

# CAN Community Council Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 8, 2021

Zoom Video Conference

**Present:** Nora Comstock, Kelly Crook, Nancy Gilliam, Blanca Alvarado, Saatvik Ahluwalia, Rachel Hampton, James May, Laura Goettsche, Gloria Vera- Bedolla, Donovan DePreist, Hunter Ellinger, Lisa Boyd, Lou Serna

**Staff Present:** Raul Alvarez, Jelina Tunstill

**Guests:** Anaami Pandit-Haji, Ara Merjanian, Suchitra Gururaj, Councilmember Gregorio Casar

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| <b>Call to Order and Announcements</b>                                    | Nancy called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm. Each member introduced themselves.  |
| <b>Approval of January 11, 2021 Minutes</b>                               | The January 11, 2021 minutes were approved unanimously on a motion by Hunter with a second by Rachel. Nora abstained.   |
| <b>CAN Community Council Chair's Report and Nomination of New Members</b> | <p><b>Summary:</b> Nancy stated that she is excited for today's meeting and doesn't want to take up too much time with administrative duties. She gave a short bio about Anaami, who is a nominee for CAN Community Council membership.</p> <p>Anaami was approved unanimously to be a member of the CAN Community Council replacing an unexpired 2020-2022 term on a nomination by Nora and second by Saatvik.</p>   |
| <b>Introduction and Special Message from CAN Board Chair</b>              | <p><b>Summary:</b> Suchitra Gururaj, 2021 CAN Board Chair, stated that she was excited to get to know and work with everyone this year. She mentioned that there is space for the Board to work operationally. They will work with the Board partners more strategically and understand where our commitments and alignments are. Strategically, the Board has thought about recovery from 2020. CAN has done some great work in 2020, such as setting the stage for the language access work and the race equity initiative. She stated one of the goals is to strengthen the communication between the CAN Community Council and the CAN Board.</p> |
| <b>Executive Director's Report</b>  | <p><b>Summary:</b> Adding on to what Suchitra mentioned about CAN's 2020 accomplishments, Raul mentioned that in 2020 CAN launched the Central Texas Language Access Fund, the Central Texas Collective for Race Equity, the WeCan!ATX website, and about to launch the Race Equity Action Framework (REAF). The first public opportunity to review the action framework will be February 16th at 11 am. The REAF began as an asset map but now includes data and local efforts. It shows where we should</p>   |

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|  | <p>focus more of our resources and attention. It would allow us to have a research team, community engagement team, or policy team. The Board meeting is February 12<sup>th</sup>. We haven't met since December and this will be an opportunity to hear updates from CAN partners about their pandemic response. The March Board meeting is when we will have the Butler Awards. We will focus on Spirit of Collaboration. We are recognizing 6 groups for their efforts during the pandemic around food access (Keep Austin Together and Good Works Austin), health needs (Austin Latino Coalition), basic needs (Community Resilience Trust), police justice (Austin Justice Coalition), and all the Complete Count Committees for their work on the 2020 Census during the pandemic.</p>   |
| <p><b>Presentations on Evictions</b></p> | <p><b>Council Member Casar Presentation Summary:</b> Health and job security and housing are the top constituent issues. He is proud of JP Courts, City and County leadership that are making sure that people aren't losing housing due to the pandemic. Austin and Minneapolis are the two cities with the lowest evictions during the pandemic. The moratorium doesn't prevent all problems, other cities are doing 5 to 10 times more evictions than Austin. So many other protections only kick in if you go to court and know what to say in court and what papers to fill out. Who is still falling through the cracks in our city and what happens when the moratorium ends? People that are still falling through the cracks are people subleasing or using cash payments. The City has been working with PSSs and food banks to get the word out about people's rights, so people don't fall through the cracks. How do we get to the other side of this housing crisis? There will be back rent when the moratorium ends. People shouldn't lose their job if they have a \$15 an hour job and have \$7,000 they owe in back rent. There needs to be a plan for paying back rent over time, get part of their back rent forgiven by landlords, and legal protections to make sure they don't get evicted. The City and County have \$40 million allocation to help pay back rent now. We still have significant growth and limited housing, so the threat is real. Undocumented families get left out of a lot of these federal programs, so their needs to be a general fund. There also needs to be a vaccination strategy plan.</p> <p><b>Q&amp;A:</b> The Cares funding is what we will use to pay back rent, we don't know the true scope of need and the undocumented people won't be able to access it. What is the council's approach for that? There isn't a fund yet, but they need to develop a fund they can use for undocumented folks.</p> <p>Is there a prediction of the need? It is hard to gauge. The question is how many people can self-resolve their back rent and how much will the city need to intervene.</p> |

Is anyone spearheading a private fundraising initiative locally to help raise funds for back rent? Public resources can only stretch so far with all the issues we have to address. Councilmember Casar answered that he doesn't know of anyone spearheading private fundraising, but it would be great.

Are you looking at expunging formal eviction notices? They are trying to prevent the filing in the first place.

Are there conversations with banks for small businesses? There is significant federal help for them right now.

**Shoshana Krieger Presentation Summary:** Shoshana is the Project Director for BASTA. She presented on evictions and tenants rights issues in Travis County during COVID-19. BASTA cares about evictions because it looms over tenants and creates a barrier in finding housing once they have an evictions record. The City is in the process of amending its restrictions for city funded housing that would limit landlords' abilities to screen. Tenants won't ask for repairs, and put up with fines, fees, and bullying managers, and tenants won't organize. It's even more important because evictions are linked to death due to COVID. From 2014-2019, there was a significant increase in evictions cases. From 2014-2019, JP 2 (which is Northeast) JP 1 and JP 4 (all eastern crescent) were seeing the most evictions. Now with the pandemic, 3501 eviction cases were filed since 2020. Since March 13, 2020 (when local protections were put in place) there have only been 800~ evictions filed. She then explained the typical eviction process if the tenant doesn't pay rent. After the court step in the eviction process, most tenants move out, but tenants can also appeal. If the tenant doesn't leave or appeal the landlord can bring it back to court and get a writ of possession. The process usually takes 3-5 weeks. During COVID the process takes a lot longer or doesn't move forward at all. Protections are consistently changing and vary by geographic location. There are 5 categories of protections: Court Moratorium (Travis County), Notice to Vacate Prohibitions (Travis County and Austin), Opportunity to "Cure" (Austin, Dallas, San Marcos), CDC Moratorium (national), and CARES Act (national). She ended her presentation by providing resources for renters and rental assistance.

**Q&A:** Are you seeing cases where landlords take it upon themselves to vacate tenants? Yes, some landlords are bypassing all protections. If a tenant receives a notice to vacate, they can call 311 to file a complaint.

How are you educating judges about restrictions and laws? They've sent 3 letters to JPs at different times to state their concerns.

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|                    | Is there a third party that can be there to help a person advocate for themselves? They work with Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid to connect people to legal services. |
| <b>Adjournment</b> | Nancy adjourned the meeting 7:58 pm.  |