



## **Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council**

*Committee Members:*

*Chair: Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge*

*Vice-Chair: Councilor Karen Foster*

*Councilor Rachel Maiore*

*Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.*

### **MEETING AGENDA**

**Date: December 29, 2021**

**Time: 4 p.m.**

Virtual Meeting

The December 29, 2021 City Services Committee meeting will be held by remote participation. The public can follow the committee's deliberations by joining the virtual meeting by phone or computer. The meeting will be recorded for later broadcast on Northampton Open Media (Channel 15) and uploaded to the Northampton Government Video Archive on YouTube.

Live public comment will be available using telephone call-in or video conferencing technology beginning at 4 p.m.

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR CALLING IN OR JOINING THE MEETING**

Join the virtual meeting: <https://bit.ly/32v0et9>

For telephone call-in, call:

+929 436 2866 US

**Meeting ID: 843 2160 8669**

**Participant #: #**

**Password: 631949**

- 1. Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call**
- 2. Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**

This meeting is being audio/video recorded.

**3. Public Comment**

**4. Minutes of Previous Meetings**

**A. Minutes of August 26, 2021, September 8, 2021, October 4, 2021 and November 1, 2021**

Documents:

08-26-2021\_City Services Committee.pdf

09-08-2021\_City Services Committee.pdf

10-04-2021\_City Services Committee.pdf

11-01-2021\_City Services Committee.pdf

**5. Items Referred to Committee**

**6. New Business**

**7. Adjourn**

Contact: *Marianne L. LaBarge*

mlabargeward6@aol.com

413.584.7937



## **Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council**

### Committee Members:

*Chair: Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge*

*Vice-Chair: Councilor Karen Foster*

*Councilor Rachel Maiore*

*Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.*

### Meeting Minutes

Date: August 26, 2021

Virtual Meeting

#### 1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4 p.m., Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge (Chair) called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilor LaBarge, Councilor Karen Foster (Vice Chair), Councilor Rachel Maiore and Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr. were present. Also present was Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler

#### 2. ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING

Councilor LaBarge announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

#### 3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There being no members of the public present, there was no public comment.

#### 4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Councilor Maiore moved to approve the minutes of July 6, 2021. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

#### 5. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

- A. 21.316A Appointments to Various Committees, referred to City Services Committee - 8/19/2021

#### Whiting Street Fund Committee

**Michael Shaughnessy**, 575 Bridge Road, Unit 11-5, Florence

Term: July 2021-June 2024

*Reappointment*

**Joseph Misterka**, 312 Chesterfield Road, Leeds

Term: July 2021-June 2023

*Reappointment*

**Andrea Murray**, 54 Day Avenue, Northampton

Term: July 2021-June 2023

*Reappointment*

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the appointments of Michael Shaughnessy, Joseph Misterka and Andrea Murray to the Whiting Street Fund Committee to the full City Council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

6. New Business

None.

7. Adjourn

There being no further business, Councilor Foster moved to adjourn. Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

*Prepared By:*

*L. Krutzler, Administrative Assistant to the City Council*  
413.587.1210; [krutzler@northamptonma.gov](mailto:krutzler@northamptonma.gov)



## **Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council**

### Committee Members:

*Chair: Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge*

*Vice-Chair: Councilor Karen Foster*

*Councilor Rachel Maiore*

*Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.*

### Meeting Minutes

Date: September 8, 2021

Virtual Meeting

#### 1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4:01 p.m., Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge (Chair) called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilor LaBarge, Chair; Councilor Karen Foster (Vice Chair) and Councilor Rachel Maiore were present. Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr. was absent on roll call but joined shortly after. Also present were Northampton Housing Authority (NHA) Board of Commissioners Chair Marilyn Richards and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.

#### 2. ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING

Councilor LaBarge announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

#### 3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There being no members of the public present, there was no public comment.

#### 4. MINUTES OF JULY 26, 2021

Councilor Maiore moved to approve the minutes of July 26, 2021. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion carried 3:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Quinlan absent.

#### 5. DISCUSSION WITH NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY (NHA) BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS CHAIR MARILYN RICHARDS

Commissioner Richards said she appreciated the opportunity to meet with them. Before being on the housing authority board she was somewhat familiar with the housing authority's operations but certainly not as much as she is now. She welcomes the opportunity to educate folks because it is sort of a complicated beast.

She was a former city councilor for Ward 3, after which she served on the Planning Board for four or five years before being appointed to the Northampton Housing Authority (NHA). She is really enjoying this appointment.

She proceeded to give an overview of the agency. The housing authority's mission is to provide safe and affordable housing to residents of Massachusetts, particularly Northampton. The NHA likes to be a leader in exceptional housing practices and a good member of the community. They

enjoy creating partnerships with other entities in the community. The housing authority is a developer, builder and administrator of public housing in Northampton. It has federal property funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and state properties funded through the state Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

Commissioner Richards gave an overview of the properties operated by the NHA. These include:

- ❖ Florence Heights, a federal family housing apartment complex with 50 units
- ❖ McDonald House, 60 units of federal housing for the elderly and disabled
- ❖ Hampshire Heights, a state apartment complex with 80 units.

The other multi-unit properties - Tobin Manor, Forsander apartments, the Walter Salvo House and Cahill apartments - are state housing complexes for elderly and disabled tenants, she related. In addition to multi-families, NHA operates 13 single-family sites and also manages 22 Hampshire Regional Housing Authority (HRHA) units in Huntington, 14 HRHA units in Cummington and several single-family homes in Huntington.

The housing authority has well over 600 units. It also administers Section 8 certificates and provides emergency housing for homeless individuals and veterans.

With regard to its organizational structure, NHA is a separate entity with a seven-member board. (The board used to have five members but was recently expanded.) The board hires and oversees an executive director who is in charge of all operations. This year they have made some substantial improvements, including assigning a property manager to each facility to respond directly to resident issues. (As an aside, she acknowledged that it doesn't always work that way. Residents are housing authority tenants but they are also councilors' constituents, so councilors may sometimes hear from dissatisfied tenants.)

Of the seven board members, one is appointed by the governor and the rest by the mayor. Of the mayoral appointments, two must be tenants, one must be a member of the Northampton Housing Partnership (NHP), one a labor representative and the remainder community appointees.

The NHA Board of Commissioners is the governing body to the housing authority as the City Council is [the governing body] to the city, she indicated. It hires and supervises the executive director and makes sure she is following the many relevant regulations. Commissioners hold monthly meetings with a format identical to City Council meetings with public and staff comment. Tenants often attend these meetings as the public attends council meetings. Commissioners don't respond to public comment during the meeting; they listen and get back to people with information.

Like the City Council, the housing board is subject to the Open Meeting Law (OML) and posts meetings through the City Clerk's office. It also has many city partnerships.

In response to questions about COVID restrictions, Commissioner Richards said the NHA goes by the city's public health guidelines and works with the Northampton Health Department and Health Director Merridith O'Leary to make sure residents are safe. She gave a shout out to the executive director and her staff for their efforts to deliver food and masks to residents and to

make sure their needs were met during the lockdown. As councilors know, it was very hard for people staying home and they can imagine what it was like in a building with 80 units. They tried to be as sensitive as they could.

Commissioner Richards responded to a list of questions provided in advance by committee members:

- ❖ When residents/constituents call the council office with complaints about housing authority policies or conditions, who should city employees or councilors refer them to? Executive Director Cara Leiper, a member of the board or other?
- ❖ Who is responsible for the hiring/firing of the executive director?
- ❖ Does the housing authority board hold meetings at different housing authority properties?
- ❖ How long is the waiting list for public housing?
- ❖ Complaints have sometimes been received about non-authorized visitors at housing authority properties. Are the restrictions on visitors put in place during COVID still in effect?
- ❖ How long can overnight visitors stay with residents without violating the terms of the lease?
- ❖ Do housing authority properties have surveillance cameras?
- ❖ Do housing authority properties have fire drills?
- ❖ What does the Power Structure look like for the Housing Authority?
- ❖ What is the relationship with its Board and City government and City zoning policy in terms of who has ultimate authority?
- ❖ Who holds the Exec Director accountable?
- ❖ How often is she evaluated?
- ❖ What is the process for tenant grievances?

The process for handling tenant grievances is spelled out in NHA guidelines and regulated by law, she reported. The agency has a three-person grievance committee. They try to handle problems at the lowest level possible. Complaints/grievances go first to the executive director, then to a committee with tenant representation, next to a labor representative and finally to an outside arbiter.

When asked how the board knows how the executive director is doing, Commissioner Richards said the best way to know how she's doing is through feedback from funding sources. Housing authorities are constantly reviewed. She has to say; they've scored very, very well on those reviews. This year they got a clean audit with no recommendations. She also meets regularly with the Executive Director and hears feedback on her performance through public comment.

Commissioner Richards fielded a variety of informal questions from councilors. Topics ranged from the housing authority's policy on plantings and garden plots to its procedures for handling complaints of drug trafficking. Councilor LaBarge asked about reports made to Disability Commission members in the past of serious drug problems at the Walter Salvo House. "Has that been straightened out?" she asked.

It will never be totally eliminated by the nature of the system, Commissioner Richards said. "Anytime you have any apartment building with 80 units or 50 units or whatever, you are going to

have some activity going on that you don't like," she asserted. Administrators will call the police if residents let them know. Non-residents sometimes piggyback in behind a tenant, so it hasn't been eliminated and probably never will be. The Neighborhood Watch has been helpful. Some residents were central in starting this program. "I think it's improved but I'm not going to tell you it doesn't happen, unfortunately. It's the nature of the beast," she suggested.

Commissioner Richards pointed out many of their residents have disabilities, some of which are mental health issues. She thinks they may have more than housing authorities in some other communities because of being in Northampton. They try their best to get services for residents, whether for substance abuse or other mental health issues.

Councilor Foster asked if there is sharing of tenants among the NHA and agencies such as Community Builders and Wayfinders, or if they operate independently.

They do operate independently but there is some collaboration, Commissioner Richards indicated. When they tore down the boarding house (Shaw's Motel), the NHA took folks from that facility so they weren't homeless.

In response to a question from Councilor Maiore, Commissioner Richards clarified that the housing authority is subject to city ordinances such as the noise ordinance and mask ordinance.

When asked about rules around flowers and garden plots - a frequent source of tenant complaints - Commissioner Richards said she is comfortable telling them there is a system in place. Housing complexes have limited gardening space so, at different facilities, tenants have to apply for them. Plantings sometimes impede access to a sidewalk and some residents don't follow the rules. If they don't abide by the rules (i.e. - if a wheelchair can't get by), they have to have the resident remove the planting. Commissioner Richards said she believed these are housing authority rules as opposed to state and federal regulations. Gardening has been very therapeutic for residents, she agreed.

She thanked Councilor Maiore for asking because it is a big deal in tenant comments. She is very grateful the NHA received Community Preservation Act (CPA) money for the playground at Florence Heights, she added. Anything they can do to make residents feel more a part of the community is a good thing.

Councilor Maiore encouraged Commissioner Richards to reach out to her with any ideas for how councilors can be more proactive in supporting the goal of integrating tenants into the larger community.

Commissioner Richards said she thought it might be a good idea for councilors to come in for coffee and meet the executive director (Cara Leiper) and some of her staff.

Councilor Quinlan said he had a chance to tour the gardens at Salvo House this past weekend with Jo Ella Tarbuton. There was a lot of pride there. The word 'therapeutic' used by Richards was also used by two residents in talking about their gardens.

When asked about the evaluation process, Ms. Richards talked about accountability to the funders, Councilor Quinlan noted. He asked if she feels confident that they also have good accountability to the tenants.

That is a tricky one because they generally don't deal with tenant issues; staff deals with tenant issues, Commissioner Richards responded. Through public comment, they do hear tenant feedback. She thinks it is probably about as good as it gets.

They have a really great commission that presently includes three residents and two people with disabilities, Ms. Richards said. Racially they are very diverse. As a seven-member commission, she thinks they are set up to be even more responsive to the needs of tenants than in the past.

"That's our goal. Do we always achieve it? No," she admitted realistically.

Councilor LaBarge thanked Commissioner Richards.

## 6. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

### A. 21.316B Appointments to Various Committees, referred by City Council - 8/19/2021

#### Council on Aging

#### Council on Aging

~~Monica V. Grezzi-Mulea, 573 Burts Pit Road, Florence~~

~~Term: September 2021-June 2024~~

~~To fill a vacancy~~

Application withdrawn at applicant's request

Monica Grezzi-Mulea had to withdraw her application due to family obligations, Councilor LaBarge confirmed.

#### Energy & Sustainability Commission

**Benjamin Weil**, 123 Audubon Road, Leeds

Term: July 2021-June 2024

*Reappointment*

Councilor Maiore moved to forward the appointment of Benjamin Weil to the Energy and Sustainability Commission to the full City Council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

#### Planning Board

**Melissa Fowler**, 87 Chesterfield Road, Leeds

Full Member

Term: July 2021-June 2024

*Reappointment*

**Christian Tait**, 46 Upland Road, Leeds

Associate Member

Term: July 2021-June 2024

*Reappointment*

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the appointments of Melissa Fowler and Christian Tait to the Planning Board to the full City Council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

**Transportation & Parking Commission**

**Jami Albro-Fisher**, 50 Manhan Street, Northampton

Term: July 2020-June 2023

*Reappointment*

**Adam Novitt**, 17 Hooker Avenue, Northampton

Term: July 2021-June 2024

*Reappointment*

Councilor Maiore moved to positively recommend the appointments of Jami Albro-Fisher and Adam Novitt to the Transportation & Parking Commission to the full City Council. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

**Zoning Board of Appeals**

**David Bloomberg**, 86 Vernon Street, Northampton

Term: July 2021-June 2024

*Reappointment*

Councilor Quinlan moved to positively recommend the appointment of David Bloomberg to the Zoning Board of Appeals to the full City Council. Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

7. **New Business**

City Clerk Pamela Powers will be coming to the next City Services Committee meeting on October 4, 2021, Councilor LaBarge reminded. She asked councilors to forward any specific questions they may have for the City Clerk to the administrative assistant.

8. **Adjourn**

There being no further business, Councilor Quinlan moved to adjourn. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 4:47 p.m.

*Prepared By:*

*L. Krutzler, Administrative Assistant to the City Council*

413.587.1210; [krutzler@northamptonma.gov](mailto:krutzler@northamptonma.gov)



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### Committee Members:

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*Vice-Chair: Councilor Karen Foster*

*Councilor Rachel Maiore*

*Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.*

### Meeting Minutes

Date: October 4, 2021

Virtual Meeting

#### 1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4 p.m., Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge (Chair) called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilor LaBarge, Chair; Councilor Karen Foster (Vice Chair) and Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr. were present. Councilor Rachel Maiore was absent on roll call but joined shortly after. Also present were Mayor David J. Narkewicz, City Clerk Pamela Powers and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.

#### 2. ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING

Councilor LaBarge announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

#### 3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There being no members of the public present, there was no public comment.

#### 4. MINUTES OF AUGUST 26, 2021

Councilor Quinlan moved to postpone acceptance of the minutes since they had not yet been transcribed. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion passed unanimously 3:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Maiore absent.

#### 5. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

##### A. 21.324 Appointment of Pamela Powers as City Clerk, referred by City Council - 9/22/2021

Mayor Narkewicz noted that Pamela Powers, the candidate for City Clerk, needs little introduction. Luckily, she has been voted City Clerk by the voters of Northampton and so is a known quantity. The city is moving away from an elected City Clerk model to an appointed City Clerk so this is somewhat of a historic appointment. Potentially, Pam Powers could be the last elected City Clerk and the first appointed City Clerk in Northampton history. She was appointed interim City Clerk by the City Council in July of 2017 after former City Clerk Wendy Mazza retired and elected in 2017 by the voters of Northampton, he reminded. She had significant prior municipal experience as the Assistant City Clerk and as the Administrative Assistant to the City Council. She has a Bachelor of Arts and an MBA and, most importantly, experience running the operations of the City Clerk's office in some of the most challenging times in recent memory,

including running an election in the middle of a global pandemic and implementing significant changes at the state level such as mail-in voting, obviously requiring exceptional organizational skills.

He formally introduced Pamela Powers, strongly recommending her to be the city's first appointed City Clerk.

Councilor LaBarge opened the floor to questions and comments.

Councilor Quinlan noted what a great luxury it is for the mayor to have a qualified City Clerk who has already been approved by the entire city. **He moved a positive recommendation of the appointment to the full City Council. Councilor Foster seconded.** There being no further discussion, **the motion passed unanimously 3:0 by roll call vote (Councilor Maire absent).**

Councilor LaBarge said she would like to change the order of the agenda to move up the City Clerk's departmental update. Hearing no objection, she invited Clerk Powers to speak.

#### 6. Departmental Update - City Clerk's Office

Clerk Powers thanked councilors for their unanimous vote in favor of her appointment. She is very pleased to be serving the residents of Northampton and to no longer have to be elected.

As mentioned, her office just completed the September 28, 2021 preliminary election. At the preliminary, 5,274 people cast votes for candidates for mayor and at-large city councilors. As all know, they had early voting in person and by mail as well as absentee voting and in-person voting on Election Day. A few people opted to early vote using the available options but the vast majority came out and voted at the polls. A little under 1,000 people voted before Election Day and the rest of the 5,274 voters actually went to the polls on Election Day.

Election results have been finalized and will be sent to the secretary of the Commonwealth's Elections Division tomorrow. Staff are already moving ahead with the November 2<sup>nd</sup> election with the drawing of the names of candidates for placement on the ballot tonight at 5 p.m. The regular election will have all of the same options: early, in-person and by mail voting, absentee voting either in person or by mail and in-person Election Day voting. She anticipates the turnout will be a little higher. They did about what she initially predicted at the preliminary since 5,000 was her estimate. She expects the upcoming November election to be a little busier.

Northampton will have early voting on Saturday and Sunday, which she thinks will help draw more people who can't participate on weekdays, and there will be a greater number of days this year. Early voting will be Saturday and Sunday and Monday through Friday the last week in October, ending on October 29<sup>th</sup>. The days, times and hours are already up on the website and staff are taking necessary steps to prepare.

Clerk Powers said she thought that turnout for the preliminary would be a little higher. The state sent out postcards announcing that early voting would continue through the end of the year. She expected a huge flurry of applications after that announcement, but it didn't happen. Applications came in just a few a day and it was something they could handle with existing staff.

Regarding her technical preparations, Councilor Quinlan asked if the Clerk's office is expected to have ballots available for everyone in case 100% of voters show up.

One thing the state did is combine early voting and absentee ballots, Clerk Powers noted. There used to be separate ballots for absentee voting, early voting and Election Day voting, she explained. They had a total of only 12 absentee voters and over 900 early voters, so it was a smart move on the state's part to reduce the number of ballots needed.

Election supervisors are required to order over 50% of each style ballot, she added. Based on the outcome of 2020, she actually did over-purchase ballots because they initially thought there would be a huge turnout. "We have an abundance of ballots from the preliminary election," she confirmed.

Councilor Maiore joined at 4:13 p.m.

### **RANKED CHOICE VOTING**

The Ranked Choice Voting Committee has been meeting twice a month to look at possible options for implementing ranked choice voting; i.e. - what method they will use to rank candidates and what they are required by law to put forward in terms of legislation.

There are a couple of different ways to rank candidates. If there are 20 people on a ballot they could rank them 1 – 20 or just rank the top five; that is one of the decisions the committee will have to make. Also, there is a way to redistribute excess votes for a candidate who has achieved a certain threshold and no longer needs more votes to be elected. The committee is looking at which option is best for Northampton. It has been quite an interesting discussion because there are different schools of thought. One school of thought is that if someone gets a huge portion of the vote, that person's vote should not be diluted in any way. The other is that, since the main goal is for a candidate to get elected, once a candidate meets that goal, the excess votes should be redistributed to another candidate.

The committee is hoping to come up with a proposal by the end of the year but the more they get into it the more questions they have. It may be a little past January of 2022 but the goal will be to get it to the legislators by early spring. It is a very interesting process.

The committee includes former Charter Review Committee members William Dwight and Robert Boulrice, who came to the community from Cambridge and serves as chair. Mr. Boulrice has a good understanding of ranked choice voting and why it is good for the community and has been helpful in researching options for implementation and bringing in resources to help members understand the concept. Attorney Seewald is a non-voting member there to help with drafting the legislation and keeping them on track. The two citizen members - Mark Ventola and John Crowley - are interested in promoting ranked choice voting and helping get it off the ground. Mr. Ventola came to an appreciation of ranked choice voting from his contact with Voter Choice Massachusetts and Mr. Crowley is a professor at Smith College. Board of Registrars (BOR) member Catherine Kay represents the registrars' concerns and is there to ensure the election requirements of Mass. General Law are fulfilled.

Councilor Maiore asked if the intent of ranked choice voting is to increase voter turnout.

By adopting ranked choice voting, Northampton is hoping to eliminate preliminary elections which, in turn, is expected to increase the turnout for regular elections, Clerk Powers advised. The goal for Northampton is for all elected positions to be ranked. By contrast, Easthampton only ranks those positions that are single seats, so at-large candidates are not subject to ranked choice. However, per its charter, Easthampton does not hold preliminary elections. By having every seat subject to ranked choice voting, the need for preliminary elections in Northampton should be eliminated, she explained.

One of the committee's biggest concerns is voter education, she continued. Ms. Kay's fear is that voter intent might not be promoted by some of the options being considered. Clerk Powers cited the possibility of truncating a person's choice if they fail to assign a rank to each candidate as an example. If there are five candidates and someone says, 'I don't care about 2, 3 and 4; I only care about the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>,' there has been some discussion of not counting the person's vote other than his or her first choice. Some concern was expressed about whether that really takes voter intent into account. Ranked choice proponents want to make sure the consequence of skipping ranks is clear, so voter education essential. Whatever they do, there has to be a huge component of educating and training the voter, she concluded.

It's interesting that Easthampton doesn't have ranked choice voting for races where there is more than one seat, Councilor Foster observed. Looking at the At-large election this year, she really wishes they had ranked choice voting. If they had ranked choice, they could eliminate preliminary elections, knowing that voters who come out to the preliminary may be different than the turnout for the general election.

With regard to cost, she asked if Clerk Powers could estimate what the city might save by not having preliminary elections.

People are the biggest cost, Clerk Powers advised. She just completed the payroll for the preliminary election and it was in excess of \$22,000 for poll workers alone, not including overtime for the maintenance crew helping to set up or staff the polls on election night. It is sort of a hollow limb for them in terms of cost because the state is moving forward with early voting for all elections and there is some discussion of having ballots or applications for ballots mailed. While they might save money locally, costs will still be incurred at the state level.

Councilor LaBarge asked what significant difference the appointment process will make in how the office is operated. Who will be your boss and will there be any changes? She asked.

The day-to-day responsibilities of the City Clerk for the most part are determined by state law, Clerk Powers noted. The requirements for licenses, elections and vital records are all prescribed by Mass. General Law (MGL). In terms of the position's reporting structure, the mayor appoints her and the City Council ratifies the appointment. The position reports directly to the mayor so that is definitely a change. One good thing is that the person who ultimately takes over in the future doesn't necessarily need to live in Northampton. If the Assistant City Clerk were inclined to take over as City Clerk, she would be eligible. It also gives the mayor's office the opportunity to find someone with the right credentials beyond Northampton residents. Mass. General Law is

sometimes a little bit difficult to understand, so it's important operationally to make sure the city has the right person to carry off an event as big as the 2020 election.

Councilor LaBarge expressed her personal delight with Clerk Power's appointment.

### **REPRECINCTING**

The re-precincting process has been interesting, Clerk Powers commented. At the introductory meeting which most councilors attended she indicated that, without a doubt, Northampton would see changes because of the shifts in density and where its population growth has been. The re-precincting working group met October 4th to start looking at actual data and decided the map recommended by the state was not going to work. GIS Coordinator James Thompson reconfigured the map to more closely resemble the one adopted in 2010 then tweaked it to maintain the required numbers of residents in each ward, she explained. Each of the 14 precincts has to have a population equal to the city's total population divided by 14 ( $29,571/14 = 2,112$ ) plus or minus five percent (+/-5%).

Based on the numbers, Ward 2 will definitely be consolidated into a smaller area since it now has greater population density, Clerk Powers reported. The ripple effect is that these new boundary lines affect every other ward and precinct. The working group meets tonight at 7 p.m.

The city needs to get the revised map back to the state along with legal descriptions of the wards and precincts. She doesn't think the legal descriptions will be ready for approval by the City Council meeting on October 7<sup>th</sup>, so councilors may need to review a draft map on the 7th and approve the final map and boundary descriptions on October 21<sup>st</sup>. She will hold a public hearing to present the proposed changes and accept public comment October 14<sup>th</sup>, she advised. She encouraged anyone interested to tune in to tonight's meeting for a look at the map.

One of the biggest concerns with the map proposed by the state is the polling locations, Clerk Powers shared. Under the state's proposal, somebody in Ward 7 would have to drive almost eight miles to get to his/her polling location. Working group members are trying to minimize the impact, especially on Ward 6 because that was one of the wards with the greatest changes the last time boundaries changed.

In response to a comment from Councilor Foster, Clerk Powers clarified that the new boundaries will not take effect until July of 2022.

There being no further questions, Councilor LaBarge thanked Clerk Powers.

### **B. 21.327 Appointment to Council on Aging, referred to City Services Committee - 9/22/2021**

#### **Council on Aging**

**Carolyn Sandel**, 132 Chesterfield Road, Leeds

Term: October 2021- June 2024

*To fill a vacancy*

Councilor Maiore said she had a lengthy conversation with Carolyn Sandel, who just moved to Northampton a few months ago and lives on her street. She is looking to plug into the community

and this is her wheelhouse. She is the executive director of an assisted living facility. She always appreciates when a non-senior steps forward to serve because she appreciates having varying ages serving on the Council on Aging. She highly recommends her appointment.

**Councilor Maiore moved to forward the appointment with a positive recommendation. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.**

7. **New Business**

Councilor LaBarge proposed asking DPW Director Donna LaScaleia in for a departmental presentation. She recently learned the DPW has at least 20 vacant positions and would like an update on the director's progress in filling these vacancies. She proposed inviting her to attend the November meeting, and other councilors agreed.

Ms. Krutzler said she would make a request to the mayor's office. Councilor Maiore said she would also like Director LaScaleia to talk about the protocol for communicating with residents around DPW projects such as the work on Meadow Street.

8. **Adjourn**

There being no further business, **Councilor Foster moved to adjourn. Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 4:49 p.m.**

*Prepared By:*

*L. Krutzler, Administrative Assistant to the City Council  
413.587.1210; [lkutzler@northamptonma.gov](mailto:lkutzler@northamptonma.gov)*



## **Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council**

### Committee Members:

*Chair: Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge*

*Vice-Chair: Councilor Karen Foster*

*Councilor Rachel Maiore*

*Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.*

### Meeting Minutes

Date: November 1, 2021

Virtual Meeting

#### 1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4:02 p.m., Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge (Chair) called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilor LaBarge, Chair; Councilor Karen Foster (Vice Chair) and Councilor Rachel Maiore were present. Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr. was absent. Also present were Department of Public Works (DPW) Director Donna LaScaleia and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.

#### 2. ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING

Councilor LaBarge announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

#### 3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There being no members of the public present, there was no public comment.

#### 4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

No minutes were presented for approval.

#### 5. DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE – DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS (DPW) DIRECTOR DONNA LASCALEIA

Councilor LaBarge thanked Director LaScaleia for joining them. She framed the presentation by saying she had shared with fellow City Services Committee members the director's informal comment to her about the unusually large number of vacancies in her department.

The administrative assistant sent specific questions from councilors to her in advance, so she was prepared to speak on a wide variety of topics, Director LaScaleia responded.

Regarding the high number of vacancies, those who have sat on council for a while know there are always vacancies in the budget every year, Director LaScaleia pointed out. It is not atypical to have a high number of vacancies in entry-level positions and to struggle with recruiting and retaining seasonal staff, gatekeepers and other entry-level staff.

There is nothing particularly unusual about the staffing level at the DPW right now, she asserted. What they did see during the pandemic and particularly through the lock down was quite a bit of

stability; they basically had no turnover, she reported. Their staffing levels were good, but as things started to open up a little bit more and people had more options, they found that people were choosing to move to different jobs. One of their mechanics took a job with the state, so that was a pretty significant bump in pay; another went back to a former employer.

They have 92 full-time positions and, as of now, 10 are vacant. It is a very typical number of vacancies although certainly not ideal. They have 10 seasonal employees who generally work in Forestry, Parks and Cemeteries and they try to have between 10 and 15 gatekeepers. Overall, they have roughly 120 employees, give or take. There are 82 full-time employees right now.

Director LaScaleia proceeded to run through the questions forwarded to her in advance, giving detailed responses where indicated. Among other things, she noted that there are no pending retirements that she is aware of and that all roads scheduled for reconstruction or repaving this year have not yet been completed. Anyone trying to hire a contractor or buy anything knows that trying to hire or acquire supplies is challenging in the current economic climate and the city is no exception. She reported on the status of several ongoing projects, noting that she is expecting final paving on Loudville Road and Hayes Avenue this Thursday and then will be moving on to other streets. North Farms Road was a two-year project and workers are still completing punch-list items there, she reported.

With regard to plowing, the city has 58 snow plow routes. There are some vacancies on routes because of staffing vacancies. They sometimes consolidate routes to cover additional roads. If councilors have been on 91 they have seen the signs; everyone's looking for snow plow drivers. The city has 160 miles of roads and the DPW will do what is necessary to cover its territory, she assured.

With regard to pending equipment purchases, she will be giving a presentation to the capital planning committee later this month to outline the DPW's five-year plan to buy equipment, Director LaScaleia related. This is all heavy, specialized equipment and its purchase follows a strict purchasing plan. After a period of time, the expense of keeping vehicles on the road represents a significant drain on city resources so she tries to keep them turning over. She will be presenting a detailed plan for these capital expenses, she confirmed.

With regard to the intersection of Westhampton Road, West Farms Road and Glendale Road, she is very aware of the crashes at this intersection and the dangers associated with it and would add Route 66 and Loudville Road as another place of concern. As part of the paving project on Loudville Road, she asked the contractor to put in flashing LED stop signs at the intersection of Glendale Road and Route 66, West Farms and Route 66 and on both sides of Loudville Road. They will also hang signs saying "cross traffic does not stop" to warn vehicles approaching Route 66 that the traffic on 66 is not going to stop. In addition, they are putting signage on Route 66 itself at both of those intersection to directionally name the streets; i.e. – go left for North Farms Road, etc. They are trying to sign up the intersection in both directions and significantly cut back vegetation that needs trimming. It is their hope that enhanced signage and line striping is going to make a difference. Again, they are having some supply chain difficulties.

The LED signs are not inexpensive; they are looking at probably five figures per sign, she noted.

Director LaScaleia went on to field numerous specific questions on a variety of topics. Among other things, she gave an overview of the traffic calming application process and discussed plans for restoring headstones in the West Farms Cemetery.

Councilors and the director talked generally about coming up with a clear protocol for when and how residents can give input to the DPW on major projects and what kind of public engagement is realistic for them to expect around DPW decision-making. Councilor LaBarge suggested that 'street meetings' around specific construction projects would be helpful. Director LaScaleia described the process the DPW has historically used to notify residents of pending work.

The director writes a pavement memo to the mayor each year that he historically shares with the City Council outlining proposed projects, Director LaScaleia noted. Like traffic-calming measures, paving decisions are made based on roadway surface conditions, the projected cost of restoring acceptable conditions and the condition of associated infrastructure, including trees. They are data-driven rather than arbitrary decisions. She has a short window to prepare construction plans, go out to bid, execute a contract and do the work. "I'm working under very, very tight time constraints," she reminded.

Once an appropriation is approved, plans are finalized and the city is ready to go out to bid, she writes a letter to residents notifying them of pending work. She always asks residents for comments but typically does not hold neighborhood meetings.

"That's the level of engagement that we have had with residents," she advised. Neighborhood meetings can certainly be tricky and, at the end of the day, they are working on very tight deadlines and have used a data-driven process to determine the work needing to be done, she reiterated. For context, in her tenure as director, the DPW has completed about 21 miles of paving projects, representing an unprecedented investment in the city's transportation infrastructure. When she first came to the DPW, trucks would simply roll onto a street being paved. Gradually, the process has changed to include more public engagement.

"That's historically been the process," she observed, acknowledging that, obviously, something different and quite unexpected happened this summer.

For parking and traffic control issues, she tries to conduct meetings through the Transportation and Parking Commission so the meetings are recorded and there is a common understanding/agreement as to what information was presented, Director LaScaleia advised.

Councilors also talked about how to prevent "Warfield-like" conflicts in the future. Councilor Maiore expressed interest in using her role as a ward councilor to act as some sort of a liaison or mediator between the DPW and residents if that would be useful to the director, although she admitted not knowing exactly what this role would look like. She didn't feel like it was productive to have residents directing their anger at the DPW director, she shared.

In talking about communication with residents, they can't lose sight of the fact that she is working under incredibly tight timelines, Director LaScaleia reminded. They need to immediately address concerns that arise, but that concern can't be 'I don't want my street to be paved.'

Councilor Maiore told Director LaScaleia that she would be supportive of a future request for more staff to handle traffic-calming requests if the director were inclined to make one. "I think we have to honor that we have this particular culture in Northampton" that expects a high level of engagement from city officials, she commented.

Councilor LaBarge thanked Director LaScaleia for her presence.

6. **ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE**

A. **21.341 Appointment to the Arts Council, referred by City Council - 10/7/2021**

**Arts Council**

Mi Belitsky, 20 Lasell Avenue, Northampton

Term: October 2021- June 2024

to fill a vacancy

She had a very good talk with Mi, Councilor LaBarge related. Mi said she is very passionate about public art and community engagement and the positive impact it has on mental health. Currently, Mi is a graduate student studying art therapy and counseling. She has experience leading community art projects and has seen firsthand how community art can bring people together and create a more connected community. As an Arts Council member, she would like to see more people of color and people who identify as transgender/gender non-conforming. She believes it is time for more marginalized artists to receive funding and grants for project proposals. These populations are often underrepresented in society and the art world. She would like to use her privilege to evaluate these voices. One of the reasons she loves living in Northampton is because of the various artworks around town. If she can contribute to this, she feels like she will really be making a difference in her community.

**Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the appointment of Mi Belitsky to the Arts Council with a positive recommendation to full City Council. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion passed 3:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Quinlan absent.**

7. **New Business**

Councilor LaBarge asked fellow members to forward suggestions for departmental presentations for December 6<sup>th</sup> to her and the administrative assistant. Councilor Maiore threw out Building Commissioner Jonathan Flagg, saying she would like to learn more about his role.

8. **Adjourn**

There being no further business, **Councilor Maiore moved to adjourn. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion carried 3:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Quinlan absent. The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.**

*Prepared By:*

*L. Krutzler, Administrative Assistant to the City Council  
413.587.1210; [lkutzler@northamptonma.gov](mailto:lkutzler@northamptonma.gov)*