



Committee on Community Resources and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Garrick Perry

Vice-Chair: Councilor Marissa Elkins

Councilor Alex Jarrett

Councilor Rachel Maiore

Meeting Minutes

Date: December 19, 2022

Time: 5:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting Via Zoom

1. **Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call.** At 5:31 p.m. Chair Garrick Perry convened the meeting. Present were Councilors Garrick Perry, Chair; Marissa Elkins, Vice Chair, Alex Jarrett and Rachel Maiore. Also present were Chair of the Select Committee to Study Barriers to Service on City Boards and Commissions Javier Luengo-Garrido and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.
2. **Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**
Councilor Perry announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded.
3. **Public Comment**
No members of the public were present so there was no public comment.
4. **Minutes of November 21, 2022**
The minutes of November 21, 2022 were not yet available.
5. **Updates and Announcements from Committee Members**
None.
6. **Update on Select Committee to Study Barriers to Serving on City Boards and Commissions**
The City Council just generously extended the Select Committee's deadline for filing its report until mid-April, Javier Luengo-Garrido reported. The way committee members have been working and approaching their assignment is by placing topics in different buckets. The first is mainly the accessibility of information; how easy it is to get to the city's landing page and find information such as the number and type of open positions, membership requirements, expected workload, etc. Also, how the community at large can learn about the differences in charge of various committees; i.e. - that some, like the Human Rights Commission, are standing committees while others, like the Elected Officials Compensation Advisory Committee, are time-limited and formed for specific purposes.

Accessibility of information is key, he stressed. If people have to go through 20, 15 or even 10 clicks to get somewhere, it's pointless. The policing review commission advocated for not needing more than three clicks to get to a document, he recounted.

The topic of accessibility includes transparency and accountability. One of the committee's potential recommendations is to require the city to report the composition/demographics of boards and committees every couple of months. The ability of a municipality to report specific data points makes the job of the City Council to serve as a check and balance easier and gives the city an idea of the composition and makeup of its own commissions.

It is imperative for them to be able to talk to the community and for that reason they are in the final stages of developing a survey, he continued. He screen-shared the survey's first page. The introduction provides basic information such as the committee's charge and how long it takes to fill out the form. They were really thoughtful to make clear to anybody filling out the survey that it would become a public record. It will be widely available after the Select Committee's meeting December 27th.

The survey addresses three specific tracks: people who have served as a chair or vice chair, current or former members and people who applied to serve but were not appointed. Depending on which category a respondent falls into, he or she gets a specific set of questions.

Committee members are trying to be really specific and know this is a process, so they are planning to separate their recommendations into things that can happen within six months and things that are more aspirational and will take longer.

He invited Councilor Perry to talk about the planned public forum.

They were tasked with a very broad mission, Councilor Perry said. Exploring what is preventing people from serving in their city is something he feels like they could continue doing for another year. They wanted to focus on trying to contact as wide a breadth of people as possible.

It is easy to contact people currently serving and people who have applied, but they spent time thinking about ways to intersect with people who may not know about these committees. Former Department of Community Care Implementation Manager Sean Donovan gave them a lot of good advice about places to go such as Manna or places where people receive services. They are also putting together one or two public forums where people can come and give testimony about their experiences. They discussed possibly doing some tabling as well but ended up with the decision to do a poster campaign instead.

They want a forum for people to speak their minds. It will be very open-ended. They know some people want anonymity so they will have an opportunity for people to submit written comments anonymously. They are asking other councilors and the city to cast their nets far and wide.

He appreciates that because of the Open Meeting Law (OML) extension granted by the governor, attendance at public meetings has skyrocketed, so they are hoping to do a hybrid or zoom forum, Luengo-Garrido added. Councilors are in a privileged position in that they are in contact with the community. They have been very thoughtful about scheduling the forums; one is during the week and the other on a weekend afternoon. They wanted to figure out a way even in this process to get around barriers.

He offered to entertain questions.

Councilor Maiore thanked them. Select committees usually get juicy topics and, frankly they never really give them enough of a timeline so she's glad they aren't adhering to an artificial timeline. She asked about the relationship between participation and serving. She has assumed participation equals or encourages serving on committees or boards although that may not always be the case. Sometimes people serve after becoming involved in a neighborhood project or are drawn to a meeting because of a particularly compelling issue. (She cited a recent meeting on a parking ordinance in Leeds which negatively affected renters as an example.)

It sounds like they are concluding that hybrid meetings encourage participation, she ventured. Based on that, she wondered if they will be making any recommendations around meeting format.

In relationship to participation, they see a close connection with impact; i.e. - people feeling that their involvement makes a difference to the outcome, Luengo-Garrido noted. Feeling like they can make a difference encourages people to participate. Before being elected, every one of the councilors did a ton of work with the community. With respect to communication between the municipality and the community, a goal is to pique the curiosity of the community and meet people where they are with their questions and lived experiences.

In his day job he is working on a municipal ordinance with regard to accessibility. The exception to the OML which runs out in March is specifically for elected officials; it doesn't apply to community members and the audience. Select committee members are seeing the value of people still being able to access those meetings remotely. The Easthampton City Council with Council President Gomez is having hybrid meetings with the council present in person and the option for the public to participate by zoom or to be physically present. They haven't talked about that as a committee but he personally would say it is good to keep that level of accessibility for community members.

She hopes they can also continue the conversation about elected officials continuing to serve virtually at least part of the time, Councilor Maiore added. They have had a change in the composition of the council. Sometimes people can't serve as long if it gets too difficult to serve.

In terms of participation, anecdotally, they are hearing that a lot of people serve because someone they know asks them to serve or tells them about a service opportunity, Councilor Perry said. They all believe a lot of people would participate if they knew about it. One of the things they are trying to tackle is not only disseminating information but making it feel accessible; i.e. letting people know it is not a job that necessarily requires a lot of experience. He knows himself and a lot of other people had never done this before and kind of learned on the fly.

It goes back to Javier's point about having a packet of information so that if someone is curious about serving, the information needed to navigate the process is available.

The Northampton Housing Partnership had a member handbook with information about the Open Meeting Law, Robert's Rules of Order, etc., Councilor Jarrett volunteered. He thinks it would be helpful if something like that was available on the website. He seconded the need for continuing the hybrid option for at least members of the public. He also said he is looking forward to the committee's discussion of whether it is

possible to provide stipends for those for whom the incidental costs of service (transportation, childcare, etc.) may be a barrier.

They have discussed this and have asked for an opinion from the city solicitor so they are looking into it, Luengo-Garrido confirmed. It's complicated but he thinks it may be done in a way that will not negatively affect the city or place a burden on people serving. Hopefully they will be able to come up with a couple of suggestions. It might need a home rule petition. They recognize that many times free time is privileged time.

Councilor Jarrett said he was looking into the idea of a civic participation grant which could be awarded by a nonprofit. He thanked him for looking into that.

Councilor Elkins thanked Javier. She is glad to hear they are thinking about identifying and widening who they want on committees and boards to represent less traditional perspectives. She thinks it is really important to identify who is in the community and invite them in. She also appreciates the idea that every board and commission have some manual or type of orientation. When she has served on the board of nonprofits or a board of directors, there has always been an orientation. A little more introduction and paving the way for people who don't have experience could go a long way.

General discussion continued. Javier Luengo-Garrido noted that the creation of the select committee shows the commitment of the City Council and the Mayor to creating an atmosphere in the city that values people across the board and recognizes that everybody has something to contribute. As a select committee they know that and are working under that premise. As chair of the committee, he sometimes feels like their work is to minimize variables that might make someone regret serving or feel like they cannot serve.

Councilor Perry thanked Javier for coming by.

Councilor Jarrett noted that the survey does not have an option for people who don't meet one of the three categories. He suggested adding a link for general comments from those individuals.

Javier thanked Council President Nash and Vice President Karen Foster for their exceptional support.

7. New Business

Councilor Jarrett mentioned that the next regular meeting falls on Martin Luther King Day so they need to find another time. He would love to have a discussion about when to hold meetings in person vs. hybrid.

Councilor Perry said he is planning on having Part 2 with Carolyn Misch and guests in hybrid format.

8. Adjourn. Councilor Maiore moved to adjourn; Councilor Jarrett seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 6:19 p.m.

Prepared By:

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