Asian Affairs Commission

Regular Meeting | September 1, 2026 | 12:00 - 1:00 pm
City Hall at One Technology Center | Room 411

Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Sarah Gilpin, Masood Kasim, Yasamin Nawabi, Cecilia Nguyễn, Bee Paredes, Parisa Pilehvar, Anna Thao

Commissioners Absent: Meg Chang, Hieu Lê, Cing Nuam, Vivian Wang

I. **Call to Order**
   a. Chairwoman Pilehvar called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm.
II. **Approval of Meeting Minutes**
   a. Chairwoman Pilehvar entertained a motion to approve August meeting minutes.
      i. Vice Chair Nguyễn motioned, Commissioner Kasim seconded.
         1. Aye: 7, Nay: 0
      ii. Motion carried, August minutes approved.
III. **Chair / Vice Chair Report**
   a. Chairwoman Pilehvar yielded time to Commissioner Gilpin to official close out her tenure as chair.
      i. Commissioner Gilpin reflected on what a pleasure it was to see AAC grow and be an anchor for Asian community representation. She enjoyed working with all commissioners and is looking forward to working in a different capacity. She also looks forward to seeing what Chairwoman Pilehvar will accomplish in her tenure.
IV. **Action: Vote on 2026-2027 AAC Focus and Goals**
   a. Chairwoman Pilehvar previewed the official proposal for the 2026-2027 AAC Focus and Goals. (Appendix 1)
      i. This commission represents a vast diversity of regions, nationalities, and ethnicities. It is difficult to select one focus.
      ii. There has been a decline in AANHPI business ownership. These businesses are visible anchors in the broader community. After a cursory glance, there appears to be a lack of culturally relevant services catered to the AANHPI community.
      iii. City has an entire entity geared toward supporting economic vitality in Tulsa.
   b. Commission Discussion:
      i. Commissioner Gilpin asked how will AAC measure success. Chairwoman Pilehvar noted that the City is dedicated to capturing this data point, so in

the long-term AAC can track the rise in business ownership. Intially, data will be qualitative as AAC identifies City policy/programs that can be catered to the AANHPI community.

ii. Commissioner Kasim: Many people have the drive to start their own business but don't know how. AAC focusing on this can help people gain knowledge and navigate the system. Chairwoman Pilehvar noted that AAC can plan an event or publish a one pager that helps people.

iii. Vice Chair Nguyễn appreciates details and plan, sense of direction.

iv. Lofty goal: Start Asian Chamber in Tulsa.

v. Commissioners discussed making a community-facing version of the proposal available on AAC's webpage in multiple languages.

c. Chairwoman Pilehvar entertained a motion to approve the 2026-2027 AAC Focus and Goals.

i. Vice Chair Nguyễn motioned, Commissioner Kasim seconded.

1. Aye: 7, Nay: 0

ii. Motion carried, 2026-2027 AAC Focus and Goals approved.

V. Action: Vote to Recommend Human Rights Commission Liaison for Appointment

a. Chairwoman Pilehvar entertained a motion to recommend Commissioner Paredes as AAC's liaison on the Human Rights Commission (HRC).

i. Vice Chair Nguyễn motioned, Commissioner Kasim seconded.

1. Aye: 7

ii. Motion carried, Commissioner Paredes is recommended as AAC's liaison on the HRC.

VI. Committee Reports

a. Cultural Hubs and Community Advocacy

i. Vice Chair Nguyễn: AAC tabled at India Fest and connected with many community members and businesses. The event grew significantly. Mayor Nichols attended and spoke.

ii. Reviewed upcoming events.

iii. Ask to AAC: Twisted Arts Film Festival will include a film about the immigrant and refugee experience, and they invited someone to speak about AAC before the screening and table. Saturday, September 26 at 5:30 pm at Circle Cinema.

iv. AANHPI Leadership Roundtable

1. Next session: September 24 at Leadership Tulsa.
2. Focus: community interviews.

b. Workforce and Education

i. Commissioner Kasim: Almost ready to launch nominations for Luminary Awards. Nominations will be due September 30.

ii. Determining if there will be entertainment, will have refreshments.

c. Data and Research
    i. Chairwoman Pilehvar: Aware of the fact that there is no Pacific Islander representation on AAC. Leveraging connections with schools that have high populations of Marshallese and Chuukese students to make connections.
d. Cultural Event
    i. Chairwoman Pilehvar: Pursuing conversations to hand off Tulsa Asia Fest to a community partner.

VII. Old Business – no old business

VIII. New Business

a. Commissioner Gilpin: Consider nominating AANHPI women for YWCA Pinnacle Awards.
b. Commissioner Kasim: Gyros by Ali has opened a second location. If you know of Asian owned businesses that are opening or expanding, share with him to shout them out.

IX. Announcements / Public Comments

a. AAC nominee has been selected for HRC's annual Humanitarian of the Year Award, will share more after HRC announces.
b. Public Comments
    i. Rex Trevedi: India Fest had at least 4k people. Had great media and glad to have Mayor Nichols attend.
c. Plug to apply to serve on the commission.

X. Adjournment

a. Chairwoman Pilehvar entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.
    i. Commissioner Thao motioned, Commissioner Kasim seconded.
        1. Aye: 7
    ii. Motion carried, meeting adjourned at 12:50 pm.

Appendix 1

AAC | ASIAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Proposal for 2026–2027 Focus

A Focus on Small Business

Rationale for Focus Area

Whereas:

- Business ownership among AANHPI Tulsans has dropped to less than half of its 2018 percentage
- Asian restaurants, markets, and business are significant as places for belonging, gathering, and cultural ambassadorship with our broader community
- There are not currently culturally-relevant or bilingual events catered to AANHPI business owners
- It is our role to act in an advisory capacity to the Mayor, City Council, and City Officials on matters of Asian American communities
    - The Tulsa Authority for Economic Opportunity (TAEO) / PartnerTulsa is a city entity that exists, in part, “to promote, stimulate, encourage and finance economic growth and development, and promote racial equity and resolve disparities in economic outcomes of the general public”

Indicator 2: Business Ownership by Race

Business ownership: Asian, Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander (Asian/NHOPI) compared to Black workers.

Report Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Equality Score	**52**	**55**	**35**	**39**	**33**	**62**	**100**	**100**
Comparison Group A: % of Asian/NHOPI workers who own businesses	**10.3%**	**10.0%**	**13.1%**	**13.4%**	**12.5%**	**10.6%**	**7.3%**	**4.5%**
Comparison Group B: % of Black workers who own businesses	**6.0%**	**6.1%**	**4.7%**	**6.1%**	**4.0%**	**7.2%**	**9.9%**	**5.7%**
Ratio of Comparison Group A to Comparison Group B	**1.722**	**1.636**	**2.798**	**2.208**	**3.104**	**1.477**	**0.739**	**0.798**

The equality score for this indicator **increased by 48** since 2018

Black workers now own businesses in Tulsa at a rate that exceeds that of Asian, Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander workers, and the share of Asian/NHOPI workers who own businesses has fallen from 10.3% (2018) to 4.5% (2025), the lowest point on record for Asian/NHOPI workers.

Guiding Question for the Year

What has contributed to the decrease in business ownership among AANHPI Tulsans since 2021? What does our business community need to thrive?

This question will anchor a year-long unit of study, structured in three phases:

- Listening and Mapping,
- Blueprinting, and
- Synthesis and Sharing, culminating in a report to the Mayor and City Council.

Enabling Decisions

To focus commission time and volunteer capacity on this small business unit of study, we are exploring the following hand-offs:

- A community entity to whom we can “hand off” the Tulsa Asia Fest name and event ownership, to be hosted with the continued support of the Asian Affairs Commission.

- A community entity to whom we can “hand off” the Luminary Award Student Scholarship, to be awarded with the continued support of the Asian Affairs Commission.

Year at a Glance

What has contributed to the decrease in business ownership among AANHPI Tulsans since 2021? What does our business community need to thrive?

This question will anchor a year-long unit of study, structured in three phases:

Phase 1: Listening and Mapping	Who are the Asian-owned businesses and nonprofits in Tulsa, what do we know about their current reality, and what does the data tell us about where they stand relative to others?
Phase 2: Blueprinting	What models, structures, and support systems have helped Asian business communities thrive in other cities, and what conditions made those possible?
Phase 3: Synthesis and Sharing	When we bring our learning back to the community, what resonates, what’s missing, and who are the leaders ready to act?

Phase 1: Listening and Mapping

Month	Speaker / Topic	Action / Objectives
October	**Melanie Poulter from Tulsa Area United Way** *Share more about the data in the Equality Indicators* • How do our trends compare with that of other major racial groups not included in the dataset? • How has the AANHPI community demographic changed since 2018? • What might we need to know about how this indicator is measured? What might we need to explore next?	☐ Introduce Tulsa Asia Collective business directory and encourage community members to register AANHPI owned businesses ☐ Solicit diverse group (ethnicity, business sector, business status) of volunteers for the small business panel in November
November	**Panel of Local AANHPI Business Owners** *Learn more from the experiences of business owners* • What has your experience been like starting or sustaining a business in Tulsa? • What barriers have you personally faced that you think may be harder today than they were a few years ago? • Are there specific systems or requirements (permits, inspections, insurance, translation of paperwork) that feel especially difficult to navigate?	☐ Capture trends from interview and solicit recommendations on other business owners we should meet with
January	**Erran Persley from Mayor's Office of Economic Development** **Jesse Morrow, Small Business Enterprise Coordinator** **Maria Almeida from Partner Tulsa** *Learn about the existing supports for small business* • We are tracking a drop in AANHPI business ownership. Does that trend line up with anything you're seeing in your own data or experiences? • What opportunities exist for a small business owner in Tulsa that more people should be aware of? What gaps do you see in current supports? • What lessons from building out Spanish-language supports like Kitchen 66 Spanish language cohort could we learn from as we seek to support our community?	☐ Cross reference learnings from three meetings to determine where we want to focus our learning in the blueprinting stage

Phase 2: Blueprinting

Month	Speaker / Topic	Action / Objectives
February	Based on our learning and major themes from the listening stage, identify near peer or aspirational organizations we want to learn from to inform our recommendations for small business support. **Examples could include:** Greater OKC Asian Chamber of Commerce, PACE LA, Black Wall Street Chamber of Commerce and Tulsa Area Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	
March		
April		

Phase 3: Synthesis and Sharing		
Month	**Speaker / Topic**	**Action / Objectives**
May **June** **July**	Based on our learning and major themes from the blueprinting stage, begin synthesizing recommendations for Mayor, City Council, and the broader community. **Ideally, we could present our findings in the following formats:** ● Special initial community meeting to share our learnings and get feedback from those most affected by the recommendations like small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs ● Final external-facing report that incorporates the feedback of our community to answer our guiding question: What does our business community need to thrive, and what should the city and community do about it? Also includes: ○ Concrete recommendations grounded in data, stories, comparative learning, and community engagement ○ Ideas for how other Title V commissions may similarly support their communities' businesses ○ Publicity for the Asian Business Directory through Tulsa Asia Collective	