



Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

*Chair: Councilor Karen Foster
Vice-Chair: Councilor Jamila Gore
Councilor Marianne LaBarge
Councilor Garrick Perry*

Meeting Minutes

Date: July 11, 2023
Time: 5 p.m.
Via Teleconference

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 5:05 p.m., Councilor Karen Foster called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilor Foster, Chair; Councilor Jamila Gore, Vice Chair, Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge and Councilor Garrick Perry were present. Also present was Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.

2. Announcement of Audio/Video Recording

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

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

4. MINUTES OF JUNE 5, 2023

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of June 5, 2023. Councilor Gore seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

5. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

- A. 23.345 Appointments and Reappointments to Various Committees, referred by City Council - 6/15/2023

As a process note, Councilor Foster said she thought it would make sense to do new appointments separately and to move the reappointments as a group.

Board of Health

Dr. Suzanne Smith, 134 State Street, Northampton

Term: July 2023 - June 2026

Reappointment

Central Business Architecture Committee

Emily Wright, 244 South Street, Northampton

Term: July 2023 - June 2026

Reappointment

Conservation Commission

Jen Smith, 24 Audubon Road #1, Leeds

Term: July 2023 - June 2026

Reappointment

Elizabeth Spriggs, 79 Reservoir Road #1, Leeds

Term: July 2023 - June 2026

New Appointment

Council On Aging

Karen Lynds, 71 Reservoir Road, Leeds

Term: July 2023 - June 2026

New Appointment

Planning Board

Samuel Taylor, 245 North Street, Northampton

Term: July 2023 - June 2026

Re-appointment

Arts Council**Michael Brown**, PO Box 113, Leeds

Term: July 2023 - June 2026

New Appointment

Councilor Foster interviewed Elizabeth Spriggs. In keeping with an interesting trend of slightly newer residents looking for how they can give back, her family just moved from Cambridge about a year ago. She's a data scientist who has worked with the Charles River Watershed and had a lot of experience with private/public partnerships and working with data and conservation in Cambridge. She reached out to Sarah LaValley a couple of months ago to learn more about the local Conservation Commission. She understands and is familiar with the meeting schedule and is confident with the scope of work, terms, lingo and types of projects involved. She asked if there is anything specific she is interested in focusing on and one thing she sees the need for in Northampton is a balance between development and conservation. She has an eye for that.

She is pregnant with a baby due in the fall and so expects to miss a meeting or two.

Councilor Foster moved to forward the appointment of Elizabeth Spriggs to the Conservation Commission to the full City Council with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

Karen Lynds was very friendly; very nice, Councilor Gore reported. She's like a watchdog among her friends who are all in their 70's and looks out for them as far as social security, medication costs, etc. She always thought that Northampton had a really nice senior center. She has lived in Leeds her whole life, taught for 37 years at Leeds Elementary and went to school there herself. She has taken care of elderly in-laws and elderly parents in this area and feels like there are a lot of resources but that there could be more. She was the primary caregiver for them and liked being able to take care of them and having the resources to do so.

She was encouraged to look into the Council on Aging by friends. Since she's like the watchdog they said, 'why don't you get involved in the community?' She has a lot of retired senior friends. She is easy going, easy to talk to and has computer skills. She has friends who go to the senior center and wants to reach out to more seniors, especially those who don't get out much. She had the idea of a phone tree to reach out to people and connect them to the community.

Councilor Gore moved to forward the appointment of Karen Lynds to the Council on Aging with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

As Councilor Foster said, there has been a trend of folks new to the area wanting to be involved and that is pretty much the story with Michael Brown and his family, Councilor Perry confirmed. He was

undergoing some change switching from being a teacher and part of a school to starting a career as a financial planner and looking for a way to engage with his community and give back. He had many discussions with Danielle of the Arts Council, who he met at a Chamber of Commerce event. He is very much aware of what the role would entail and the time commitment involved. They discussed how the Arts Council itself has been going through some changes and what skills he specifically would bring. He talked about his time as a nonprofit leader and school director and his experience organizing people and knowledge of the financial side of things. They also talked about his love of literature and film, which is a little outside of the purview of some of the other members. He has been in contact with Brian Foote. He did a senior thesis on photography and has some ideas for capturing artistically the beauty in this area.

Councilor Perry wholeheartedly moved to forward the appointment of Michael Brown to the Arts Council to the full City Council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Gore seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward all the reappointments with a positive recommendation as a group. Councilor Perry seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

6. Discuss Process for Implementing Barriers to Service Select Committee Final Report Recommendations

A. Update SC Report Implementation Matrix

Members generally agreed that the matrix captures the action items/recommendations of the Select Committee. They agreed to remove Line 15 (There should be a clearer process for considered review of all applicants.) since it seems more like an overarching goal than an actionable step.

Councilor Foster noted that it wasn't super clear what entity is responsible for Line 17 (Chairs/vice chairs should be involved from the early stages of the process to the point that a candidate is confirmed by City Council.) She wondered if in creating the rubric for the applicant evaluation process they wanted to add the step of having the councilor assigned to interview the candidate reach out to the chair of the committee as well.

This led to a discussion of possible ways to solicit the input of committee chairs. After some discussion, members decided that the simplest way might be to flag chairs at the beginning of the City Council process by cc'ing them on City Council agendas with proposed appointments to their particular committees on the consent agenda for referral to City Services. The cc' could include a brief explanation of why they are being copied. Members indicated this would only need to be done for new appointments and not for reappointments.

Although Line 19 is assigned to the Mayor's office, Councilor Foster asked if City Services Committee members would be interested in taking on some responsibility for it. (*Perform a needs assessment to create a viable system for paying for childcare and other needs*, which at this point is one of the main factors preventing community members from engaging in the city process.)

His recollection is that some research was done on this by the select committee but that it was not conclusive, Councilor Perry related. They reached out to Solicitor Seewald and he made it clear that there is not a simple mechanism available to pay board members.

Councilor Foster said she is happy to dedicate some time to looking to see if some other cities and towns have come up with a way to provide compensation to members that passes legal muster.

Standardized Questions

Councilor Foster suggested taking on the action item of creating a rubric for the evaluation process/standardizing the questions asked to each applicant as a low hanging fruit/starting point.

As a former teacher, she used to grade on a rubric and it had a rating scale attached, Councilor Foster shared. Members agreed that a formal rubric in the form of a grading system for applicant responses is not necessary.

Councilors shared their FAQ's. Councilor Perry said he starts with an overview of the appointment process and always asks the reason the person applied for the position and what brought them to Northampton.

Councilor Foster offered to ask the mayor's office what questions they ask applicants.

Councilor Perry says he asks if there is a particular issue the applicant is interested in working on and if they are aware of the time commitment involved. He also asks if there is anything else they would want to share about themselves or why they want to be a part of this.

Councilor Foster said she thinks she uses the exact same questions as Councilor Perry. She has recently added the question of whether they are familiar with the meeting schedule/time commitment.

Councilor Gore said she asks what [skills or experience] they can bring to the commission or board.

Councilor Foster asked if they wanted to add the step of reaching out to the chair to ask what they are looking for in an applicant to the evaluation process. Members did not express interest in adding this as a formal requirement but confirmed their interest in informing committee chairs by copying them on relevant council agendas. Members decided it would be good to do this for reappointments as well as new appointments. Councilor Perry suggested inviting the chairs to reach out to the chair of City Services if they have any comments or recommendations.

Councilor Foster proposed she and Ms. Krutzler work together to create a template of questions to bring back to the next meeting.

Councilor Foster said she thinks it is valuable to get the input of the chair even though they are not evaluating multiple applicants.

She asked if anyone wanted to take on the task of exploring more options for communicating public service opportunities to the general public (Line 7). Right now, the main way people become aware of openings is either by going to the city website or knowing somebody.

Councilor Perry says he thinks it's a big question. It's very difficult because there is no one path. He doesn't know if this committee itself will be able to solve that problem. They talked about using the information kiosks that are being put up throughout the city. It might be an issue for a broader discussion by the next committee.

They will bring a one-page template back to the next meeting, Councilor Foster reiterated.

7. **NEW BUSINESS**

Councilor Foster asked if anyone had a conflict with the August 7th meeting. As no one did, she said they would plan on having an August meeting.

8. **ADJOURN**

There being no further business, Councilor Perry moved to adjourn. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Prepared By:

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