



## **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: February 7, 2022 Organizational Meeting  
Virtual Meeting

#### 1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4 p.m., Councilor Karen Foster called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilor Foster, Councilor Gore, 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

**Robert Boulrice** spoke in support of the renewal of city solicitor Alan Seewald's contract. As someone who worked in executive positions in local government for 20 years, he has had any number of opportunities to work with city solicitors, city attorneys and city legal staff, he related. Most recently he served on the Charter Review Committee and is presently the chair of the Ranked Choice Voting Implementation Committee. In those capacities, he has spent over 30 meetings with Solicitor Seewald. During that time, he has come to realize that his cautionary advice regarding the Open Meeting Law (OML) and other topics is always to the better. Particularly with regard to the Charter Review Commission, it is clear to him that Attorney Seewald is an expert on the city charter and an expert on Mass. General Law and, most importantly for the council, a vigilant guardian of what are legislative duties and what are executive authorities. He believes that he is a credit to his profession and that they are lucky to have him, and he recommends his reappointment as the city attorney.

#### 4. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

Councilor Foster explained the procedure she would use in accepting nominations.

**Councilor Garrick nominated Councilor LaBarge as chair.**

**Councilor Foster said she was interested in putting her own name forward as chair.**

Councilor LaBarge said she has been on City Services for four years. Previous to that, it used to be called Social Services and Veterans Affairs, which she chaired for quite a long time. She had a really terrible experience with that as she had to do all the minutes and invite all the agencies. She loves this

job; it is a very valuable position regardless of whether someone is a chair or vice chair. She likes working with other councilors, thinks transparency and communication is very valuable and thinks it is a learning experience so she is interested in doing it again.

Councilor Foster said she joined the Committee on City Services two years ago in her first council term. Her nomination is not in any way a critique of Councilor LaBarge's work but more an expression of her own interest in chairing a committee. She looks forward to taking more of a leadership role, and the City Services Committee was ranked second on her list of preferences. She thinks it is a committee with tremendous potential with the charge of overseeing and confirming mayoral appointments as department heads and members of city boards and commissions as well as the opportunity to provide oversight and a space for public conversations.

As they all heard last week with the resolution to establish a select committee, one of her greatest interests is looking at how they can diversify city boards and committees. While those appointments come from the mayor's office, it is a great interest to her to work with the mayor's office to see what they can do as a committee to support that important work.

**Councilor Foster called the nominations to a vote. Both nominations failed, with Councilor Foster receiving the votes of Councilor Foster and Councilor Perry and Councilor LaBarge receiving the votes of Councilor Gore and Councilor LaBarge.**

This is the reason they recommend against four-member committees, Attorney Seewald commented. Since the vote has failed, they have to start over again, he advised.

**Councilor LaBarge and Councilor Foster both expressed continued interest in serving.**

The nominations were called to a vote, and **Councilor Foster was elected chair 4:0 by roll call vote.**

### Vice Chair

Councilor Foster opened the floor to nominations for vice chair.

**Councilor LaBarge nominated Councilor Gore.**

Councilor Gore said she thought serving as vice chair would be a good learning experience for her since she is new to the council.

**Councilor Foster called the nomination to a vote, and all four councilors voted in favor of Councilor Gore by roll call vote.**

5.

### 6. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

A. 22.021 Appointment of Attorney Alan Seewald as City Solicitor, referred by City Council - 1/20/2022

Mayor Sciarra introduced Attorney Seewald by saying that he is one of the foremost experts in municipal law in the area and that she has the ultimate faith in him. As she shared at council, he deeply values practicing in a city where he's lived for a long time and raised his family and it's incredibly meaningful to him to be able to do this work in his own community. She's enjoyed working with him as a city councilor and knows many of them have as well.

Attorney Seewald gave an overview of the legal services he provides to the city. As the city solicitor for the past ten years, he also coordinates the services of a few other lawyers who provide specialized legal services, including Layla Taylor, the city's labor lawyer, Louise Moore, the city's environmental lawyer and Robert Spencer, who does titles searches and conveyancing. Most of what his office does is general municipal law, providing legal counsel to the mayor, all city departments and the city council. He guides the city on issues concerning Open Meeting Law, finance, Conflict of Interest and planning and zoning, among other things.

By far, the vast number of lawsuits filed in Northampton are sent directly to the city's insurer and handled by the insurer. His involvement is to make sure that notices are sent to the insurer in a timely manner and that the insurer takes up the matter and defends the city's interests. Right now, there are seven of those claims, most involving the police department and one involving Smith Vocational School and he monitors their progress. The other major category of claims is zoning and land use lawsuits arising out of decisions made by the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals. He defends those cases himself and right now there are three. That is an exceedingly low number considering Northampton's size and the amount of development that takes place here.

He helps with enforcement actions such as a wetlands violation on Riverbank Road and miscellaneous litigation, such as the appeal of denial of a license to carry a firearm, but otherwise city departments handle these quite well.

The single major litigation the city is involved in is a lawsuit involving construction of the deck attached to the police department facility. There were major leaks into the police station after it was built in 2011. The city had it reconstructed and is now seeking compensation for the cost of this reconstruction.

Attorney Seewald fielded questions and comments from councilors. In response to a question from Councilor Foster, he clarified that he represents the City of Northampton as a municipality as opposed to individual elected officials. He understands the perception that he works for the mayor given that he is appointed by the mayor and spends most of his time dealing with the mayor and executive departments. However, he hopes it has been clear over the years that he has been as responsive as possible and provided the best counsel he can to the City Council. He understands the concern about the possibility of conflicting interests and acknowledged there are situations where there is so much acrimony between the mayor and the city council that there has to be a separation of counsel. However, generally, he thinks this is a good model and that it's worked well over the 10 years that he's been here.

If the need for another lawyer arises, they can certainly hire one on a case-by-case basis, he noted.

Councilor Perry commented that Attorney Seewald's reputation precedes him and that he's heard nothing but the highest recommendations for him. He saluted him for his job well done for the city. The number of times she's called or emailed him, his response time and level of helpfulness has been extraordinary and it's clear to her that his interest is in representing the city, Councilor Foster confirmed.

**Councilor LaBarge moved to positively recommend the appointment of Alan Seewald, Esq. as city solicitor to the full City Council. Councilor Perry seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.**

- B. 22.020 Appointments to Boards, Committees and Commissions, referred by City Council  
- 1/20/2022

**Arts Council**

**Garrett Williams**, 4 Sunhill Drive, Florence

Term: January 2022-June 2025

*To fill a vacancy*

**Parks and Recreation Commission**

**Kelsey Flynn**, 15 Edwards Square, Northampton

Term: January 2022- June 2025

*To fill a vacancy*

**Planning Board**

**Chris Tait**, 46 Upland Road, Leeds

Term: January 2022– June 2025

*To Full Member from Associate Member to fill a vacancy*

**Trust Fund Committee**

**Jacob Dissinger**, 8 Stowell Street, Leeds

Term: June 2021- June 2024

*Reappointment*

**GARRETT WILLIAMS**

Councilor Foster reported on her phone interview with Garrett Williams. He had moved to Northampton during the pandemic, having worked as a lighting technician and gaffer in the film industry in Los Angeles and having a desire to be closer to extended family. (He had grown up in Beverly.) He had been working as an installer for Valley Solar and ended up working at Brian Foote's house, the Arts Council director. Garrett was expressing a desire to be more involved in the community. Serving as a technician working in the lighting industry is all consuming, so he was looking for a way to use his skills and background and talent and get to know people in his new community without it being all-consuming. Brian had recommended that he apply for the Arts Council, which he did.

He's currently working in Lee for a company called Limelight Productions that rents and installs lighting for other productions, so he's excited to be working back in the industry. They had a fairly open discussion about the fact that the Arts Council has seen some controversy over the last couple of months and he's really open to joining the committee and helping to work past that. After their conversation she definitely feels confident in a positive recommendation for Garrett Williams to serve on the Arts Council.

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

**KELSEY FLYNN**

Councilor Gore said she spoke to Kelsey Flynn last Thursday and she talked about how she had been involved in the Parks and Rec Department for a few years now and really enjoyed the programming they

had for her kids. She said that she would be a voice for the Parks and Rec Commission. She would get the word out because she used to be on the radio and is good at vocalizing and getting the word out about things.

**She would positively recommend her for the Parks and Rec Department, Councilor Gore motioned. Councilor LaBarge seconded.**

Councilor Perry said he would also wholeheartedly endorse Kelsey Flynn, who he's known for a number of years. She's been actively involved in their school system as part of the parent teacher organization (PTO) and he thinks she'd be an excellent addition.

Kelsey Flynn is a stellar human being and she was really excited to see her name coming forth as a referral, Councilor Foster said.

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

#### **CHRIS TAIT**

He had a nice discussion with Chris Tait, Councilor Perry related. He is being recommended for promotion from an associate to a full member on the Planning Board, and he found out that the Planning Board has seven full members and two associates and everyone has a vote. He also used to work as a consultant engineer for clients so he has been on the other side of the process. One of the coolest things for him as a self-proclaimed nerd is that he found out Chris Tait is also a zoning nerd, and he really just loves the work and has worked well with Office of Planning and Sustainability (OPS) Director Wayne Feiden and Assistant Director Carolyn Misch.

**He moved to positively recommend the appointment of Chris Tait to the Planning Board to the full City Council. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.**

#### **JACOB DISSINGER**

This is a reappointment, and committee members generally don't interview reappointments because the mayor's office has already confirmed that the individual is willing to continue serving, Councilor LaBarge explained.

**She moved to positively recommend the reappointment of Jacob Dissinger to the Trust Fund Committee to the full City Council. Councilor Perry seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.**

#### **7. SET MEETING SCHEDULE FOR 2022 – 2023**

The committee typically meets the first Monday of the month at 4 o'clock, Councilor Foster reminded. That will come up against a couple of holidays so they can always move those meetings as needed.

Councilor Perry said he had a personal conflict with 4 o'clock since he does all the transportation for all his children, so he asked if the meeting time could be pushed back to 4:45 or 5 p.m. Other members agreed.

Councilor Foster proposed moving this agenda item to the next meeting so she could confirm the adjusted time with the administrative assistant.

8. **NEW BUSINESS**

Typically 'New Business' is an opportunity to think about if there are department heads or city matters they want to consider at City Services so that she can work with Laura Krutzler to bring those in, Councilor Foster advised. If there are issues going on in the city that they want to take a look at, this is the time to bring that up.

She had asked during their last council term to invite Brian Foote to meet with them. She is still interested in learning more about the Arts Council and what supports he may need to get things back on track. Councilor Perry said he wholeheartedly endorses that idea. Being an artist himself, it would be nice to see some resolution and some work on the Arts Council after the last year. Councilor LaBarge and Councilor Gore agreed they would like to make that a priority.

Councilor Foster said she would put that request forward to the mayor's office. She added that she would like to invite DPW Director LaScaleia to come in once she has put together the paving schedules for next year so that they can learn what will be going on ward by ward.

9. **ADJOURN**

There being no further business, Councilor LaBarge moved to adjourn. Councilor Perry seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

*Prepared By:*

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