

# City of San Antonio



## Minutes Community Health Committee

2023 – 2025 Council Members

Chair: Teri Castillo, Dist. 5

Dr. Sukh Kaur, Dist. 1 | Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3

Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, Dist. 4 | Marina Alderete Gavito, Dist. 7

Thursday, August 22, 2024

2:00 PM

City Hall

The Community Health Committee convened a regular meeting in the City Hall Council Briefing Room beginning at 2:02 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

**Members Present:** Teri Castillo, *Chair*  
Dr. Sukh Kaur, *Member*  
Phyllis Viagran, *Member*  
Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, *Member*  
Marina Alderete Gavito *Member*

**Members Absent:** None

### Approval of Minutes

1. **Approval of minutes from the Community Health Committee meeting on Thursday, June 27, 2024.**

Councilmember Rocha Garcia moved to Approve the minutes of the June 27, 2024 Community Health Committee meeting. Councilmember Viagran seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** Castillo, Viagran, Rocha Garcia, Alderete Gavito

**Absent:** Kaur

### Public Comments

Boyd Baxter from the Breathe Clear Air Coalition spoke in support of Item 3 and advocated for the regulation of vaping.

Abigail Moore, CEO of the San Antonio Council on Alcohol and Drug Awareness spoke in support of

Item 3.

Alec Puente, Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association spoke in support of Item 3.

### **Briefing and Possible Action on**

- 2. Briefing on the Afghan Evacuees' Resettlement: Insights and Lessons for Future Humanitarian Populations report (Dr. Diana Guelespe, Sr. Research Associate, Urban Institute; Nadia Mavrakis, CEO, Culturingua).** [Andy Segovia, City Attorney; Dr. Jennifer Mata, Director, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility Department]

Dr. Jennifer Mata, Director of the Department of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) provided an overview of the Item and introduced Dr. Diana Guelespe, Senior Research Associate with the Urban Institute and Nadia Mavrakis, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Culturingua.

Guelespe stated that a community advisory group and non-profit, Culturingua provided the research for the study which was intended to provide insight into how Afghans were faring 1.5 years after their arrival across three sites, Chicago, San Antonio, and northern Virginia. She noted that the goal was to determine how the resettlement infrastructure and broader community could better prepare to welcome future migration flows.

Guelespe reported that the approach engaged the community through a community advisory board, community partners, and local Afghan field interviewers. She stated that the team held qualitative interviews with 36 Afghan evacuees and 51 community stakeholders in these three sites with 12 Afghan evacuees who arrived in San Antonio between August 1, 2021, and December 31, 2021, which were included in the study. Guelespe stated that most of the evacuees were Pashto-speakers from rural areas of Afghanistan, married with children, and had low levels of formal education and this was a secondary migration.

Guelespe stated that the process that the United States Citizen and Immigration Services utilized for humanitarian parole negatively impacted the ability of individuals to secure stable employment. She noted that most felt stressed, depressed, and in a state of poor mental health and most women wanted opportunities to learn or improve their English, get a driver's license, and exchange knowledge or skills with other Afghan women.

Guelespe stated that through interviews with Afghan community leaders, the main challenge was the lack of government funding and limited infrastructure. She noted that established Afghans voluntarily provided crucial navigation and cultural brokering. She indicated that legal service providers reported that their main challenges were receiving timely information on U.S. government policies and unreliable USCIS interpreters. She added that additional challenges included lodging and transportation costs for interviews.

Guelespe stated that other direct service providers cited challenges such as insufficient or restricted funding and limited staff capacity. She mentioned that key resources that were noted included: partnerships between resettlement agencies and organizations, and networks connecting

stakeholders, and government funding resources. Guelespe mentioned that the City had convened a collaborative of resources including the food bank, resettlement agencies, and other stakeholders to pool resources and learn from each other.

Guelespe stated that best practices identified in San Antonio included efforts to empower evacuees and other Afghans as connectors, government-convened collaboratives, connecting organizations, expediting of processes, bridging the cultural and information gap between the community and newcomers, fostering social connections with members of the broader community, and other Afghans with welcoming activities being viewed as “essential.” She noted that additionally, concentration in the Medical Center neighborhood made for easy access to essentials.

Guelespe recommended supporting Afghans and future populations with ongoing needs, access to mental health services, increased accessibility of education and employment services, long-term legal services and resources, lessons for future populations, engaging culturally aligned community leaders and stakeholders before arrival and throughout the resettlement process, providing ongoing training and orientations for community stakeholders and new arrivals, hiring trained staff who spoke the arrivals’ native language, and increased communication and collaboration across community stakeholder groups.

Nadia Mavrakis listed the following programs Culturingua had put in place to support Afghans in San Antonio including: Community and Economic Development, Communities of Welcome, Pathways to Prosperity: Community Ambassador Leadership Training (CALT and Community Land Trust, Career and Financial Opportunity, Sewing for Success, Animal Husbandry, Culinary Food Handling, Youth Development, and Peer Support Mentorship to support mental health.

#### DISCUSSION:

Chair Castillo commented that the report was proof that international issues were also local issues, and it was important that the City listen to, support, invest in, and connect residents to resources. She recommended collaboration with the Global Engagement Office of the Economic Development Department to help connect the international community with refugees.

Chair Castillo noted that the expansion of healthcare was important and suggested including Medicaid and Medicare services as well as mental health for refugees in the City’s next legislative priorities. Guelespe stated that she would see what might work and noted that there was a national mental health line created by an Afghan group out of northern Virginia and she would research best practices in other cities like Chicago. Chair Castillo recommended that Dr. Mata review the Budget to see if there was intersectionality with any other areas.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito was proud that San Antonio was a location for refugee resettlement and requested information about locations by council district of where most of these immigrants were living. Maria Montero, Immigration Liaison stated that a report in 2019 indicated that most Afghan immigrants resided in Council District 8 and they had been assisted in settling by three local resettlement agencies: Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES), Catholic Charities, and Global Refuge.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked what barriers existed to helping Afghan women learn to drive as well as current available resources. Samantha Smith stated that there were legal barriers to attaining a driver's license at the State level. Councilmember Alderete Gavito suggested including the elimination of these legal barriers in the City's state legislative agenda. Mavrakis stated that the language barrier was an issue and most Pashto speakers were often pre-literate so they could not take a written exam even if they had the driving test in Pashto.

Mavrakis noted that there was a need for cultural training to help with the language barrier as there were no Licensed Professional Counselors in San Antonio that spoke Pashto or Dari, however, peer support was conducted in Pashto and most of the youth were learning English quickly.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if the survey would be expanded to learn about other refugee communities in need. Montero stated that the Immigrant Inclusion Advisory Group was being developed by DEIA and would conduct more studies. Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if there was a plan to use this information to help those adapt to living in San Antonio such as engaging our residents to be more welcoming. Montero stated that the information was important and recommended more formalized collaboratives that could determine gaps in services and connect resources.

Mavrakis mentioned that the community welcome program had a lot of momentum, but it needed more work. She noted that a new Welcome Corps Program by the State Department was developed to help private citizens develop private sponsorships. Councilmember Rocha Garcia commented that there were children in local schools from many different countries that spoke different languages and supported the Immigrant Inclusion Group. She suggested that the remaining American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding in mental health could be reallocated.

Councilmember Kaur requested the number of projects and success and asked more about the Community Land Trust. Mavrakis stated that the Community Land Trust was an affordable homeownership program developed in the Greater Medical Center area with the goal of helping immigrants attain affordable opportunities to own a home and build equity. She added that a pilot program was planned that would build two single family homes with a mission-aligned developer.

Councilmember Kaur asked how many people in the welcoming committee could speak Pashto or Dari. Language Access Manager Emily Yaffee stated that the information was difficult to obtain because the survey was taken several years ago so it was difficult to determine.

Councilmember Viagran suggested that with worldwide conflict, we would see more refugees and noted that San Antonio was already one of the most popular resettlement cities. Councilmember Viagran recommended investment in a language school to ensure children understood the opportunities they might have if they remained multi-lingual.

Councilmember Viagran mentioned that there was rural land for animal husbandry work on the South Side of town and commented that sewing skills were something that was experiencing a revival. Mavrakis stated that the animal husbandry program was either in Council District 3 or 4 and many of the families wanted to move to those areas to create a cohesive community possibly through the Community Land Trust. Councilmember Viagran also suggested that the new refugee communities should be connected digitally, particularly in emergencies.

Chair Castillo supported Councilmember Rocha Garcia's suggestion to reallocate unused mental health ARPA funds to meet these needs. She looked forward to having new ways to support the resettlement.

**3. Briefing provided by the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District on amending the City of San Antonio's Smoke Free Ordinance (Chapter 36 – Smoking) to incorporate Electronic Smoking Devices (ESD), also known as e-cigarettes or vapes.** [Erik Walsh, City Manager; Claude A. Jacob, Director, Health]

Dr. Claude Jacob, Director of Metro Health stated that in 1964, the Surgeon General issued a Smoking and Health Report warning of the dangers of smoking. He mentioned that the City of San Antonio's Smoking Ordinance (Chapter 36) was established in 2010 before e-cigarettes entered the market. Jacob asserted that Chapter 36 required updating to effectively address vaping trends and Electronic Smoking Devices (ESD) usage, also known as e-cigarettes or vapes as the current policy did not prohibit e-cigarette smoking or vaping indoors.

E-Cigarette Public Health consequences posed a serious health risk, and toxicants from secondhand aerosols posed an increased risk to the health of all bystanders, according to Jacob. He noted that the concern was that negative health behaviors could be renormalized if indoor vaping were permitted in smoke-free environments. Jacob stated that there was a misconception that ESDs could be used as a tobacco cessation method and this led to false perceptions of vaping as "safe."

Jacob characterized E-cigarettes and Youth Vaping as an epidemic citing the 2023 National Youth Tobacco Survey which stated that E-cigarettes were the most popular tobacco product used by youth for the 10th year in a row and one in four students reported daily e-cigarette usage. He stated that 21.0% of high school and 10.2% of middle school students in Texas reported having used e-cigarettes. The Centers for Disease Control reported that 81% of youth who tried e-cigarettes started with a flavored e-cigarette and tobacco companies marketed smokeless tobacco, little cigars, and electronic cigarettes in youth-friendly flavors like cotton candy, gummy bear, cherry, and watermelon.

The goal of updating the policy was to protect the public from both second-hand smoke and aerosol from an e-cigarette (ESD), according to Jacob. He stated that a comprehensive and uniform approach was necessary to protect public health, noting that 91 cities across the State of Texas have adopted amendments to their smoke-free policies and Ordinances. Jacob recommended adding the ESD definition from the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation which included the use of any oral smoking device.

Jacob proposed bringing the City Code update to the City Council in September or October 2024; an education and marketing strategy would immediately be launched with Ordinance changes taking effect in January 2025.

**DISCUSSION:**

Chair Castillo thanked the department and all stakeholders and recommended a public information campaign so people could find out how to get help quitting smoking or vaping as well as the harms

of vaping. She asked who would enforce violations of Chapter 36. Jacob stated that the City Code would be a complaint-driven system would be tracked through 3-1-1 complaints and Metro Health would investigate and enforce.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia agreed that marketing campaigns were effective and necessary, noting that children were being targeted by the vaping companies and we needed a counter campaign. However, she was concerned that vape shops were popping up all over town. Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked how much would be spent on the awareness campaign and whether Jacob thought the community and businesses would oppose the measure. Jacob stated that the cost would be determined in the future, but the first step was to update the City Code adding that his conversations had indicated that most businesses would support it. Councilmember Rocha Garcia recommended collaboration with the San Antonio Youth Commission.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito requested a comparison of regular cigarette usage against vape usage. Jacob stated that while tobacco use had declined, e-cigarette use had increased. Councilmember Alderete Gavito requested the number of citations given to youth and the number of citations that vape shops had received. Jacob stated that there had been complaints but no citations were issued. Councilmember Alderete Gavito recommended development of zoning regulations to push vape shops further away from schools.

Councilmember Kaur asked why this would not be implemented until January 2025. Jacob mentioned that the process of amending the City Code and educating the public would take several months.

Councilmember Viagran supported the Item and thought it was important to develop a community awareness campaign as she knew people who were vaping because they were trying to quit smoking.

Chair Castillo closed the discussion by stating that she was looking forward to the Ordinance coming before the full City Council.

**4. A briefing on the call for Municipal Golf Association – San Antonio (MGA-SA) City Board applications.** [David W. McCary, Assistant City Manager; Homer Garcia III, Director, Parks and Recreation]

Director of Parks and Recreation, Homer Garcia introduced Assistant to the Director Ryan Harrison and Andrew Peterson who was President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Municipal Golf Association of San Antonio (MGA-SA).

Peterson stated that MGA-SA was a non-profit entity created in 2007 to manage and maintain eight city-owned golf courses. He noted that the MGA-SA's mission was to provide the best quality municipal golf to citizens at an affordable rate, and to continue to provide municipal golf as a City amenity available to citizens and visitors. He indicated that MGA-SA sought to provide access to all, and encouraged senior play, as well as promoting junior golf.

Peterson provided a map of the golf course locations and commented that the facilities were relatively old noting that the Brackenridge Park Golf Course was 108 years old. Peterson stated that MGA-SA had a \$21.4 million annual Budget and employed 290 people to serve 10,435

members and the public with an estimated 418,000 rounds of golf annually. Peterson provided customer demographics which indicated that 75% were men and 25% were women.

Harrison explained that the MGA-SA Board was a policy-making board that consisted of 15 members: 7 at-large members selected by the MGA-SA Board; 6 at-large members appointed by the City Council for two-year terms; 2 ex-officio members appointed by the City Manager including the Parks Director and Finance Assistant Director. Harrison reported that the board met 6-7 times annually but had subcommittees that met monthly such as: Finance, Construction, Long-Range Planning, Diversity, and Inclusion. Harrison noted that the current board members were serving in holdover status.

Harrison recommended seeking new board applications through the standard process managed by the Office of the City Clerk beginning on August 26, 2024. Enhanced outreach efforts included a press release, notice to City Council Offices and San Antonio Sports as well as promotion on the MGA-SA website and direct outreach to the SA Women's Golf Association, the Brackenridge Park Women's Golf Association, and the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) which was a women's amateur golf association.

Harrison recommended establishment of an ad-hoc committee to review applications which would be comprised of two members of the Community Health Committee, Director of Parks & Recreation Department Homer Garcia, Assistant Finance Director Melanie Keeton, and MGA-SA President and CEO Andrew Peterson.

#### DISCUSSION:

Chair Castillo stated that she played golf and was the 2006 Champion at Harris Middle school and supported municipal golf courses. Chair Castillo asked if any of the members were interested in serving on the ad-hoc committee.

Councilmember Kaur commended the MGA-SA for keeping the courses affordable and was pleased that there was an effort to seek more diverse representation. She offered to serve on the ad-hoc committee. She asked whether a City employee or Local Government Corporation employee could serve on the board. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre stated that there was no prohibition.

Councilmember Viagran supported a more diverse membership on the board and mentioned that she had served on the selection panel before to help ensure diversity. She supported the mission of MGA-SA as these courses had great attendance at affordable rates.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito supported the plan.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if there were student and senior discounts and supported reaching out to youth at First Tee at Brackenridge Park. Peterson stated that MGA-SA participated in Youth on Course and they paid \$25 per year and could play any course for \$5 and there was a senior discount. She supported the outreach strategy to seek more women applicants.

Chair Castillo closed the discussion by appointing Councilmembers Kaur and Viagran to the ad-

hoc committee.

**Consent Agenda**

**Adjournment**

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:43 p.m.

**Approved**

---

*Teri Castillo*  
*Chair*

---

*Debbie Racca-Sittre*  
*City Clerk*

DRAFT