

**COMMUNITY RELATIONS ADVISORY BOARD (CRAB)  
REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL**

**SUBJECT:** Council Referral – Welcoming of Refugees

**BACKGROUND:** At the Regular Meeting on December 14, 2015, Council referred this matter to CRAB. In November, 2015 Governor Larry Hogan made a request to federal authorities that Syrian refugees not be directed to Maryland until they pose no threat to public safety. Council received a petition on November 23, 2015 requesting that the City express Greenbelt’s willingness to welcome Syrian refugees to Greenbelt. On December 14, Council approved a letter to Governor Hogan urging him to reconsider his position.

**DISCUSSION:** CRAB considered and discussed this referral at meetings on January 12, February 2, March 8, April 5 and April 19. Representatives of the petitioners attended the meetings in January and February and provided valuable input and suggestions for actions and outreach that could be taken to become a more welcoming community. CRAB members added their own ideas for activities and programs.

As consideration of this referral evolved, CRAB felt the City should focus on welcoming any refugee or non-native resident and not limit efforts to Syrian refugees. CRAB observed there are many aspects of life in America which, due to experiential and cultural differences, cause challenges for non-native residents trying to acclimate to a what for them is a new community in a new country. CRAB noted there were many opportunities for dialogue, interaction and engagement between these newer residents and their neighbors. It was suggested the City’s welcome packet could have helpful information targeted to the non-native population. CRAB believed such actions were consistent with the Community Pledge and the community’s values.

CRAB categorized the ideas and suggestions discussed into four categories as follows:

- Within the purview of CRAB.
- Should be handled/led by the petitioners or other existing advocacy/support groups.
- An activity that might evolve into a permanent function in the future.
- Should be led by a new ongoing Committee or group.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the categories above and extensive discussions, CRAB recommends the following within their purview:

- CRAB will pursue having a kiosk/booth at 1-2 upcoming community events with the Community Pledge posted largely and visibly, and staffed with CRAB members to explain it to those in attendance. The intent here is to target existing community events with built-in attendance (i.e., festivals).
  - In addition - At the booths CRAB could also invite the small group who issued the referral (Josh, Melissa, et al) and have "Welcoming Communities" materials available so that individual members of the citizenry can offer to assist/participate in helping Greenbelt pursue a Welcoming Communities designation if desired. This allows CRAB to sponsor such interest without directly "staffing" it ourselves.
  - In order to facilitate this, for now and in the future 1) print the Community Pledge in very large format as well as 2) order a table skirt/banner with "Community Relations Advisory Board" written on it.
- CRAB will pursue hosting a "Meal and Reel" at the New Deal Cafe over the next 6 months (as scheduling for the event allows). The Meal and Reel will focus on challenges the immigrant and refugee community faces, and will be followed by a discussion among the participants.
  - The Community calendar will continue to be monitored into the future for other opportunities to serve at a kiosk with the Community Pledge or at other public events

In addition, CRAB offers the following recommendations to Council:

- CRAB recommends that Council consider forming a small group (outside and separate from CRAB) to update and expand the Welcome Packet by incorporating information for non-native residents. As one facet of their charter, this committee should ensure that current city and volunteer services and groups are presented in such a way as to encourage those of foreign birth or culture to participate, as well as encourage their participation in city presentations and activities in general. CRAB recommends that the group work in cooperation with the existing group that currently prepares and distributes the Welcome Packets.
- CRAB also recommends that Council consider a new temporary committee or Board to address the overarching issue of acclimating to the U.S. and to Greenbelt in particular for persons who are arriving as non-natives. While there may be some special emphasis on accommodating Syrian refugees in concert with Council's letter to the Governor, the new group would focus on welcoming persons from all areas outside of the U.S. The previous

recommendation (above) could be folded into the purview of this group as Council sees fit. In its deliberations, CRAB was presented with many fine ideas and recommendations from an eager and capable coterie of city residents who were part of the initial effort concerning a response to the Governor's statement. It seems counter-productive to let the ideas and working knowledge of this group go to waste.

Respectfully Submitted

Rick Ransom, Chair  
Community Relations Advisory Board