

**City of Sterling Heights
ETHNIC COMMUNITY COMMITTEE**

Official minutes of the Thursday, April 7, 2022 regular meeting.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Kelechi Anyaogu
Abbott Basal
Kozeta Elzhenni
Naketa Jones
Vipul Tripathi
Carmen Williams

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mohammed Alomari
Dunia Arif
Willie Dechavez
Susan Kattula
Iqbal Singh

OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Community Relations Services Specialist Sue Giallombardo

1. Call to Order – Chairperson Kozeta Elzhenni
2. Roll Call
3. Approval of Minutes: MOTION by Basal, SECONDED by Anyaogu. Approved 6-0
4. Communication from Citizens: None
5. Communications from the Sterling Heights Police Dept.-Sgt. Kevin Reese – None
 - Members asked if Sgt. Reese could possibly send a police representative in his place, since he isn't able to attend meetings.
6. Agenda
 - A. Guest Speaker - Tammy Turgeon, SH Public Library Director, public art project**
 - Turgeon was in attendance to present a public art idea to the committee, to seek their opinions and assure that the project would not be found offensive. Turgeon stated that they would like to have a mandala mural installed in the teen section of the library, she presented two possible ideas using the 'flower of life' pattern. Turgeon added that the mural project would allow teens to contribute to the project after reading one book. Turgeon said that she has spoken with members from the Buddhist Meditation Center as well as the city's Community Alliance and has their approval. Members from the Buddhist Center shared their interpretation of the design with the artist.

- Turgeon stated that the design does not celebrate or represent a specific religion and she doesn't want to create any controversy, she added that the mural would be installed by local artist Wendy Popko.
- Williams likes the design, thanked Turgeon for bringing the topic to the committee and asked if anyone thought it would be offensive to other cultures.
- Tripathi stated that it would not, and added that he is familiar with history of the lotus design.
- Elzhenni asked if there would be any wording included in the mural. Turgeon said that the wording would outline what the flower mandala represents: love, growth, beauty, hope, compassion, connection and passion.
- Turgeon thanked members of the committee for their support.

B. Building Bridges

- Giallombardo stated that Dechavez is currently in the Philippines, and is continuing to assist with the recruitment of 500 nurses to work in Michigan, and is also coordinating a medical mission in Sorsogon, with 40 missionaries from Michigan expected to join.
- Elzhenni said that she attended the SH Clergy Forum on March 25 and met some very interesting people. She added that Stacy Bahri with the Chaldean Community Foundation is hoping to coordinate workshop in conjunction with the city's Community Alliance and would like to involve young residents. Elzhenni encouraged members to attend future clergy forums, Giallombardo stated that she will extend invites to the committee and added that the forums are every six months.
- Williams shared that she was chosen for a *spotlight* award from the State of Michigan Dept. of Corrections to recognize her for her work in diversity and inclusion with their wellness unit. She has been a part of their "push" initiative, which helps bring together people of color.

C. Cultural Exchange 2022

- Giallombardo stated that the event was another great success. She thanked members for their commitment and help with making the event a success. Giallombardo shared the final report with members, stating that the total sponsorship dollars totaled \$1,950, additional revenue of \$350 from donation boxes and \$175 from table displays. Total expenses equaled \$3,406. Giallombardo said that she received several positive comments, and even with the change in the food buffet, attendees enjoyed the evening.
- Anyaogu stated that he was very happy with the event, and was excited to see that the donated paintings were so well-received; he hopes to be able to have more at next year's event.
- Tripathi asked if there is a video or news story available, Giallombardo stated that SHTV did take some video, interviewed council members and guests, etc.; she will share the link via email.
- Williams suggested making larger signs that are more visible for the donation boxes.
- Giallombardo asked members to provide further feedback at any time, positive or negative.

D. Diversity Distinction Awards

- Giallombardo stated that due to other city events, the date of the Diversity Distinction Awards will need to be pushed earlier into the month of September.

- Giallombardo asked members if they would like to continue with the awards dinner, or as an option, present the awards during a City Council meeting and perhaps host another type of event in the fall. She added that due to budget reasons, the committee presented the awards at council meetings for three years, SHTV staff would interview the recipients, giving them some exposure, and there was a small reception in the lobby following the awards.
- Elzhenni and Williams both stated that they would like to continue with the dinner, they enjoy the event as do their friends, family and colleagues. Other members concurred.
- Giallombardo stated that she will secure a date, and just wanted to offer the other option. The tentative date of the dinner is Wednesday, September 14.

7. Old Business:

- Giallombardo reminded members that the Memorial Day parade will be held on Monday, May 30th, and asked who would be able to commit to participating. Williams said that she is available and would like it if the committee could be a part of the parade. Giallombardo stated that it would take at least two members to hold the Ethnic Community Committee banner. No other members were able to commit at this time, the topic will be discussed and decided on at the May meeting.
- In regards to the showcase at the Community Center, Elzhenni currently has items on display sharing her Lebanon culture; she will leave the items on display through April. Giallombardo stated that Dechavez signed up for May, June and July are open. Williams tentatively signed up for June, to celebrate the African American culture and recognize Juneteenth.

8. New Business:

- Tripathi extended an invite to a Hindu American exhibit taking place on May 6 in Troy. He will forward the invitation to Giallombardo for sharing.

9. Adjournment. Meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.