

# CAN Community Council Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 21, 2021

Zoom Video Conference

**Present:** Nancy Gilliam, Kelly Crook, Nora Comstock, Patricia Longoria, Lisa Boyd, Rachel Hampton, Hunter Ellinger, Lou Serna, James May, Anaami Pandit Haji, Donovan DePreist, Caroline Reynolds

**Staff Present:** Jelina Tunstill, Raul Alvarez, Melinda Barsales, Carlos Soto

**Guests:** Ara Merjanian, Tiffany Washington

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Call to Order and Announcements</b>      | Nancy called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm followed by introductions. A quorum was present.   |
| <b>Approval of May 17, 2021, Minutes</b>    | The May 17, 2021, minutes were approved as amended unanimously on a motion by Nora with a second by Lou. The amendment is to fix the end time on the minutes to say 8:02 pm instead of 9:02 pm.   |
| <b>CAN Community Council Chair's Report</b> | <p><b>Summary:</b> Nancy stated that the Board meeting was really informative about the legislative session. She stated they received updates from the City, County, Central Health and AISD. In the Executive Committee they spoke about the CAN Retreat. She stated that the first food security meeting for the Community Council was informative. Nora encouraged the Community Council members to add the Regional Summit date to their calendars.</p> <p>Nora Comstock nominated Patricia Longoria to join the Community Council as a new member taking over the remainder of Nick Haigh's term (June 2021 – December 2022) term. Kelly seconded the nomination. Patricia was voted into the Community Council unanimously.</p> |
| <b>Executive Director's Report</b>          | <p><b>Summary:</b> Raul shared that CAN will publish the CAN Dashboard August 4, 2021. It was supposed to be released last week, but we are still waiting on data from a few partners. He stated that the Regional Summit will take place in Pflugerville this year and it'll be the first time that the Summit happens in Travis County. We will look at economic recovery. The second planning meeting is later this week and during that meeting the date and theme will be chosen. The summit will help form our priorities for the upcoming year when Tamara Atkinson, CEO of Workforce Solutions, will be the Board chair.</p>  |

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
|                                 | <p>He gave a brief overview of the CAN workplan priorities for the remainder of 2021 which include: learning from pandemic response, community healing and mental wellness, and economic recovery. He shared that the Central Health Equity Policy Council will finalize its report on improving equity in pandemic response.</p> <p>He shared a few slides, provided by Brie, that listed the bills that will have a positive and negative impact on Austin that passed or failed to pass during the legislative session.</p> <p><b>Q&amp;A:</b> CAN staff will share the Central Health Equity Policy Council report with the Community Council when it is released.</p>  |
| <p><b>Workgroup Updates</b></p> | <p><b>Housing Workgroup Summary:</b> James stated that the housing workgroup has come up with 4 recommendations and Raul finished the summary for the presentation that happened in March. Raul added that the Housing workgroup is working on finalizing the report. They are still looking for data to add to the report.</p> <p><b>Q&amp;A:</b> When will the report will be ready to share with the Board? Raul stated that there isn't a Board meeting in July, and it will be ready by the August meeting. Nora asked for clarification about where the recommendations go. Her current understanding is that the Community Council recommendations go to the Board and the Board decides what to do with the recommendations. Rachel clarified that they have some specifically worded recommendations that could go directly to the City Council that will be decided on by the CAN Board of Directors. Nancy stated that before this report goes to the Board it should go to the Executive Committee. Ara urged the Community Council to work on the report quickly to get ahead of the eviction's crisis. He also asked about the format of the report and if we would be able to standardize the format. Raul stated that he just sent a draft format to housing workgroup members but stated that he took the format from the Person Centered-Care work from the Community Council.</p> <p><b>Follow-up:</b> The housing workgroup will tentatively have the report ready to view by the whole Community Council in 3 weeks, but will reach out via email with a definitive response.</p> <p><b>Mental Health Workgroup Summary:</b> Nora stated that they've got a lot of reading and are collecting data. The mental health workgroup wants to find best practices and identify the current landscape. The categories from which they will look at information will be self, family, and community. Ara added that the mental health meetings start in August and that we are still in the early phases of planning the meeting, but things are starting to gel.</p> |

**Presentations on Food Insecurity**

Lisa shared that the guest speaker is Tiffany Washington an Urban Farmer with Dobbin Kauv Farm. She is the only black farmer in Austin and has a unique perspective on food insecurity in Austin.

**Tiffany Washington, Urban Farmer Presentation Summary:**  
She stated that her family has been in Austin for over 200 years and that she is a descendant of farmers. She is a Navy veteran dealing with PTSD and started a garden because it was therapeutic. Her garden grew from trying to meet the requests of different veggies and fruits from her family and friends. She needed more land and decided she wanted to become a farmer. Her and her family were featured in the Resilience Project, a mural in East Austin, about leaders in the past and future.

When she got out of the military, she couldn't find resources for veterans or things that would help her become a farmer. Her first step was joining a farmshare and started to enroll herself in business for agriculture classes. She started looking at community gardens from a lens of the black community and social justice. Community gardens aren't sustainable for black and brown communities. Black and brown communities are marginalized and vulnerable. They have to work and there is no constant caretaking of the garden. In black and brown communities, the gardens are run down and people don't know who to talk to in order to get involved with gardening. She feels that there is a place for gardening/ farming education in the black community. When discussing eliminating food insecurity she believes it requires increasing the number of local farmers who have been disenfranchised by policies and procedures on a city, local, county level. She stated that a problem for her has become community engagement. Everyone has access to food, but it's the food that people choose to eat. There's a food disconnect and not understanding the value of food. That's why culturally appropriate food is important.

She shared the "Black Farmer Files" that will be presented on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. She gave the presentation to the Central Texas Young Farmers Coalition that recently did a local resolution in City Council apologizing for racial injustice and racism. The resolution mentioned that agriculture was part of the foundation of Austin and she wonders why we can't get to that point again.

She stated that urban farms existed in Austin, but she had never seen one although she had lived in Austin for years. She started researching and saw that a portion of the community became food impoverished but these were the people that were growing the food

in Austin since the beginning. How did the people that grew food in Austin, become so food poor? She accredits it to food policy. The food policy board is at the bottom of the list on the City's website. How is it that food isn't important? She believes it comes from Austin being known as a foodie town and the food available goes to restaurants and tourism. She believes that the City should provide incentives for local farmers, for agribusiness, or local farming. Community gardens in vulnerable and marginalized communities don't have people or funding to create farms.

**Q&A: What are the barriers for you to create an urban farm?**

She hasn't looked at what policies specifically impact urban farming, but the City has policies on community gardens and ordinances. She needs people to push community education and knowledge about gardening. Look at agriculture as a trade skill that youth can learn and get compensated for. They also develop a better relationship with food.

**How would you say the COA should support you better if they haven't already?**

There is a disconnect with the community and regular people being able to navigate these systems and programs. They could teach people how to better navigate the systems. The city has the programs, they just don't know how to talk about it or have a regular conversation without scholarly rhetoric. It was a huge sacrifice for her to put into this farm. They need to go into the community and have conversations and do proper outreach.

**In addition to farmshare, what are other supportive organizations do you work with?**

She has worked with federal programs, Battle Ground to Breaking Ground program, that was specifically for veterans or veteran spouses. Locally, the Sustainable Food Center for assistance on grant writing to get funding. It's hard to work with an organization when she is also running her own business. Instead, she tries to follow the lead of other organizations that are doing the work and seeing benefits. When she is on the property for her new farm, she feels that it'll be easier to network.

**What is your opinion of farmers markets/ school gardens? Are they working well? How can they be improved?**

It can be an extra expense when getting started. For a beginner getting started she suggested a delivery service and delivering their listed produce. School gardens work well, gives the kids an opportunity to go outside outside of recess. She suggested a class similar to

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
|                    | <p>home economics that focuses on gardening. Bring in local growers to do the education.</p> <p><b>Could the mental health of farmers be an angle that can be taken to help the City of Austin to provide more funding?</b> She agreed that gardening is therapeutic. She can spend time with her kids, get exercise, and great for her mental health.</p> <p><b>If you could envision a perfect future for your community regarding farming what would look like?</b> She defines community as friends, family, and neighbors. If she could live on a small 50-100 acre plot, to provide for her community, teaching her kids, a shared community trading food and learning from one another.</p> <p><b>Are there opportunities to partner with grocery stores or gas stations?</b> There are opportunities. The City is paying someone to be an ambassador to make connections between farmers and corner stores.</p> <p><b>Relationship of home-gardening and future of food security?</b> She stated that we have to have some type of knowledge and access to our own food. During the winter storm they were 2 days away from having no food. It would be in everyone's best interest to be engaged in a community garden.</p> <p><b>What is holding back other farmers from doing what you are doing?</b><br/>She stated that she is looking for any funding to bring her farm into full production. Other farmers have no choice but to grow for the restaurants. She stated that during festivals, people come from other countries to eat our local foods and that local foods aren't going to the community but to the restaurants. Not giving an incentive for growers to grow for the community is the problem.</p> <p><b>How do you suggest we begin the narrative in the community in regards to inequities?</b> She stated that if she was going into a community that didn't know they were food insecure she would just build the farm. When it comes to inequity she state that it is crucial for black farmers to get money for growing and for their land.</p> |
| <b>Adjournment</b> | Nancy adjourned the meeting 8:05 pm.  |