

**City of Northampton, MA**  
**City Council Select Committee to Study Barriers to Serving on City Boards and Commissions**

MEETING MINUTES for **January 10, 2023**

Submitted by: Laura Krutzler

1. Chair Javier Luengo-Garrido called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m. He announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

City Council Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler called the roll:

**Members present and absent:**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Time if arriving late or leaving early</b>
Javier Luengo-Garrido, Chair, Citizen	X	
Jamila Gore, Councilor At Large, Vice Chair	X	7:33 p.m.
Garrick Perry, Ward 4 City Councilor	X	
Cynthia Suopis, Citizen	X	
Gwen Nabad, Citizen	X	
Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Citizen	Absent	
<b>Staff</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Time if arriving late or leaving early</b>
Laura Hill Krutzler, Administrative Assistant	X	

**2. Public comment**

No members of the public were present. Javier stressed that the committee is being very intentional in continuing to allocate the first 15 minutes of every meeting to public comment as it is important.

**3. Minutes of Previous Meetings**

Members agreed by consensus to defer approval of the December 27, 2022 minutes to the next meeting since they were just distributed and members had not had time to review them.

Motion:	Motion by:	Second:	Vote:
NO ACTION TAKEN			

**4. General Discussion Items**

- o Finish Workshopping Google doc and forms
- A little more than 400 people received the Qualtrics survey with a thoughtful email explaining the mission of the Select Committee and they received 103 responses in a little over a week, Javier Luengo-Garrido reported. With no nagging, the level of response is remarkable. It shows how important the work is and is a testament to the work of everyone on the Select Committee. The fact that the survey is easily accessible and that people can just fill it out electronically plays a huge role.
- He thanked Janna and every single member for their work. Probably before the next meeting he will have a small report of what they are seeing in the responses.
- Gwen asked if people serving on two different committees should fill it out for both.

- They should go ahead and complete both, Javier said. The nature of the boards and commissions is quite different.
- Discussion with Human Rights Commission (HRC) Chair Megan Paik
- Everyone on the Select Committee thought the first conversation with Megan was really good and very interesting and wanted to invite her back. The HRC is a commission with a pretty unique charge, pretty unique workload and a pretty unique set of members.
- He is serving on the advisory board to the mayor on the matter of compensation for elected officials, Javier related. At the beginning of their meeting yesterday, members talked about the relationship of compensation to representation; the fact that a ton of people may not be able to run for office because they work and do not have disposable income or leisure time. A lot of the time, they cannot get a single mother onto the City Council because there are not resources for childcare and other things. There are a lot of parallels in the ability to serve of elected officials and the ability to serve of people appointed to committees.
- In this committee, they have been talking about people's ability to serve, attend regularly and not fall through the cracks and stop coming; i.e., people being engaged and having access to help paying for childcare.
- He reminded members that, in the first couple of months of the policing review commission, not a lot of people attended but that, in the last three months, a ton of people were coming. One of the things that would happen is that somebody would come in month eight and bring up something they had talked about in the second or third month, and he would be frustrated that they hadn't shown up when it was discussed earlier.
- He thinks the ability of people to serve as an elected official or as a volunteer comes with the need for time to communicate with community members. City councilors use newsletters to regularly update their constituents, he pointed out. Not all the commissions have an administrative assistant like they do.
- Sending out an email blast with an update of what an individual or group is doing is taxing and time-consuming. He thinks that is important and he would like to talk about it in their report. He is starting to write the report and will probably send part of the first draft for the next meeting. He thinks this section is really important. Regardless of whether they find a way to get stipends, if they see the need for it, it should be stated and included in the report, he asserted.
- For purposes of their discussion, he said he would just treat Megan as another member.

As a following up to their meeting in November, Megan Paik shared the HRC's project to create a handbook for new commissioners. The HRC shares their interest in increasing transparency and access to public service, particularly for volunteers on Northampton boards and commissions, she stressed. They also share the belief that onboarding of new members has been uneven or lacking across the standing committees and that there are various ways they can improve that process.

As an aside, she recognized Councilor Perry for how he personally has approached new members. In the past two months he has welcomed two of their newest members, Diana and Alton, and he spent substantial time with them not only vetting their candidacy but answering their questions about city government. It demonstrates that councilors can play a strong role in orienting volunteers, especially those who have no prior connections with City Hall and have never served on boards.

The handbook for new commissioners is intended to help familiarize candidates with the history and purview, priorities and expectations of the commission they've just joined. She appreciated all the helpful and thoughtful feedback they offered. She hopes the handbook can be included in the Select Committee's report and adopted as a template for other commissions.

Some of her take-ways from that meeting were that several of them said that, in addition to the handbook providing cut-and-dried information critical to the onboarding process, it could also serve as a recruitment tool for volunteers.

Cynthia Suopis suggested highlighting the missions of the boards.

Megan screen-shared the handbook, pointing out some of the features and information it contains, such as bios of current members. (See attachment to master version of the minutes.)

Janna thought the handbook could have some language about the committee's priorities so candidates could figure out if it was a match for their skills and expertise.

One of the things they have talked about is the number of clicks it takes to go from the landing page of the city website to certain information such as the policing review commission report, Javier pointed out.

She thinks there's a lot of value in centralizing this information, Megan agreed. The HRC is one of the few commissions that has its own webpage. Some information is out of date and she thinks it is because it isn't clear who is responsible for updating the page. She thinks it would be good to have a link to the handbook on the Boards and Committees page.

Gwen suggested that the document be bilingual in both English and Spanish.

Cynthia Suopis expressed her understanding that Megan is providing a template which could be available for other boards to use. She suggested the document could possibly live on the City Services site. [Editor's note: there is a City Council webpage but not a page for individual City Council committees such as the City Services Committee.]

Councilor Perry thanked Megan Paik for her work in putting this together. It is something she put together for the HRC but it goes above and beyond. He thinks it is something that is going to benefit the city. It is not just for people already serving but is a way to recruit people in general, he agreed. He hopes they can find a way to put it smack in the middle of the website.

He agrees it is something that possibly could live on the City Services website. He suggested discussing this with chair Karen Foster.

Megan Paik said she thinks the city attorney would also need to do a pretty thorough review.

She thinks it's important to share with them because she sees the project (putting together the handbook) as addressing some of the less public and more hidden challenges of service on volunteer boards.

Her perspective as someone on the HRC for nearly four years is that they actually deal less with people attempting to join and more with misunderstandings of what is possible or realistic within the limited authority and resources given to them. Recently, someone she never met emailed her to ask what the HRC has been doing and why they have not organized city-wide events for International Human Rights Day and Martin Luther King Day. This person said she was intending to write about their lack of activity in a Gazette column.

Putting aside whether it is the HRC's responsibility alone to offer such community events, they are unique in that they don't have any sort of city staff liaison, Megan noted. There is not a Director of Human Rights. They are advisory to the mayor but are rarely asked to weigh in on executive decisions. Although they do incur

monetary costs and time for running activities, they don't have a budget. The two commissioners who organized a virtual event in 2022 have since resigned so it is a lot of work.

The board is five-seven (5/7) BIPOC (black, indigenous and people of color), all employed except for one and all caregivers, she shared. Four have been on the HRC for less than six months so they are a fairly new group.

Javier said he was sorry for that interaction and whatever that person writes about. This is what he meant when he mentioned people coming into a process or dynamic of one of the commissions and making assumptions. The last time Martin Luther King Day was celebrated in Northampton it was organized by the Edwards Church and the resistance center.

He thinks it speaks to the lack of understanding of the roles of advisory committees but also that they need to give the city a gentle push to post this document in a place that is accessible so people can see the board's charge rather than having a misunderstanding of its role.

Megan Paik said she thinks it is particularly an issue for retention on boards and commissions, this distance between what the community expects and what they are able to deliver.

As they may remember, on August 20, 2020, the City Council signed a resolution (R-20.107) saying that the city will appoint a director of Human Rights along with many other suggestions, Cynthia Suopis reminded. As they wait going into the third year for that position, it occurs to her that if City Council resolutions are not being enacted for whatever reason, she is concerned about the viability of their report and its recommendations.

We have a resolution right now that resolves to do things that we haven't done and haven't addressed. She doesn't know if anyone on the City Council or in the Mayor's office is taking this on. She personally doesn't want Megan Paik to take this on. She hopes it is something they can include in their report as something that came from the grassroots.

They are fully sponsoring/endorsing this in their report, Javier assured.

Councilor Gore said she is thankful for Megan Paik's work on the handbook and agreed having it on the website would be good. She too is sorry about the letter. She thinks that people on the HRC work really hard.

If a resolution says they should have a Human Rights Director, she thinks they should be working towards that.

Megan Paik said she thought her anecdote illustrates the types of barrier they refer to in their survey; specifically, the dissonance between what it is people think committees should be doing and what it is they *can* do. She said she appreciated the generous input.

If they are going to distribute the handbook she requested that they omit HRC members' bios for now. Javier suggested she send it to him so that he can make a template of it without HRC-specific information.

o **Discussion about outreach**

- Javier screen-shared the communication plan Cynthia Suopis drafted. Cynthia reviewed it, saying she welcomes additions to the list of who should receive press releases and notices.
- She suggested using the notice of a listening session sent out by the City Council as a template for their press release.

- Javier said he thought it would be great to have Councilor Perry and Councilor Gore on the Monte Belmonte show on New England Public Media (NEPM). He said he could draft a press release. He stated his intention to bring the press release and new dates for the listening sessions to the meeting on January 24th. Cynthia Suopis agreed the listening sessions could be pushed out.
  - By January 24<sup>th</sup>, they will review the final draft of a press release that can be added to City Councilor's newsletters if they are willing. In that meeting, they will also timeline everything. Everybody agreed.
  - Cynthia Suopis encouraged everyone to add to the list of recipients.
  - Javier said he was going to talk to Gwen Agna so she could talk to the School Committee.
  - Councilor Perry said he thought some of the recipients, such as Bill Newman, might require a little more than a press release. He mentioned the possibility of showing up on one of his shows. He thought someone ought to reach out to Northampton Neighbors and said he would be willing to reach out to Alan Wolf to see if one of them could attend a Youth Commission meeting.
  - Gwen mentioned the 'Truth School' also has a youth program. Javier said they could share information with them, too, and he would talk to Reverend Carey from Edwards Church to see if they could make an announcement about their forums.
- .Assignment Updates
  - Susan McDonald-Bolanos was not present so there was no update on the research assignment.

**5. New Business**

- Javier confirmed that Karen Foster will attend the meeting on January 24<sup>th</sup> to discuss the City Services Committee process for reviewing the Mayor's recommendations for appointment.
- They can't complain about the level of support they are getting from the City Council President and Vice President, he commented.
- Javier reminded members to talk to people they know who have applied to serve and invite them to complete the survey.

**6. Adjourned at 8:43 p.m.**

- A motion was proposed and seconded and a roll call vote was taken. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Motion	Motion by:	Second:	Vote:
Adjourn.	Councilor Perry	Cynthia Suopis	Yes, 5 No, 0 Absent, 1