



Santa Cruz County Latino Affairs Commission

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Meeting Minutes

DATE: Wednesday, June 4, 2025

TIME: 6:00PM

LOCATION: United Way of Santa Cruz County, 4450 Capitola Road, Ste 106, Capitola, CA 95010

PRESENT: Yadira Flores-Martinez (*1st District*), Kassandra Flores (*3rd District*), Cesar De Santos (*4th District*), Emmanuel Nevarez (*City of Santa Cruz*), Micaela Lopez (*City of Watsonville*)
Bibianna Rocha (*City of Watsonville*)

EXCUSED: Oscar Sanchez (*2nd District*),

ABSENT: None

STAFF: Kaite McGrew (*Commissions Manager*), Tiffany Avila (*Equal Employment Opportunity Officer*)

GUESTS: Heather Rogers (*Public Defender*), and no members of the public were present.

1. Call to Order/Roll Call/Agenda Review

Meeting convened at 6:04 PM.

Commission welcomed new at-large Commissioner Nevarez representing the Santa Cruz City Council.

2. Officer Elections

Motion to elect Nevarez to serve as Chair and Flores-Martinez to serve as Vice Chair

Motion/Second: Rocha/DeSantos

Motion passed unanimously.

3. Approve February 5, 2025 Minutes

Motion to approve minutes as written.

Motion/Second: Rocha/Lopez

Motion passed unanimously.

4. Public Comment

5. New Business/Action Items

5.1. County Public Defender's Office Immigrant Services Overview

Rogers provided an overview of Public Defender's Office, including programs supporting clients affected by new immigration enforcement actions. Services include early representation; holistic, community-based defense; interdisciplinary multilingual teams; charge negotiation and post-conviction relief; the *Clean Slate Project* (record clearance with a 98% success rate); the *Truth Project* (disclosure of potential long-term impacts of plea deals); and a full-service center in Watsonville. Rogers acknowledged that unmet basic needs often worsen clients' legal situations but addressing them is beyond the office's role and capacity. To fill this gap, they've established *The BRIDGE Foundation*, a separate nonprofit to raise money and seek grants to provide clients with holistic defense-related material supports, including backpacks, emergency housing vouchers, transportation funds, bus passes, tents, shoes, food, and education fees. The BRIDGE Foundation will also raise awareness regarding the relationship between meeting clients' material needs and securing positive defense outcomes.

Non-citizen cases are flagged for a triage process to secure 977 waivers for remote appearances in eligible cases. While not mandated to provide removal defense, the office is a founding member of the Removal Defense Collaborative and supports related efforts, including participating in Asylum Clinics, Know Your Rights advocacy, and A pilot outreach program with Watsonville Police to provide

early representation in misdemeanor cases, helping some noncitizens avoid the criminal legal system. Rogers also emphasized the office's commitment to second-chance hiring and confronting systemic racism. In response to a question about the officer misconduct complaint processes, she noted that many justice-involved individuals fear retribution, making it a challenging issue to address. Recent budget discussions with the Board were successful, preserving all staffing and services.

5.2. Approve 2026 Regular Meeting Schedule

Motion to approve 2026 Regular Meeting Schedule.

Motion/Second: Rocha/Flores-Martinez

Motion passed unanimously.

5.3. Consider Establishing a 2025 Hispanic Heritage Art Wall Exhibit Ad Hoc Subcommittee

Staff provided some additional detail on the information the Community Action Board has provided to support the exhibition. Highlights include a reception on September 15th to open the exhibit, a possible proclamation from the Board, the inclusion of CAB participant original artwork, and photographs of CAB program participants and achievements.

Motion to establish an ad hoc Art Wall subcommittee to collaborate with the Community Action Board to develop and install an art wall exhibit celebrating their history and many achievements benefiting the Latino community.

Motion/Second: Rocha/Lopez

Motion passed unanimously.

Nevarez appointed Lopez, Nevarez, Rocha and Sanchez to the ad hoc subcommittee.

6. Commissioner Reports

6.1. District 1 Report (Flores-Martinez)

Flores-Martinez reported on County Park Friends' no-fee *Artiseando* community art project.

6.2. District 2 Report (Sanchez): No Report

6.3. District 3 Report (Flores): No Report

6.4. District 4 Report (De Santos): No Report

6.5. District 5 Report (Seat Vacant): No Report

6.6. Santa Cruz City Report (Nevarez)

Nevarez shared that ICE deported someone without notice, and three UCSC students had their visas revoked. They are already challenging the decision with the help of immigration attorneys provided by a private organization.

6.7. Watsonville City Report (Lopez/Rocha)

Rocha shared details about two upcoming fundraising events—one for Positive Discipline Community Resources and another for a local girls' softball team. Lopez announced the opening of Cienega Heights, an affordable housing development with units reserved for farmworker families.

7. Staff Report:

Staff requested Commissioners to keep an eye out for requests for DocuSign signatures and asked those who had not already done so to re-register as County vendors in the new payment processing system, Payment Works.

8. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:29 PM.

Submitted by: Kaite McGrew, *Commissions Manager*