

**Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (CIRA)  
6th Regular Meeting Minutes  
141 N Front Street, Garage Conference Room  
Date: December 2, 2025  
6:00 pm -8:00 pm**

**Attendance:**

- **Commissioners:** Adeeti Jindal, Bartholomew T. Shepkong, Bashir Ahmed, Daniel Myungho Sim, Fernanda Diaz-Basteris, Kassandra Aguirre Ramirez, Mariam Isse, Nadia Jean-Jacques, Jesús A. Valencia, Tasha Lomo, Kamran Syed Arif, and Rev. Dr. Alexander Y Sumo. **Absences:** Naima Ilmi, Shahwar Ali, and Sara Abou Rashed
- **City Employees/Non-voting members:** Robert Tobias, CM Lourdes, Jessica Caceres, and Lindora Howard-Diawara

**1. Call to Order and Roll Call**

The meeting commenced at 6:13 pm and the chairman acknowledge that the December 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting was the final meeting of the year. He asked for a round of applause, thanked everyone for their dedication and commitment since the beginning of the commission's work in 2025. He additionally encouraged all commissioners to keep up the good work as is highly needed. With that, he officially welcomed everyone; announced that someone had been invited to share information about the city's budget but asked Lindora to make the roll call before moving forward with the agenda for the day.

➤ **Verification of quorum:**

Lindora made the roll call, confirmed a quorum given the presence of the above-listed commissioners, both present and absent. With that, the chair officially called the meeting to order and asked for a motion to adopt the past meeting minutes if there were no issues.

**2. Approval of Agenda and November 2025 Minutes**

With no issues raised, **the chair requested** a motion to adopt the meeting minutes. Mariam made a motion which was seconded by Jesús. All then agreed that the minutes be adopted as was submitted.

**3. Public Comment**

There was no one from the public in attendance and so there were no public comments for the day.

**4. Budget Presentation:**

The budget presentation was made by Chris S. Long, Director of Finance, City of Columbus, as invited by Council member Barroso De Padija. As a result, the Chair invited her to officially introduce and welcome Director Long.

- **CM Lourdes:** Opening Remarks & Introduction: Council Member thanked the guest- Chris Long- for honoring the invitation and expressed excitement to introduce him as a partner in the city. The following are highlights from the intro:
  - When the Commission was being formed, creating access to the city was one of the tasks being considered. One of the ways it shows up is the budget and how Council makes investments at the city.
  - There are multiple budgets across the city-every department has their own budget and, there are essentially two budget seasons- The operating budget and the capital budget. As such, there are different ways that folks can advocate for investments in the budget. At different times during the process folks may or may not come to city council.
  - This year, the city is starting a participatory budget process where each of the districts will get a certain amount of money. There will be a committee to decide where the money is invested and how. There are many new opportunities coming up to help folks learn and start having conversations.
  - To help commissioners understand the budget and understand how to engage with the process, Director Long was then asked to attend the meeting and make a presentation to help facilitate the learning process for everyone.
  - The budget has both a management and administrative side and Director Long is from the Administrative Side. The mayor proposes the budget, and it gets reviewed. This is where things are now. The new budget passage deadline for passage is January 2026.
  - Again, the new process will allow every district to receive funding.
  
- **Director Christopher Long started by making a brief introduction of himself. He thanked Council member for the invitation but also her efforts at always trying to demystify the way the city works. Director Long shared that the presentation would be made available to commissioners via Council Member's office and then proceeded with the budget presentation. Below are some highlights:**
  - He's been with the city for 13 years now, but it took him a long time to learn most of what he now knows about. He expressed joy in being at the meeting to share about his work; encouraged everyone to ask questions, and flagged that he can always come back as if there's a lot to take in.
  - He reemphasized that there are 2 main budget cycles- Operating and capital:

- ✚ The Operation Budget (Recently submitted to council for revision) is largely for People. It covers staffing, supplies/materials and services contracted outside the city.
- ✚ The three main general sources of revenue for the city include income taxes, about 80% of which are from the general fund. The Enterprise Fund revenues (Utility bills paid) and Property taxes. These pretty much pay for everything done by the city. There are also other smaller revenue sources, but that can be dealt with at another time.
- ✚ The Capital budget targets where the operations take place (The physical, tangible places that the city does business). Its buildings, it's roads and it even vehicles. Questions about how the city provides programming and services to all residents happen in the Capital budget. And it's paid for in a slightly different way- 25% of every income tax payment coming to the city is reserved in its own special fund (Called the income tax set aside funds). Funds are set aside for the simple reason that the city doesn't want to use the funds for any other thing except for providing support to the capital program. Part of everyone's utility bills also go toward helping to pay for the capital funds.
- ✚ The 2025 Capital budget was submitted in July, right before Council break.
- ✚ These are things that city council is heavily involved with- roads, sidewalks, recreation facilities, park improvements, water and sewer infrastructure, new police and fire substations are all funded out of the capital program.

### **How it all comes together:**

- Operating Budget Cycle: Budgets are submitted by all departments to Finance by August 31<sup>st</sup> of every year; Finance receives all budgets and compiles all requests and sends them to the city auditor to determine the funding capacity. Finance then meets with the mayor. The mayor in return makes his spending decisions and submits to Council by November 15<sup>th</sup> for consideration. The first public hearing will then be held to allow for participation by December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Adoption of the operational budget is typically by February of the following year. The adoption reflects all changes made by Council. More hearings are expected before February and could be done in a variety of ways- In communities or Chambers.
- The Capital budget is similar in terms of how it's compiled and processed but slightly different in terms of the timetable. All submissions are made to Finance by September 15<sup>th</sup> and finance reviews it to make sure the proposed spending will not go above the expected revenue. Once received, the mayor then reviews the budget to ensure that the priorities he would like to fund are represented. He then submits it to Council again for consideration and amendments. Then the process begins again as

there are hearings. Note that the mayor also submits the city's Capital Improvement Budget (CIB) and Capital Improvement Program (CIP- 6-year forecast) to Council for consideration. Submissions are made by everyone.

One big difference with the operating budget is that if the operating budget is adopted in February, the capital budget is usually several months behind. This is because there are two different budget cycles and secondly, there needs to be some space.

- The final step after adoption of the capital budget is that finance works with the city auditor to do a bond sale. These sales support investments needed but that take years for revenue to come in. As a result, bonds are sold and municipal bonds are issues to get loans from large institutions to allow for direct investments. Ex. Construction of a Rec. Center or a Fire Station. The city has an AAA rating which is a good thing. When the revenue comes in, the Bonds are paid off.
- Questions:
  - ✚ Nadia: What are the requirements for a firehouse or police station to get a makeover or something? I do have one on Morse Road and Karl. They do not know that I'm speaking on their behalf, but would they need to put in a request? In response, Chris mentioned that each year Public Safety including Fires Service does an assessment and submits their budget for maintenance or capital upkeep. That's how they get supported.
  - ✚ CM Lourdes: In the context of the capital improvement budget, CM Lourdes also mentioned the importance of Area Commissions or Civic Associations across Columbus. Area commissioners are voted for by their neighbors. In terms of work, they look at zoning applications, budgets, and advocate for better sidewalks or even fire stations, etc. However, she added that there is lack of advocacy by most commissions or Civic Associations that are neighborhood led. Even though Nadia's Area is very diverse and has the Northland Civic Association, there is not one person of color on the Civic Association. So, no one's advocating for people like Nadia or for services in her neighborhood. Additionally, Council member mentioned that there are so many other ways that capital projects could be funded she named Celebrate One and indicated that Council provided funds for Zora's house to be funded. Finally, CM Lourdes emphasized the importance of understanding the budget but also understanding the work of various community structures and strategies through which advocacy can lead to solution finding.
  - ✚ Kamran: He raised concerns about recent debates in the news about increasing property taxes and wanted to know how city services would be impacted. Chris indicated that the city is equally concerned as almost 10% of the city's

budget comes from property taxes. However, he noted that if property taxes go away, the impact will be catastrophic-It will impact the city's ability to sell the bonds spoken about earlier. Meanwhile, CM Lourdes mentioned that the county decides the property taxes and that one main concern is not just that the city loses its 10 % but that the State of Ohio also loses billions of dollars if there's no property tax. She said that there are so many gaps that filling in make it look like "You're robbing Peter to pay Paul as there is no way to fill in the gaps". So, finding a reasonable way to lower the taxes may be doable but not eliminating it. Chris added that the property tax issue is also because of the affordable housing challenge facing the state.

Go back to his presentation, Chris mentioned that the 2026 Operating Budget is as big as 2.7 billion and has 4 Buckets- General Fund about 1.2 billion funded mostly by income and property taxes; Enterprise Fund about 980 million (Most from public utilities- water, sewer, electric); etc. Whereas the Capital budget is about 3 billion. We're blessed that Columbus is growing. As a result, the city's budget has also grown. **Population growth equals growth in the local economy.**

CM Lourdes: Informed the body that there has been a utility rate increase of \$10.00 to pay for a fourth water plant given that folks before did not make many investments. water will also increase gradually over the next five years because more people are coming into the region. There are ongoing conversations about having a regional water authority. The city provides water to our neighboring suburbs who then pay for Columbus. But it's a conversation that need to be held as the city prefers to grow up and not out as it creates more problem "A double edged sword".; CM Lourdes also mentioned that Commissioners will have the opportunity to attend budget hearings or ask specific questions that will be shared with the concerned departments for response and feedback.

At this point, the budget presentation ended, and the Chair thanked Chris on behalf of the Commission.

##### **5. Hybrid or Virtual Meeting Policy Discussion: Led by Rob.**

- Rob: As a result of a specific request made by the body regarding a virtual meeting policy, Rob shared that the draft policy had been shared with the staff and chairs but also mentioned that he drafted the same policy for the Civilian Review Board and that they adopted their policy with two amendments that he'd like to share. He highlighted that:
  - Over the next week or two, the chairs, staff and Council member's Office should review the draft and based on their comfort level, share with others in

preparation for review. And then at the January meeting, the hope is that there will be some discussions, final edits, and adoption.

✚ Two issues that need to be discussed:

**(a) Decisions about meeting type overrides- who determines?** There is a provision in the draft whereby certain number of commissioners can decide that they don't want an in-person meeting or a hybrid meeting. (The Civilians Review Board for example voted for an agreement by a majority of the seated members can override a virtual meeting if the chair is notified within 48 hours). The hard part is notice. You must give notice whether, or not it is in person or hybrid. For the Commission, **Rob recommends-** a majority of the seated members of the committee/commission or a majority of seated members agree to either choose meetings that are all in person or all hybrids.

**(b) Recordings of minutes.** Section 10 requires all meetings to be recorded. The Civilian Review Board requested for language change to allow flexibility. Rob mentioned that he changed the word **Shall** to **May** recorded the meeting and if they do, those recordings can serve as the minutes of the meeting which also needs to be taken in accordance with the minute's retention schedule.

And if they decide not to record, the minutes will then be taken by someone. **For CIRA**, Rob also added that the Commission should decide who will host the meetings, remember notices would need to be made and that in the absence of recordings, individuals should be designated to write the minutes.

Finally, Rob mentioned that once the copy of the draft is received, the above counts will be the two main points for consideration.

➤ **Questions:**

✚ Nadia: How do we use our titles when speaking with someone who'd be interested to learning more about what CIRA does? Rob advised that Commissioners refer to the mission statement earlier adopted (See the website for reference). Fernanda also mentioned that if it's about emails, the titles can be referenced in the email signature and then individual can add the link to the commission's website.

✚ Jesus: Requested for updates about the website and social media: Lindora mentioned that a meeting was earlier held and that She was still waiting for Jessica to make the connection with Brad (Council's Communications team member) who would provide guidance regarding the website update. Regarding the social media Jessica and Council member mentioned that in partnership with the LGBTQ Commission, a facilitator and someone on communications will be hired to help deal with communications. They also shared that options for having a shared facilitator are being explored as the best. Jessica shared that A bid will hopefully be going out and

so if commissioners know folks who might be interested, they should consider sharing the bid information.

- ✚ Kamran: Asked a question about opportunities for legal Aid support. **CM Lourdes** mentioned that her office is working with ABLE, but they've realized that ABLE is having demand issues. As such the Immigrant and refugee serving agencies are being engaged to provide some services. **Rob** mentioned that Refugee Serving Agencies could help but they cannot provide legal advice. **CM Lourdes** shared that city Council is trying to figure out how to strategically fund groups without having to deal with stop orders. **Rob** proposed that one way of doing that is to invite folks to come and share their work. **CM Lourdes** agreed and proposed creating spaces for immigrant serving agencies to be linked with the Municipal courts and others to help facilitate open dialogues. She added that she shared the model with the chairs, and they think that it's a good idea. Finally, she shared that reallocation of funds cut out by the federal government because of the Big Beautiful bill's conversation is ongoing at Council.

## 6. Committee Report:

- **Advocacy and Policy: Tasha shared the following updates on behalf of the committee:**
  - The committee met and spoke about few resolutions on the table (HB 1, SB 88, HB 26, HB 281, HB 282).
  - Jesus has developed a resolution which highlights a general overview regarding the bills, practices and laws. The resolution is expected to be shared for review and feedback.
    - ✚ Considering that the committee's work borders on many legal issues, Lindora asked if the Committee needed experts to attend the committee meetings and provide information and support. The team agreed in principle but indicated that they will meet and let the commission know the specifics.
  - They talked about their meeting policy.
  - They plan to meet on December 10<sup>th</sup> at the Fran Ran Center.
    - ✚ Kamran asked if other staff could attend their meetings. Jessica mentioned that she'll be available to attend Committee meetings if informed ahead of time.
  - The committee also discussed the possibility of escorting residents to courts and would need help with understanding what the process looks like. CM Lourdes Mentioned that they can connect committee members with Rapid Reponses network headed by Dr. Dorothy Hassan from Our Helpers.

- The Committee discovered that Bernie Moreno has proposed the Exclusive Citizenship Act which compels citizens to denounce other citizenships. The Committee encourages everyone to keep an eye on this act.
- **Community Engagement: Kassandra presented the updates on behalf of the committee:**
  - The Committee met on Black Friday, and they talked about dates for the Town Hall event- February 13<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> @ 9:00 am-12:00 pm. With brief discussions held during the full commission meeting, the majority agreed that Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> will be feasible.
  - The committee also discussed their objectives and work outlook.
  - **Challenges:** Some Commission members do not attend meetings and they're having problems with meeting a quorum for meetings. Barth mentioned that everyone committed to the process and encouraged everyone to be more active as being absent slows down the work. He also mentioned that if individuals feel that they don't want to be part of the meetings, they should also make it known.
  - The Committee has decided to meet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month. At this point, Lindora reminded the committee to explore their meeting locations and share the details for public notices to be sent out.

To wrap up this session, Tasha mentioned Naima's reference to New York times which highlights how Somalians are being targeted.

On behalf of the Commission, the Chair again thanked Committee members for their commitment and encouraged them to review and use the 2026 Year Plan worksheet which serves as a guide for their work.

7. Announcements: The Year End Potluck was announced and the Chair called for a motion for adjournment. Adeeti moved and Kassandra seconded the motion.
  - Mariam: Rice Chicken and Pumpkin Pie
  - Barth: Fried Plantain and Soda
  - Fernanda: Keelan Pie
  - Kassandra: Traditional Pasta (Has ham)- is Spicy.
  - Adeeti: Brough Rice and Vegetables
  - Kamran: Brough Sweets
  - CM: Puerto Rican Candies
  - Jessica: Puerto Rican Eggnog -Cokato (no Rum)
  - Daniel brough a rice dish; biscuit of cream and pie
  - Lindora: Avocado, Chips and Peanut snacks

**\*\*\* Most of the members learned during the meeting that Commissioner Mariam Isse lost her husband. Everyone expressed our individual condolences but prayed for strength for Mariam and her family.**