

BEFORE THE METRO COUNCIL

FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROCLAIMING APRIL	)	RESOLUTION NO. 20-5091
1 THROUGH APRIL 30 SOUTHEAST ASIAN	)	Introduced by Council President Lynn
COMMUNITY RECOGNITION MONTH	)	Peterson

WHEREAS, SE Asian communities, including Cambodian, Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Hmong, Burmese (Myanmar) and many others live and work in Greater Portland; and

WHEREAS, the Month of April is traditionally celebrated in many Southeast Asian communities as New Years, "Songkran" in Thailand, "Pi Mai" in Laos, "Thingyan" in Burma and "Choul Chnam Thmey" in Cambodia, a time of renewal, reflection and sharing of cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS, the Month of April is historically significant in that April of 1975 marked the United States withdraw from Southeast Asian conflicts. Subsequently, on April 17, 1975 the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia and began the "Killing Fields", a mass genocide of an estimated two million Cambodians. In the same period on April 30, 1975, Saigon, Vietnam fell to communist forces while a handover in government to communist forces in Laos also coincided at the end of the month; and

WHEREAS, the initial resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees to the United States between 1975 and 1979, resulted in the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980 paving the way for hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees to resettle across the country; and

WHEREAS, Greater Portland is now home to more than 55,000 Southeast Asian community members, many of which are Metro employees; and

WHEREAS; standing with all immigrant and refugee communities reflect Metro's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion including advancing racial equity, working to remove barriers and ensuring all communities meaningfully participate in public decision-making.

BE IT RESOLVED that the Metro Council proclaims April 2020 to be Southeast Asian Community Recognition Month in Greater Portland.

ADOPTED by the Metro Council this 23rd day of April 2020.

Approved as

DocuSigned by:  
  
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to Form:



Carrie MacLaren, Metro Attorney

Lynn Peterson, Council President

## **STAFF REPORT**

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 20-5091, FOR THE PURPOSE OF  
PROCLAIMING APRIL 1 THROUGH APRIL 30 SE ASIAN COMMUNITY RECOGNITION  
MONTH

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Date: April 1, 2020  
Department: Council Office  
Meeting Date: April 23, 2020

Prepared by: Victor Sin, Council Office  
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503-797-6619  
Presenter: Victor Sin

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### **ISSUE STATEMENT**

The Metro Council has an opportunity to stand with residents, community partners and local jurisdictions in our region by adopting Resolution No. 20-5091, in recognizing the month of April has significant to the Southeast Asian Community.

### **ACTION REQUESTED**

Consideration and vote on Resolution No. 20-5091.

### **IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES**

Advancing the Metro Council's proclamation for Southeast Asian Community Recognition month from April 1 to April 30.

### **POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER**

Council adoption of this resolution will further Metro's commitment to the goals stated in the Strategic Plan to advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, in particular:

- a) Metro meaningfully engages communities of color
- b) Metro hires, trains and promotes a racially diverse workforce
- c) Metro creates safe and welcoming programs, spaces and destinations

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

Staff recommends the Metro Council adopt Resolution No. 20-5091.

### **STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION 1. Known**

#### **Opposition/support/community feedback**

No opposition known at this time. Testimony in support has been submitted by Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) and the Cambodian American Community of Oregon (CACO).

#### **2. Legal Antecedents**

None. This is the first year that the Metro Council is considering adoption of this resolution.

#### **3. Anticipated effects**None.

#### **4. Financial implications**

None.

None.

## **BACKGROUND**

The month of April is traditionally celebrated in many Southeast Asian countries as New Years ("Songkran" in Thailand, "Pi Mai" in Laos, "Thingyan" in Burma and "Choul Chnam Thmey" in Cambodia). It is a significant time of the year for many in the Southeast Asian American community to recognize a shared history, showcase cultural heritage, celebrate renewal and honor the sacrifices so many had to make to resettle. It is a month of deep mourning and commemoration of as many as 3.5 million deaths of Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians as a result of the U.S. military intervention in the Vietnam War.

In the United States, Asian communities are among the fastest growing racial group at a growth rate of 3.3% according to the latest Census data. Greater Portland is home to more than 55,000 community members who identify as Southeast Asian.

Southeast Asian countries consist of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand but is largely identified in the states by the mass resettlement of refugees in the 1970's due to United States intervention in the Vietnam War. Resettlement primarily impacted people from Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar (Burma), Laos and Hmong people which experienced traumatic civil wars.

April of 1975 holds historical significance to these countries due to the subsequent ending of American involvement and toppling of existing governments. This includes the Khmer Rouge capturing the capital of Phnom Penh, Cambodia marking the beginning of the mass genocide of over two million people known as the "Killing Fields", the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese forces and the handover of power to communist forces in Laos. As a result, changes in American refugee policy resettled more than 300,000 to the states initially. The passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, then raised the annual intake of refugees from 17,400 to 50,000 while establishing a more formal system for immigration and resettlement. This landmark act provided a lasting effect for millions of refugees and asylum seekers seen to this day.

The experience of the Southeast Asian community is one of success for some during resettlement but struggle for most. Economic, education, housing and health indicators show disparities when compared to other Asian communities. Southeast Asian refugees experience high levels of physical and mental health issues including PTSD that have gone untreated. The vast majority of those who initially resettled accepted any labor jobs available, unable to seek education opportunities further expanding economic and social disparities.

In Oregon, non-profit organizations like IRCO (Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization) founded by Southeast Asian refugees play an essential role in removing economic and social barriers to help immigrant and refugee communities grow in their new home.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Testimony in support submitted by Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) and the Cambodian American Community of Oregon (CACO).

**IMMIGRANT  
AND REFUGEE  
COMMUNITY  
ORGANIZATION**

building new beginnings  
www.irco.org



MAIN OFFICE  
AFRICA HOUSE  
ASIAN FAMILY CENTER  
INTERNATIONAL  
LANGUAGE BANK

April 2020

On behalf of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), I would like to express my support and pride in Metro's proclamation recognizing our region's Southeast Asian refugee community. Following the 1970s political upheavals in Southeast Asia, Oregon and Washington were two of the first states to offer new opportunities and homes to refugees. And in 1976, IRCO was formed by a group of Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian refugees to help newly arrived families find jobs and navigate their new lives in America. More than 40 years later, IRCO continues to provide essential support and remove barriers for newcomers as they build new beginnings in Oregon.

In 1994, IRCO founded the Asian Family Center (AFC) as the very first culturally and linguistically specific one stop community center focused on the diverse needs of Asians and Pacific Islanders. For more than 25 years, AFC has created a space for families to receive support, celebrate our cultures and identities, lift up our voices, and thrive in Oregon. At IRCO and AFC, we believe that the unique experiences of our immigrant and refugee communities enhance the diversity of our region's shared community.

The greater Portland area is now home to over 55,000 Southeast Asians who have made significant contributions to our region. As a former refugee from Southeast Asia at the end of the Vietnam War, I know the challenges that this community has overcome. My deepest hope is that they—and all the newcomers who will follow—find a welcoming and equitable home here.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee Po Cha', is positioned above the printed name and title.

Lee Po Cha  
Executive Director



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**Cambodian-American Community of Oregon**  
501 (C) (3) Non-Profit Organization  
P.O. Box 233  
Beaverton, OR 97075-0233

Metro Council  
600 NE Grand Ave  
Portland, Oregon 97232

April 16th, 2020

Dear Metro Council Members,

On behalf of the Cambodian American Community of Oregon (CACO), I am writing in support of Resolution No. 20-5091, recognizing the Southeast Asian community and our celebrations of New Year. Specifically, for the Cambodian American community, April is a time of renewal, contemplation, and family gathering as we celebrate the Year of the Rat, 2564 Buddhist Era (B.E.).

Cambodian Americans in Oregon and S.W. Washington celebrate the New Year by paying homage to our ancestors, traveling to our local Buddhist temples, and joining in community gathering. CACO is a longtime partner and supporter of grassroots volunteer events, like New Year in the Park at Glenhaven Park in Portland. This year is no different. While our events are cancelled or postponed amidst the global health crisis - we continue to recognize the importance of community bonding, health, and family.

We also recognize the sacrifices and hardships of the past. April holds another significance to Cambodians Americans. On April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1975, Cambodia ended a devastating Civil War as the Khmer Rouge took control. The country plunged into darkness as the United States left Southeast Asia. From 1975 to 1979, the “Killing Fields” genocide would take the lives of two million people. During that time, Cambodian refugees resettled in the United States – including here in our Portland metro area.

This month we remember the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the Killing Fields and honor the sacrifices. We also cherish and recognize the growth of our Cambodian communities – and many other Southeast Asian communities of similar experience – in becoming an integral of the American melting pot. We have a lot of work left in uplifting our communities through education, mental health, and socio-economic equitable policies that address our generational trauma, the stability of our families, and our wellbeing as Americans.

Yet one thing remains just as clear now as it did decades before – the journey of a people and a community are exemplified by the individuals that stand up and extend a warm welcome to those who need help – whether family, friends or strangers. That enduring spirit of creating a home for all is what stands out in our local communities, even as global forces continue to strain and stress us apart.



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P.O. Box 233  
Beaverton, OR 97075-0233

We thank Councilmember Juan Carlos Gonzalez and the entire Metro Council for your work in advocating for immigrant and refugee communities.

Wishing you joyous, prosperous, and healthy Year of the Rat, 2564 B.E.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Sokho Eath*  
Sokho Eath,  
CACO President