



Committee on Community Resources and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Gina Louise Sciarra

Vice-Chair: Councilor Dennis P. Bidwell

Councilor Alisa F. Klein

Councilor James Nash

Meeting Minutes

Date: June 18, 2018

Time: 5:00 pm

Location: City Council Office, 210 Main St., Northampton, Massachusetts

1. **Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call.** At 5 p.m. Councilor Sciarra called the meeting to order. Present on roll call were Councilors Sciarra, Bidwell, Klein and Nash.
2. **Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**
Councilor Sciarra announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded for broadcast by Northampton Community Television (NCT).
3. **Public Comment**
No members of the public were present, so there was no public comment.
4. **Approval of Minutes**
Members agreed by consent to move both sets of minutes as a group. Councilor Bidwell moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of Community Resources on February 27, 2018 and the special meeting March 5, 2018. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion carried 4:0.
5. **New Business**
 - B. **Quarter-term committee check-in and discussion of ideas and goals for the remainder of the term**
Councilor Sciarra said she would like to reverse the order of the agenda to discuss ideas and goals for the remainder of the term first. There being no objection, she took up the quarter-term committee check-in.

She wanted to have a discussion because they have not had an item referred to them for the past two meetings. When it came to the third she thought it warranted a discussion of things they might want to have referred to them and the scope and breadth of the committee. Councilor Bidwell also expressed

curiosity about why she had waved off some items and she wanted to explain her thought process on that.

There have been a bunch of zoning items that came through that could have been referred to Community Resources, she acknowledged. She didn't ask for them to be referred because, having sat last term on both Legislative Matters (LM) and Community Resources (CR), she found it very repetitive and redundant and potentially unnecessary. If it were a zoning issue that required more community discussion, she would be in favor of having it come to this committee. She sat through many meetings where Senior Planner Carolyn Misch came and carefully and diligently presented to them and then presented to LM and she thought it was perhaps unnecessary.

Councilor Bidwell said his question could be related to some confusion about the role of LM; i.e. – to what extent it is a technical review. At one point he thought that was LM's primary responsibility. He is not sure if LM is getting into more substance because other committees are not or because members consider this its purview. Some clarity would be helpful, he suggested.

She is no longer on the committee and so cannot answer that question, but there was a change in the chair of LM, Councilor Sciarra noted. She read the charge of the LM committee from the council rules. It doesn't talk about substance vs. technicality, members observed.

This opens them up to thinking about their mission and what they're here to do if things aren't being referred to them, Councilor Sciarra continued. She wanted to see if members had some ideas of what they thought they should be working on or what their mission should be.

Councilor Sciarra presented ideas of her own for community issues the committee could become involved in:

- ❖ engaging more with city departments and multi-member bodies. She and Councilor Klein are veterans of the now-defunct City Council Committee on Social Services, Veterans, Culture and Recreation (SSVCR), which rotated meeting regularly with certain department heads and social service agencies, she noted. She does not want to follow the practice of having a formal rotation but thinks it would be good to engage more in the form of making information requests of specific departments. She cited Economic Development Director Terry Masterson, Arts Council Director Brian Foote, Wayne Feiden, Peg Keller, the Housing Partnership, License Commission, Conservation Commission and Energy & Sustainability Commission as some of the groups and individuals they could potentially solicit information from.
- ❖ engaging more with state legislation; i.e. -, following certain issues more closely

Members could pick a topic they are interested in and make an information request. I.e. – for the impact of the casino opening, they could engage people in city hall or, for the arts, they could engage Mr. Foote.

Councilor Klein said she appreciated how much thought Councilor Sciarra had put into this but asked if she could articulate more to what end they would want to tackle any of this. Would it be for the purpose of crafting an ordinance or for referring a matter to another body? She asked. When on SSVCR, it was wonderful to be updated but it didn't translate more into particular action.

Good question, Councilor Sciarra agreed. It would be an opportunity to pursue an individual or collective topic of interest; for example, to flesh out the community art idea that has been kicking around, she suggested.

This is much the same question that members have had in City Services (CS), Councilor Bidwell noted.

She envies CS for its responsibility for appointments, Councilor Sciarra remarked. It is its reason for being. It is part of a larger philosophical discussion of what the role of various committees is.

It raises the larger practical and philosophical question of what city councilors as a group should be doing, Councilor Klein observed. Are they just crafting ordinances or are they more community organizers or activists, she asked rhetorically. She would like to have that discussion, she said.

Councilor Bidwell said his opinion would be the latter. He has been thinking about the casino about to open, he volunteered. He noticed the Mayor is meeting tomorrow morning with a marketing consultant to make a report to the DNA about a marketing approach for the city. He would like to have a committee of the council be briefed on this report. This would not only serve to inform the council but would promote greater community awareness as well, he noted.

Councilor Klein raised a related subject that came up earlier in discussion of the charter: how the city council communicates with and liaises with the Mayor's office. Following the Mayor on social media, she sees all the events he attends. Frequently she doesn't know about those activities until she sees them on social media. It makes sense to her that they would be engaged in those kinds of things and that the council would have a presence at these kinds of things. She wondered if they could serve as a liaison committee with the Mayor's office to share with their colleagues on the full council.

She had the experience this morning of being surprised by the presence of the Mayor, superintendent, press and Representative Scibak at the school for an event she was unaware of, Councilor Sciarra related.

Councilor Nash said he had a similar experience with the bike tunnel opening.

Councilor Sciarra offered to have a conversation with the Mayor's office.

Members discussed how there may be an assumption among businesses and outside groups that information directed to the Mayor's office is automatically disseminated to the City Council. He would like to explore ways to have a collaborative conversation earlier in the process of some initiatives, Councilor Bidwell shared.

Discussion continued, with Councilor Bidwell reiterating that he would be interested in more information about the casino opening. He wants to hear the direction the marketing effort is taking, what Terry is doing, etc. An update on the coordination of efforts of different entities around the casino opening might be a useful topic, he suggested.

Also, between the Mayor's office and realtors he thinks they are beginning to get a sense of what the market for retail marijuana might be.

Looking at the purview of CR, Councilor Klein said she would love more information about certain zoning topics such as infill development and zoning regulations for small farms. She and Councilor Nash are looking at doing a piece of work around environmental issues and the use of pesticides in the city. They could hear from DPW folks about how municipal areas are managed in terms of pesticides and herbicides and integrated pest management.

On the subject of housing affordability, it could be useful to reach outside of city government to talk to the organizations behind the two developments on Pleasant Street, Councilor Klein continued. She does think there are very relevant subjects to discuss but, again, she isn't sure toward what end.

Councilor Bidwell agreed it was a good list. He thinks it would be very interesting to have a conversation about housing and affordability and the future direction of that.

The final version of the Open Space Plan was just published and both areas being considered for hunting are in Ward 7, Councilor Klein advised. The Conservation Commission is the only board tasked with holding a hearing and making a final decision. She wondered if CR could partner with them and potentially hold a hearing. It would have to happen fairly quickly, she noted.

Councilor Sciarra asked if it would have to happen at the July 16th meeting. Councilor Bidwell texted Kevin Lake and reported that the Conservation Commission isn't planning on holding a hearing until the fall, so there is time to confer about a joint hearing.

The model where this committee did its best work was retail marijuana, Councilor Nash opined. He referred to the community forum at which NETA and the Northampton Prevention Coalition made presentations. He thinks too often they don't take advantage of the opportunity to hold discussions in various venues. Though LM is tasked with looking at the letter of the law, it sometimes gets off course and ends up being a pre-vetting forum. Some of that discussion needs to be consciously delegated to CR.

Another conversation he thinks the council needs to engage in is the question around the way police in the community relate. "There's a lot of tension," he observed.

They talked about having a larger community discussion in City Council. If they could 'frontload' the discussion so that they are talking about policing in general and not a particular vote or incident, it would be useful, he proposed. He said he didn't know if that conversation could start here.

Councilor Sciarra expressed the opinion that the subject falls more under the jurisdiction of City Services.

He went to a symposium at HCC on "policing and communities of color," Councilor Nash shared. It had a panel of community leaders and panel of police and the District Attorney. He would much rather have a discussion in this type of venue than have it in connection with a specific appropriation or measure

One of the reasons some of them developed "Northampton Connects" is to have a conversation prior to the introduction of a specific measure, Councilor Bidwell said. There has been conversation about having some kind of discussion on policing hosted by the Truth School and Northampton Connects, he

shared. If a committee of the City Council were willing to have the conversation, maybe it wouldn't have to happen outside, he said.

Conversations in different and varied venues are also helpful, Councilor Sciarra observed. She's heard from people that it doesn't necessarily feel like a conversation when they come and speak at a podium and city councilors are behind the desk. She's not sure this is the best venue for that discussion.

Reading from council rules, Councilor Klein pointed out that CR may also review and make recommendations on licenses and permits. If there needs to be further discussion on the taxi ordinance, it could be brought here, Councilor Sciarra agreed.

An example of a permitting issue that has larger implications is the permitting of underground storage tanks, Councilor Bidwell noted. There is very large community interest in that and public safety issues related to tanks.

Councilor Sciarra asked if there is anything members want to tackle in July. It was noted that the casino opening is Aug. 24th. Councilor Sciarra offered to contact the Mayor's office and see if he would come and talk about the city's marketing approach. They should keep in mind that there are some things it might be more appropriate for the entire council to be updated on, Councilor Klein noted. She didn't think the Mayor should be expected to make a separate presentation to them if he were planning to make a presentation to the council as a whole, she indicated.

Councilor Bidwell wondered if they might want to broaden it a little to be an update on local economic development. Two additional trains a day are running, he noted. It might be good to learn a little bit more about that; the casino, north/south rail, etc.

A. Discussion of the Final Report of the MA Senate Task Force on Strengthening Local Retail

Members discussed various points of interest from the report. Among other things, Councilor Klein said she is interested in learning more about "The Good Jobs Strategy" and whether it might be useful to bring to local businesses. The report referred to a Powerpoint presentation.

She also mentioned that the report notes that low teen employment rates particularly impact low-income families. This affirms the argument some made in the discussion of raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour that teens would be disproportionately affected by a two-tiered system.

Councilor Sciarra promised to look into the Good Jobs study and to get ahold of the Powerpoint presentation. Councilor Bidwell said he would look at the Quill decision ruling that internet retail businesses are not subject to sales tax.

6. **Adjourn.** At 6:15p.m., Councilor Klein moved to adjourn the meeting; Councilor Nash seconded. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Prepared By:

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