



CITY COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE TO STUDY BARRIERS TO SERVING ON CITY BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Meeting Agenda

Date: June 30, 2022 Time: 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm
Teleconference

Instructions for how to view, listen or participate in this meeting:

Use the Zoom Meeting Link, Meeting ID 869 7570 1770 and Passcode: 431846 for participation via the web:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86975701770?pwd=NEZMKzRhMWVEZzgwdFdKWURzSi94UT09>

Dial +13017158592,,86975701770# US (Washington DC) for One tap mobile access

From your phone dial +1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC). If prompted, use meeting id 869 7570 1770

1. Call Meeting to Order

- Roll Call
- Announcement that Meeting is Video & Audio Recorded

2. Public Comment - 15 minutes

3. Introduction of Committee Members

4. Minutes of Previous Meetings

A. Approve Minutes of June 9, 2022 Meeting

Documents:

[06-09-22 Select Committee - Barriers to Serving - Organizational Meeting.pdf](#)

B. Approve Minutes of June 23, 2022 Meeting

Documents:

[06-23-22 Select Committee - Barriers to Serving - Meeting Minutesdocx.pdf](#)

5. General discussion Items

- Goals & expectations
- Formulating record requests to collect data
- Strategy to collect testimonies
- Possible compensation

6. Description of the process for becoming a city committee/board member

7. New Business

8. Adjourn

Members		
Javier Luengo-Garrido, Chair	Councilor Jamila Gore, Vice-Chair	Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Citizen
Gwen Nabad, Citizen	Councilor Garrick Perry	Cynthia Suopis, Citizen
Janna White, Citizen		



MEMBERS

Javier Luengo-Garrido, Citizen
Councilor Jamila Gore
Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Citizen
Gwen Nabad, Citizen
Councilor Garrick Perry
Cynthia Suopis, Citizen
Janna White, Citizen

City Council Select Committee to Study Barriers to Serving on City Boards and Commissions Organizational Meeting – June 9, 2022

5 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

This meeting was held by remote participation via Zoom. Instructions for how to join the meeting were included on the meeting agenda. The meeting was recorded for future review by the public.

- 1. Opening Remarks by Councilor Nash:** At 5:00 Councilor Nash opened the meeting and noted that this was the organizational meeting of the Select Committee to Study Barriers to Serving on City Boards and Commissions. The meeting was held virtually on Zoom and was being video and audio recorded. The meeting is subject to open meeting law.
- 2. ROLL CALL:** City Clerk Pamela Powers called the roll. The following individuals were present: Javier Luengo-Garrido, Councilor Jamila Gore, Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Gwen Nabad, Councilor Garrick Perry, Cynthia Suopis, and Janna White. In keeping with the City Council rules, the first person listed as a committee member, Javier Luengo-Garrido, acted as chair of the meeting until the election of the chair and vice-chair was held.
- 3. PUBLIC COMMENT:** None
- 4. ELECTION OF CHAIR/VICE CHAIR:** Councilor Nash explained the duties of the chair of the committee. The chair would be responsible for setting the meeting agenda and running the meeting. The chair and the vice chair will be responsible for publishing the final report back to city council and to present the findings of the committee. A city staff person will publish agendas to the city's calendar consistent with open meeting laws. There will be a staff person attending each meeting who will take the roll and record votes of the committee. Staff will also publish meeting minutes after the meeting.

Upon opening of the nominations for committee chair, Cynthia Suopis nominated Javier Luengo-Garrido for chair. Janna White seconded the motion. On a roll call vote to close nominations, the motion was approved 7 Yes (Gore, MacDonald-Bolanos, Nabad, Perry, Suopis, White, Luengo-Garrido), 0 No. Javier Luengo-Garrido was elected chair on a roll call vote of 7 Yes, (MacDonald-Bolanos, Nabad, Perry, Suopis, White, Luengo-Garrido, Gore), 0 No.

Chair Luengo-Garrido announced that the committee would open nominations for a vice-chair. Gwen Nabad moved to elect Councilor Gore as vice-chair. Javier Luengo-Garrido seconded the motion. The committee unanimously approved closing nominations on a roll call vote of 7 Yes (Nabad, Perry, Suopis, White, Luengo-Garrido, Gore, MacDonald-Bolanos), 0 No. Councilor Gore was elected as vice chair on a roll call vote of 7 Yes (Perry, Suopis, White, Luengo-Garrido, Gore, MacDonald-Bolanos, Nabad), 0 No.

5. OVERVIEW OF OPEN MEETING LAW, PUBLIC RECORDS AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST – ALAN SEEWALD, ESQ.

Attorney Seewald guided the discussion about open meeting law, public records, and conflict of interest.

Open Meeting Law

Open meeting law is a fundamental requirement that the committee is going to have to abide by. There are general requirements for posting meeting notices, items that need to appear on notices, etc., and this part of the law will be taken care of by staff. Members will be receiving open meeting law materials and are encouraged to review them in more detail. Committee members may not deliberate except in an open meeting that is duly posted. Deliberations include a gathering of a quorum of the committee, whether in person or virtually. There are ways that deliberations can violate open meeting law even without members gathering:

First, serial communications among a quorum (majority of the committee members) happen when member A speaks to member B who speaks to member C, who speaks to member D, etc. This should never happen, whether in person or via e-mail. Members are free to speak to each other outside of a meeting, but they should be careful not to speak with more than a quorum.

Second, e-mails sent to the entire committee should never be answered by “reply all”. Expressing opinions to items circulated, even if no one responds to the opinion, is an open meeting law violation. Committee members are encouraged to have the staff person circulate items that will be considered by the committee at a future meeting.

Third, every vote must be public, and there will never be a secret ballot. A vote taken by secret ballot, whether done in-person, virtually, or outside of the meeting will violate open meeting law.

Public Records

All documents reviewed by the committee are public records. Documents must be preserved for a minimum period of time. Records include texts, e-mails (preserve for seven years), voicemails, and documents. If someone requests to see e-mails that are part of a personal e-mail account, these must be produced if this is part of the scope of the public record request. Once records are distributed to the requester, they can be published on any platform by the person receiving them. The committee is encouraged, therefore, to think about this prior to publishing anything to other committee members. Attorney Seewald suggests creating a separate e-mail account just for this committee. Attorney Seewald advised committee members to preserve all documents made or received so that the records can be easily retrieved.

Conflict of Interest

Attorney Seewald notes that this committee likely won't be discussing matters of financial interest. However, members need to be aware that they cannot participate in certain matters if certain conditions are met. A member may not participate in a particular matter if:

- a member
- a member's immediate family member
- a member's employer, or
- anyone a member might be negotiating with for employment

has a financial interest in any matter that comes before the committee. The member must leave the meeting while the matter is being discussed/deliberated. Attorney Seewald suggests getting guidance from him or from the State Ethics Commission if a member has a question about this. It is best to ask prior to the item being discussed rather than after the item comes before the committee. Once an item is referred to enforcement by the State Ethics Commission, the consequences can be substantial. This is a serious matter that should not be taken lightly.

Attorney Seewald notes that committee members cannot take bribes, nor can members accept anything, no matter how insignificant, to encourage them to perform a job in a particular way. Even if it is not quid pro quo, members may not accept anything from the public because of their role on the committee. If a member of the public wants to thank a member for participating on this committee, members cannot accept anything worth \$50 or more. There are also limitations on holding contracts with the city. If any member is currently holding a contract with the city, the member should contact Attorney Seewald for guidance. There are also limits on the ability to act as an agent or attorney for a third party in any matter in which the city has a substantial interest. As a public official, a committee member may not ask for money on behalf of any organization. Members are still able to contribute to agencies they want to support, but they cannot ask the general public

for money on behalf of any organization.

6. DISCUSS MEETING SCHEDULE

The committee discussed the timeline to complete its objective. The resolution reflected a completion date of October 20th; however, Councilor Nash suggested that the chair reach out to him or Councilor Foster if an extension is needed. He recognizes that the committee is getting a late start and the original timeline was determined based on when the resolution passed in City Council.

For planning purposes, Councilor Perry indicated that bi-weekly meetings would be better for him. Gwen Nabad wouldn't recommend any less than bi-weekly, but would like to ask the committee to remain flexible if the work of the committee requires more time to analyze data or to meet deadlines. Cynthia Suopis noted that Thursday might be difficult; it is the Council's meeting day, as well as the meeting day for the Board of Health. Janna White commented that the Planning Board also meets on Thursdays; she would like to see the committee establish a regular meeting day, but not on Thursdays.

The committee discussed several meeting day options for the next meeting; however, they could not reach consensus. The chair and vice-chair will send a doodle poll to determine the next meeting.

A question was raised about whether the committee will continue to meet via zoom or in person. Councilor Foster indicated that state law allows for zoom meetings until July 15. After that, it will depend on what the state legislators determine is appropriate for public meetings. Javier Luengo-Garrido is an advocate to make all meetings, whether teleconference, or in person, accessible to everybody. Councilor Foster noted that there is a set-up in Council Chambers for hybrid meetings. Councilor Nash stated that Northampton Open Media is setting it up so that meetings can be held in person for members, but the public can participate remotely. Cynthia Suopis reminded the committee that the pandemic is still a concern. People will need to make choices about how they participate in meetings and there is a lot of stigma for people who make individual choices. She notes that Zoom works well to keep people safe.

7. REVIEW CHARGE/RESOLUTION TO FORM SELECT COMMITTEE:

Councilor Gore read the resolution into the record. Javier Luengo-Garrido notes that the charge of the committee is explicit. When he served on the police review commission, the committee started with a diverse contingent, including several women of color. Over time the commission lost 80% of them. He notes that one of the discussion points of this committee needs to be about childcare. Cynthia Suopis notes that the process itself needs to be examined as a barrier. The process is unfriendly and the way applicants are treated is poor. They are not acknowledged or responded to and go into a black hole. She notes that the charge of the committee is to look at

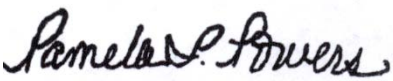
barriers for certain populations, but there are also procedural structures in place that stop others from applying or that give people a bad taste when they do apply. Janna White feels it is important to look at the whole lifecycle of participation, including how the city is promoting openings, and what information is out there about the roles of the different boards and commissions. Once people join a committee, she wonders what is being done to support members and to try to retain them. She notes that each step of the process likely has ample room for improvement. Councilor Gore notes that not a lot of people are aware of what opportunities there are to be a board member and she supports looking at the entire process. Gwen Nabad reflected about her experience in the town where she grew up. No one knew when things were happening and it was always the same people getting re-elected time after time. Since the pandemic, people can join meetings remotely; they don't have to pay for parking, worry about getting their car towed, and didn't have to worry about childcare. Remote participation has made it so incredibly accessible for people. She notes that when someone submits an application, they become vulnerable by putting so much information about themselves out there. Javier Luengo-Garrido asks the rhetorical question about how many clicks away a person is to get information from the city's website. When talking about commissions, this is usually buried into the website. Being able to serve on a commission or council is a privilege of time and this committee is being called upon to analyze what the city can do to address the inequalities where mostly white people are serving on city committees. This speaks to the ability to have time to spare to serve. It takes time to gather information about the committee and then to gather information to submit an application. Is the time commitment sustainable for a mother or father to serve on city committees? Gwen Nabad agrees that it is a privilege to have enough time to serve and she likes the idea that the language includes mentorship, because it is a privilege to know how to do that. When serving as a student senate member, she learned about Robert's Rules parliamentary procedures and other things like this. Councilor Foster envisions that the committee has the freedom to take the spirit of the resolution in the direction that they feel it needs to be taken. She would like to offer assistance if the committee needs it. Councilor Nash agrees that the committee is going in the right direction.

Janna White would like to have as an agenda item for a future meeting to learn more about the process of becoming a city committee member. Councilor Foster notes that Court Cline in the Mayor's Office would be able to help with that question. Javier Luengo-Garrido said that in correlation with this, there will be a better understanding about the kind of data the committee can collect for better understanding. Cynthia Suopis cautions that even if data is given, the committee might find that the system doesn't work when you consider anecdotal evidence or other experiences. The committee has got to be diligent in its approach and ask questions for better understanding. What is said is being done might not actually be what is being done. The committee has the right and the charge to push back and have an honest conversation about what is occurring. She agrees that the website is difficult to navigate.

Clerk Powers suggested that any request to have department representatives

participate in the committee's discussion might need to go directly through the Mayor, as it had in the previous administration. Javier Luengo-Garrido said that this was how it was done for the police commission review board. He asked for clarification about whether this was a joint city council/mayor committee as the resolution had stated. Councilor Nash stated that the wrong version of the resolution was posted to the agenda. The mayor is supportive of the process, but since a select committee is appointed by Council, the mayor thought best to have the committee established under only the council.

8. ADJOURN: At 6:23pm Councilor Perry motioned to adjourn the meeting; Gwen Nabad seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 7 Yes (Perry, Suopis, White, Luengo-Garrido, Gore, MacDonald-Bolanos, Nabad), 0 No.

Attest: 
Pamela L. Power, City Clerk



MEMBERS

Javier Luengo-Garrido, Chair
Councilor Jamila Gore, Vice
Chair
Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Citizen
Gwen Nabad, Citizen
Councilor Garrick Perry
Cynthia Suopis, Citizen
Janna White, Citizen

City Council Select Committee to Study Barriers to Serving on City Boards and Commissions Organizational Meeting – June 23, 2022

7 - 8 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

This meeting was held by remote participation via Zoom. Instructions for how to join the meeting were included on the meeting agenda. The meeting was recorded for future review by the public.

1. **Call Meeting to Order:** At 7:00 pm Committee Chair Javier Luengo-Garrido called the meeting to order. On a roll call done by City Clerk Pamela L. Powers, the following committee members were present: Javier Luengo-Garrido, Jamila Gore, Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Garrick Perry, Cynthia Suopis, and Janna White. Member Gwen Nabad joined the meeting at 7:14 pm.

Chair Luengo-Garrido announced that the meeting was being recorded. He notes that Public Comment was not added as an agenda item because he wants the committee to weigh in on whether the committee should have public comment and what the norms will be. The Chair opened the floor for committee members to introduce themselves and to talk about what they hope to accomplish as a member of this committee.

2. **Introduction of Committee Members:**

- a. Garrick Perry is the current Ward 4 City Councilor and has lived in Northampton for the past 20 years. During this time, he has worked downtown in the service and retail industries. For the past 10 years he has worked at Bishop's Lounge. While there, he was a bar tender, security agent, manager and event planner. He is also a musician in a local band. Councilor Perry came to this area in 1997 while attending Amherst College. As a city councilor, he has interacted with community members at a whole different level. Councilor Perry has two children who attend school in Northampton.
- b. Cynthia Suopis has lived in Northampton for 35 years having relocated from the Midwest. She is retired faculty from UMass Amherst and has served on the city's Board of Health for about 10 years. In addition she is currently co-chairing a committee at Cooley Dickinson Hospital. She notes that COVID has decimated

certain demographics, such as people of color, houseless, and members of other social economic background. She is interested in making this community inclusive. She would like to improve the process by making it more welcoming, and make changes to how city hall responds to applicants. She would also like to see the process more transparent.

- c. Jamila Gore has lived in Northampton for sixteen years. She is currently an At-Large City Councilor and decided to be a part of this committee because she would like to see more inclusivity and diversity in the city—this is something that she talked about during her campaign. She notes that a lot of people who are not aware of how many boards and commissions there are in the city. She believes that this needs to change. She is looking forward to working on this.
- d. Janna White works in higher education as an administrator for the five-college consortium based out of Amherst. She attended Smith College, left for a period of time, and has been back for approximately eleven years. She currently serves on the Planning Board as the Vice-Chair and she is the Planning Board representative to the Community Preservation Committee. This past year Janna completed a Public Administration degree at Syracuse University; part of the work that she did included collaborative governance looking at how to engage the public during the public comment process.
- e. Susan (or Mara) MacDonald-Bolanos is a member of the Human Rights Commission and is a senior at Smith College studying government. The HRC focuses on inclusivity and diversity, especially as a committee member, and she is interested in seeing how this committee can work to advance this issue.
- f. Javier Luengo-Garrido is originally from Chile and has been living in Massachusetts for the past fourteen years, all of which has been in Northampton. Javier works for the ACLU in Massachusetts as a lobbyist. In western Mass he is in charge of the advocacy and works with public officials, writes ordinances, and works with state representatives to pass legislation and runs campaigns for the ACLU.
- g. Gwen Nabad lives in public housing in Northampton and is close proximity to single parents who experience various challenges. Gwen has been a single mom since she was seventeen; over the years she has seen a lot of challenges in terms of overcoming barriers. She has seen what might be considered alternatives to help others participate and she would like to contribute these ideas. One aspect might be parents' hours.

3. Minutes of Previous Meetings: Tabled until the next meeting.

4. General discussion about goals/expectations/data needed and people to invite

Goals:

- a. Explore whether people know if the boards exist. Examine how openings are publicized. Share details about how to access meetings and recorded videos via

NOM/Youtube.

- b. Examine ways to explain what investments of time and talent are required to participate on a board or committee.
- c. Examine the process of on-boarding and training individuals so that they are prepared to serve on a committee. Examine ways in which new participants can be mentored or trained so that they feel qualified.
- d. Since the public is not subject to open meeting law, explore whether there is the possibility to allow for public participation using the hybrid model.
- e. Consider what it would take to keep the remote participation available to public officials. Explore whether a home rule petition would be an option.
- f. Examine what it means that appointments are at the pleasure of the Mayor. Examine ways in which there can be wider influence about what names are put forward for consideration.
- g. Query the decision making process for appointments by the Mayor. Examine how appointments are made. Examine ways to provide greater transparency in the process.
- h. Regarding meeting participation, evaluate what other communities are doing. Examine other models to get public participation. Explore problems that other communities, such as Amherst, are having at getting the public to participate.
- i. Consider what policies would encourage more participation by a wider demographic. Compensation policy? Other?
- j. Invite community leaders (such as the Director of Community Care) to help understand how to get underrepresented populations involved in membership.

Gather Data:

- a. What boards and committees currently exist? What is their function?
- b. What openings exist for each board? Who is applying to open positions? How does the applicant pool compare to the demographics of Northampton?
- c. What are the demographics of the people who are currently serving?
- d. Gather data about how existing boards operate; what is the average amount of time per week required to serve on committee?
- e. Poll what is stopping people from joining.

Comments & Notes:

The state's remote participation legislation due to the COVID pandemic expires July 15, 2022. Chair Luengo-Garrido has been discussing with Council President Jim Nash about the possibility of a hybrid model for member/public participation.

A recent Gazette article discussed the difficulties Amherst is having at getting people to participate on committees. They seem to be struggling to get a diverse representation

of the public.

Experience by the Planning Board suggests that remote meetings have influenced public participation; more people have been participating in recent times.

It is a privilege to serve on boards: privilege of money comes with free time to participate. It is also a privilege to be able to speak freely. The demographics that this committee would like to involve to give advice to the city and to participate at a different level won't have this privilege and this needs to be recognized. There is a wide representation on this committee that will help to engage more of the community in the conversation. There is a mystique about public participation that may impact whether people will join a group.

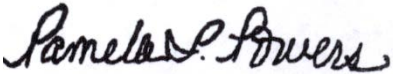
People like to participate in things when they know that it makes a difference and they want to know that the time they spend on the committee is worthwhile. The city has the responsibility to create committees that are relevant and that the recommendations that get made by the committee will change people's lives.

People who participate in public meetings are at times subjected to criticism or worse. Being treated poorly could be a barrier.

5. Description of the process for becoming a city committee/board member:
Tabled for a future discussion.
6. New Business: The next meeting is scheduled for July 30th from 7 pm – 8:30 pm. Chair Luengo-Garrido will send a doodle poll to plan for the meeting following the 7/30/2022 meeting.

Public comment will be added to the agenda. As soon as the agenda is posted, the Chair asks that committee members share it on social media and encourage people to participate.

7. ADJOURN: At 8:00 pm Councilor Perry motioned to adjourn the meeting; Cynthia Suopis seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 7 Yes (Nabad, Perry, Suopis, White, Luengo-Garrido, Gore, MacDonald-Bolanos), 0 No.

Attest: 
Pamela L. Power, City Clerk