



Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Jeremy Dubs

Vice-Chair: Councilor Chris Stratton

Councilor Deborah Klemer

Councilor Meg Robbins

Meeting Minutes

Date: March 16, 2026, 4 p.m.

Council Chambers, 212 Main Street
Northampton, MA

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4 p.m., Councilor Jeremy Dubs called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilor Dubs, Chair; Councilor Christopher Stratton, Vice Chair, Councilor Deborah Klemer and Councilor Meg Robbins were present. Also present was Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.

2. Announcement of Audio/Video Recording

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

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no general public comment.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 24, 2026

Councilor Klemer moved to approve the February 24, 2026 minutes. Councilor Robbins seconded.

Councilor Stratton said he thinks the minutes are accurate but he wonders if they are quite as complete as Open Meeting Law (OML) requires. He asked other members their thoughts.

The administrative assistant reminded councilors that the minutes were taken by Chief of Staff Alan Wolf in her absence. She acknowledged they are not as detailed a record as she usually provides but said she believes they technically meet the legal requirements of the OML. She noted that she added a paragraph to explain Councilor Stratton and Councilor Robbins' discomfort with making a positive recommendation on the appointment of the city solicitor, since she has received opinions from the Division of Open Government that, if someone offers an argument against a vote (in this case, the positive recommendation), that person and his comments should be identified in the minutes.

The acting solicitor made some important comments about his approach to his job and some questions were asked and answered that would have been helpful to preserve as part of the record, Councilor Stratton noded.

Councilor Klemer stressed that they meet the legal requirements and the recording is available on YouTube if people want more detail.

Councilor Robbins said she sadly acquired a lot of expertise in taking minutes in the process of helping the Northampton School Committee eliminate a backlog of minutes cited by the state attorney general in 2023.

She offered to fill in in the future if needed. She said she didn't know if it would be the same for City Council, but the School Committee received legal advice that members could take their own minutes in subcommittees.

The motion passed 3:1 by roll call vote with Councilor Stratton opposed.

5. DISCUSSION OF PROCESS FOR REVIEW OF MAYORAL APPOINTMENTS/REAPPOINTMENTS

Since first bringing up the process question, Councilor Stratton said he has talked to a number of people formerly in government and given it a lot of thought. He now thinks they could divide the question into two parts: 1) how they should evaluate proposed appointments by the Mayor, and 2) the broader question of what proactive steps the committee might take to increase transparency in the recruitment of candidates even before the Mayor makes her selections.

With regard to part one, he referred to a key sentence in Charter Section 2-10; "The committee may require any person whose name has been referred to appear before the committee or before the city council to give any information relevant to the appointment that the committee or the city council may require."

He expressed his understanding that the committee's practice has been only to do this for the appointment of department heads. For ordinary appointments, it's been the practice to delegate one member to interview them and report back. He would like to see them be more proactive and, as often as possible, interview people before the whole committee. He thinks it gives candidates a platform to introduce themselves and explain their interest and gives individual committee members the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity as to specific questions they might have.

"Being able to talk to them as a group would be great," he avowed.

Councilor Dubs said he had some strong opinions. He noted, among other things, that Section 2-10 says the committee 'may' rather than 'shall' require people to appear. He feels like requiring such a thing would be creating a barrier to people volunteering their time to serve. From his experience, he not only has found the process effective but has enjoyed it. He thinks it would be intimidating to put people 'on the spot' at a public meeting almost as if they were on trial.

He gives people the option of meeting in person, talking on the phone or by Zoom or corresponding by email. He wouldn't be against giving someone the option of coming to a meeting but would be highly against requiring it. "Sometimes they barely have enough time to be on these committees that they're volunteering their time for," he asserted.

Councilor Robbins said she has never understood why City Services only gets one candidate. What is the role of City Services in interviewing if is only one candidate? She asked.

She asked if the committee ever voted 'no,' and Councilor Dubs said he personally has voted 'no.' While the candidate was ultimately appointed, at least he got to voice his opinion as to why he thought they shouldn't be appointed.

Responding to the points raised, Councilor Stratton said the idea of getting a foot in the door resonates with him. Frankly, he ran for city council because he wasn't sure he'd be appointed otherwise, he shared. However, in terms of the time commitment involved in coming to a meeting, a prospective volunteer may be signing up for 48 meetings so he isn't sure a 49th meeting to kick it off is that much of an ask.

The idea of expanding the slate of contact options to include coming before the committee could be a pathway, he allowed.

As far as proactive steps to enhance recruitment, in the era of Mayor Higgins' administration, he found in his research that the then appointment committee actually interviewed people before the appointment process began. He understands multiple people would appear before the committee to express interest.

Under Worcester's charter, a citizens' advisory committee impanels those interested in appointment, he added. By contrast, Northampton's charter calls for the mayor to appoint and the city council to confirm or reject.

As a committee, they have a broad mandate to involve themselves in the delivery of city services, he pointed out. On an optional rather than mandatory level, members could hold informational sessions and invite people to attend. "It could be treated as an on ramp and an outreach and a recruiting thing, not necessarily just an intimidating interview," he proposed.

Councilor Klemer noted that, of all of them, Councilor Dubs is the only one who has been through the process himself and knows what it's like to be on the other side. She was on the committee for a short time last term and thinks this system works well. Holding interviews would mean they would have to vote in the presence of candidates. She encouraged Councilor Stratton to see how things work before changing to some unknown way of doing things or how they do things in Worcester. "I think we should just keep it the way it is."

Councilor Dubs pointed out that requiring attendance at a fixed monthly meeting does not accommodate the busy schedule of many of their applicants as well as a more flexible one-on-one interview. Also, people don't want to face 'gotcha' questions in public meetings. "Making that some sort of requirement, I think, is harmful to the city, and will create barriers," he volunteered.

Stratton said he is not necessarily talking about making it a consistent requirement. He sees the specificity of schedule as the strongest barrier against his proposal.

Although he is new to this, he asked them to keep in mind that he has been watching public meetings. Most of what he is proposing is based on what he's seen that has not been working.

When asked by Councilor Dubs to give a specific example, he pointed to Councilor Dubs' mention of the time he had a complaint against a certain candidate.

Councilor Dubs asked Councilor Stratton if he wanted to re-litigate an old topic.

Councilor Stratton said he didn't but wasn't sure he agreed with Councilor Dubs that the person was saying what Councilor Dubs thought they were saying.

"I know what they were saying," Councilor Dubs insisted. He said he was not going to talk about a two-year old topic. "We're going to move on," he announced.

Councilor Stratton appealed the ruling of the chair

Councilor Robbins suggested giving candidates the option of coming before the committee. She likes that it takes place in public and that the public gets to meet the candidates. She wouldn't want to put anybody awkwardly on the spot, but some people might not mind.

She proposed including it as a question to people when they interview them so they could get some feedback and revisit it in the future

Councilor Dubs said they could feel free to ask that question. Suggested questions developed by a previous committee are just a guide, he clarified.

Councilor Klemer and Councilor Dubs advocated for tabling the proposal to change the process.

Councilor Stratton asserted that, particularly subsequent to the 2012 charter change, a huge amount of what the city does is now extremely insulated from the public. Committee appointments to long terms made by mayors serving four-year terms themselves creates a long delay in public feedback to much of government operations. The city council is the only branch of government along with its School Committee peers elected to two-year terms. "We are responsive to the public and much of city government is not," he asserted.

The council's charter role in the appointment process is the only influence voters routinely have in a large swath of city government. In watching past councils, he's seen a lot of deferral to the mayor's choice of appointments. He thinks trying when possible to bring people to the committee is important.

He referred to the past case where he and Councilor Dubs had very different impressions. "Depending on who talked to a person, you could get a very different report back and I don't really think that's fair to the candidate." In this case, presentation to the council clearly would have varied depending on who interviewed the candidate, he suggested.

However, Councilor Dubs disagreed, noting that, in the discussion at full council, every councilor was able to express an opinion. "It was democracy," he volunteered.

Councilor Stratton asked if the candidate had a chance to respond to Councilor Dubs' accusations in front of the committee.

Councilor Dubs shouted that he was not going to continue to be grilled. The committee does not have the power to propose charter changes, he stated.

Councilor Stratton said he is not proposing a charter change, he is proposing to use the power written into the charter as it currently stands.

Tentative motions were offered by Councilor Klemer, first not to change the process and then to table the discussion. However, Councilor Dubs decided that a vote was not necessary and that they could simply end the discussion.

Councilor Dubs said he thought Councilor Stratton's suggestion [that the full committee interview candidates] was an implication that he doesn't trust other councilors to report back accurate information, and he finds that offensive.

Councilor Stratton raised the point of order that Robert's Rules explicitly prohibit speculating on the motivations of another member of the body.

Councilor Dubs said he is telling him how he feels. He is following Robert's Rules and doesn't care what Councilor Stratton's interpretation is.

Councilor Stratton appealed the ruling of the chair.

Councilor Robbins said she hoped they could reflect on this conversation and learn from this dialogue. They need to learn to listen to each other, she suggested. "I know we will, together as a group," she assured.

6. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

A. 26.020 Appointments to Various Committees, referred by City Council - 3/5/2026

Board of Health

Luke Messac, 294 Cardinal Way
Term: March 2026 - June 2028
To fill a vacancy

Community Preservation Committee

Leticia Ward, 12 High Meadow Rd
Term: March 2026 - June 2028
Filling the position of Debin Bruce

Housing Partnership

Yakov Kronrod, 188 Rocky Hill Rd
Term: March 2026 - June 2028
To fill a vacancy

Members divided up interview assignments, with Councilor Klemer volunteering to interview Luke Messac, Councilor Dubs volunteering to interview Leticia Ward and Councilor Stratton agreeing to interview Yakov Konrod

7. **NEW BUSINESS**

Councilor Dubs recognized former City Councilor Marianne LaBarge, who congratulated Councilor Dubs on doing a great job running City Services.

Councilor Dubs apologized for losing his temper, saying this was a challenging conversation and he's doing his best.

Councilor Stratton said he really would be interested in exploring what this committee could do in terms of outreach and recruitment for roles on city boards and generally easing the process of entry into government.

8. **ADJOURN**

There being no further business, **Councilor Stratton moved to adjourn. Councilor Klemer seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 4:54 p.m.**

Prepared By:

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