



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: January 14, 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 Quinlan were present.

2. ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING

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

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

4. MINUTES OF DECEMBER 7, 2020

Councilor LaBarge noted that no action was needed because the minutes are not ready for acceptance.

5. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

A. 20.162 Appointments to Various Committees - referred by City Council 1/07/2021

Arts Council

Jesse Hassinger, 184 Main Street, Apt. 4, Northampton

Term: January 2021-June 2024

To fill a vacancy

Councilor Quinlan said he had a fine conversation with Jesse Hassinger. When he saw his application, he thought there were a lot of really good things there that made him more than qualified for the arts council. He has lived in Northampton for a little over four years. They talked about his experience with the Coolidge Corner Theater in Brookline, MA, which he mentioned is a non-profit arts house very similar to the Amherst Theater. They have four theaters and show films but also feature live events and author events where they partner with local bookstores. He mentioned one particular event - 'Do the Right Thing' – where they brought in experts to talk about historical ideas around racial tension as well as experts to talk about the current climate.

Jesse coordinated events there but there was a group that made democratic decisions about events. He was pretty impressed with that.

Councilor Quinlan asked if he had been following the Northampton Arts Council. He said not very closely but Mr. Foote sometimes has lunch in Belly of the Beast so they've gotten to know each other and he was invited to attend the December meeting. Belly of the Beast has been very happy to hang posters to advertise arts council events and has even donated food.

He wanted to talk a little about commitment. As they all know, Mr. Hassinger has spoken at City Council meetings and Northampton Policing Review Commission (NPRC) meetings and last month they had Ace Tayloe, who also has spoken at public meetings. They all know there are plenty of people with something to say - in public meetings, on Facebook and otherwise - and he is glad to see people who speak at these meetings trying to be involved. Not everybody wants to lend their strength to carry the load.

Jesse had one funny anecdote. Mr. Hassinger was born in Syracuse. He recently told his mom he applied to be on the arts council in Northampton and his mom reminded him she was on the arts council in Syracuse when he was little, so he will be a second generation arts council member if approved.

He asked if Jesse had an idea for something this committee was not doing that he thinks would be interesting, and Mr. Hassinger said he thought it would be really fun to coordinate 'City Reads.' He thought that if a lot of people in town wanted to participate and read a book, once out of the state of emergency, they could have a large event with an author or other subject matter experts and have good community spirit and create an education and a dialogue for everyone. Especially since community sentiment has been so strong about defunding the police, he thought that could be a topic. Councilor Quinlan's wife said Forbes already does that so he thought it might be neat to have Forbes Library and the Arts Council collaborate in the future.

Councilor Quinlan moved a positive recommendation for Mr. Hassinger to the Arts Council. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

Housing Partnership

Sara Howard, 8 High Street, Florence

Term: January 2021- June 2024

To fill a vacancy

She had a nice talk on the telephone with Sara Howard, Councilor LaBarge reported. She heard a lot about her history and Sarah sent her the following email:

"My reasons for wishing to be a member of the housing partnership spring from a few different sources. Fair and affordable housing is an issue that is near and dear to my heart. I have always felt that every person deserves as a basic right of being alive on our shared planet a place where they are allowed to exist. It feels vitally important to my sense of justice and humanity to join in the effort to support, defend and carve out those spaces for people in our community. As a single mother I raised my two children living below the poverty level. I was able to manage and meet my family's needs through my resourcefulness as well as through the immeasurably helpful

resource of living in subsidized housing at that time. I was living in Amherst. I was able to put myself through nursing school and last year became a registered nurse. I am fully cognizant of the luck and also the privilege I have to be able to navigate the convoluted, overwhelming and discouraging system enough to get on a housing list, remain on that list and persevere over the course of years until I was able to obtain affordable housing for my family. It breaks my heart to know that there are only limited units available for the many families and individuals who need that same resource and could benefit just as much.

I am now working and living within the City of Highview of Northampton and working in a short-term, subacute rehab unit. We have a specific population of people who are either current or recovering people with a substance abuse diagnosis. The issue of houselessness remains in the forefront of my mind as I see clearly how paramount housing is to the ability of my patients to access and benefit from health care. I believe I would bring to the partnership the perspective of knowing what it is like to navigate the system. I understand inherently the repetitiousness and harshness of the system and its downfalls. I know from firsthand experience how frustrating it is and what it means for one survival to be able to navigate.

Having lived below the poverty level for so long, I have plenty of contacts and friends who have experienced houselessness or near houselessness. In the past, I have had more than one friend stay with me in my tiny subsidized apartment, crashing on my couch when they were experiencing houselessness themselves. I also bring the perspective of a nurse working in the field of addiction treatment and having worked in case management. I know what people who use services are asking for, both from my own experience and as a professional in the field. I believe these dual experiences give me a perspective that will be useful to the housing partnership. My firsthand lived experiences as well as seeing the daily suffering and struggle faced by my current patients have infused me with a passion and a desire to fight for meeting the needs of everyone in our community. Some areas I would love to see the partnership move toward are continuing to explore the most effective ways of increasing the affordable housing stock, whether it's through looking at further zoning changes, including allowing tiny homes in Northampton. (After all, there's no limit to how large a single-family house can be but there is a limit to how small it can be.) I think this is inherently wrong and finding ways to encourage infill will include visionary housing and putting aside requirements. I am interested in putting work toward progressive change."

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the appointment of Sara Howard to housing partnership with a positive recommendation to the full city council. Councilor Maiore seconded.

Councilor Maiore said her email brings back that point of how powerful personal narrative and personal experiences are. She really appreciates that she shared that and appreciated the specific goals and areas she wants to work.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

Human Rights Commission

Kathy Wicks, 102 Black Birch Trail, Florence

Term: January 2021-June 2024

To fill a vacancy

Councilor Maiore said she had an exciting conversation with Kathy Wicks because, admittedly, a lot of things in her background are also in Councilor Maiore's background, particularly, her background in public health, anti-racism work, linking public health to anti-racism work and her desire to be on the Human Rights Commission. She is particularly excited about this appointment because Ms. Wicks also shared very specific things she wants to offer, very doable agenda items. She also has worked in Springfield and was on the race and health equity subcommittee of the Western Mass Public Health institute and has a really strong facilitation background. She talked about different models of equity and representation she worked on and would like to bring to bear here. The Western Mass Public Health equity network is just amazing and actually known nationally, so she's really proud that they're here.

Especially in light of last year and the resolution declaring racism a public health crisis, she feels like this is a really timely appointment. She wholeheartedly recommends Kathy Wicks for appointment to the Human Rights Commission.

Councilor Maiore so moved. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

Northampton Housing Authority- Board of Commissioners

Jo Ella Tarbutton, 81 Conz Street, Apt. 626, Northampton

Term: January 2021-June 2022

To fill a newly-created position on the NHA Board of Commissioners through the Special Act

Councilor Foster said she spoke with Jo Ella Tarbutton yesterday and wished she had significantly longer to talk to her than she did. She wanted to recognize that she knows Councilor Maiore from UMass but her last name was Costello at that time.

Councilor Maiore expressed surprise that Jo Ella is back in this area.

They had a really great conversation. She is from the south. She had been doing some advocacy work in Georgia around the senate run-off race. Councilor Foster asked how she was doing in viewing joining an authority in light of everything happening. They had a great discussion about the power of local action.

She said she was inspired to join the Northampton Housing Authority partly when she saw how responsive Northampton's government is. She has had good experience with the mayor's office and housing authority listening to their concerns and is excited to be a part of that. When there was an opening, four or five tenants contacted her and said she'd better be the one to join. She is applying by request and very excited about doing it.

Similar to Councilor Quinlan's question, she asked what she might want to change or promote more in the work. Pre-pandemic, she would pretty regularly take people to meetings they needed to go. She mentioned Northampton has right here the Smith College of social work. She suggested the possibility of them having an office in one of the housing properties and maybe rotating students through for an internship. Councilor Foster thought it was a very wise idea since

so many people are struggling with issues of addiction and told her to let her know if she could help. She thinks her compassion and energy make her a worthy candidate. She is already doing work to advocate for and connect with tenants so Councilor Foster thinks her voice would be an important one on the housing authority.

Councilor Foster moved to forward the appointment of Jo Ella Tarbutton to the Northampton Housing Authority to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

6. New Business

Members discussed ideas for departmental presentations for February.

Councilor Maiore thanked Councilor LaBarge for her advocacy when she was advocating for those with hearing disabilities and asked about Keith Benoit. The city now has a grant for an assisted listening system, she noted. She would really like to hear from him.

Councilor Quinlan had mentioned the senior center, Councilor Labarge reminded.

Councilor Quinlan confirmed he mentioned the senior center but said he still thinks they should be trying to talk to Ann-Marie Moggio because the Parks and Recreation Commission, her advisory committee, hasn't had a meeting since March of 2020. He thinks Director Moggio should be coming in and they should be finding out why they haven't had a meeting. Councilor Quinlan said he is also wondering what the Recreation Department is doing with its funding without programming.

Councilor LaBarge suggested getting Director Moggio in February and Keith Benoit in March.

Councilor Foster said she would like to hear Keith Benoit talk about the new grant but also more broadly about ADA issues following the transition of this position from the Senior Services Department to the Planning Department.

Members decided to invite both in February. Councilor Foster mentioned the possibility of a joint City Services Committee/Community Resources Committee meeting to discuss homelessness. She said she didn't know the status of that proposal.

She talked to Councilor Nash and they are looking at holding a joint meeting on Wednesday, January 27th @ 5 p.m., she said. City Services Committee members are available if that date is confirmed. Mrs. Krutzler said she would check in with Councilor Nash and let members know.

7. Adjourn

There being no further business, Councilor Foster moved to adjourn. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 4:35 p.m.

Prepared By:

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