



MEMBERS

Javier Luengo-Garrido, Chair
Councilor Jamila Gore, Vice
Chair
Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Citizen
Gwen Nabad, Citizen
Councilor Garrick Perry
Cynthia Suopis, Citizen
Janna White, Citizen

City Council Select Committee to Study Barriers to Serving on City Boards and Commissions Organizational Meeting – June 23, 2022

7 - 8 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

This meeting was held by remote participation via Zoom. Instructions for how to join the meeting were included on the meeting agenda. The meeting was recorded for future review by the public.

1. **Call Meeting to Order:** At 7:00 pm Committee Chair Javier Luengo-Garrido called the meeting to order. On a roll call done by City Clerk Pamela L. Powers, the following committee members were present: Javier Luengo-Garrido, Jamila Gore, Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Garrick Perry, Cynthia Suopis, and Janna White. Member Gwen Nabad joined the meeting at 7:14 pm.

Chair Luengo-Garrido announced that the meeting was being recorded. He notes that Public Comment was not added as an agenda item because he wants the committee to weigh in on whether the committee should have public comment and what the norms will be. The Chair opened the floor for committee members to introduce themselves and to talk about what they hope to accomplish as a member of this committee.

2. **Introduction of Committee Members:**

- a. Garrick Perry is the current Ward 4 City Councilor and has lived in Northampton for the past 20 years. During this time, he has worked downtown in the service and retail industries. For the past 10 years he has worked at Bishop's Lounge. While there, he was a bar tender, security agent, manager and event planner. He is also a musician in a local band. Councilor Perry came to this area in 1997 while attending Amherst College. As a city councilor, he has interacted with community members at a whole different level. Councilor Perry has two children who attend school in Northampton.
- b. Cynthia Suopis has lived in Northampton for 35 years having relocated from the Midwest. She is retired faculty from UMass Amherst and has served on the city's Board of Health for about 10 years. In addition she is currently co-chairing a committee at Cooley Dickinson Hospital. She notes that COVID has decimated

certain demographics, such as people of color, houseless, and members of other social economic background. She is interested in making this community inclusive. She would like to improve the process by making it more welcoming, and make changes to how city hall responds to applicants. She would also like to see the process more transparent.

- c. Jamila Gore has lived in Northampton for sixteen years. She is currently an At-Large City Councilor and decided to be a part of this committee because she would like to see more inclusivity and diversity in the city—this is something that she talked about during her campaign. She notes that a lot of people who are not aware of how many boards and commissions there are in the city. She believes that this needs to change. She is looking forward to working on this.
- d. Janna White works in higher education as an administrator for the five-college consortium based out of Amherst. She attended Smith College, left for a period of time, and has been back for approximately eleven years. She currently serves on the Planning Board as the Vice-Chair and she is the Planning Board representative to the Community Preservation Committee. This past year Janna completed a Public Administration degree at Syracuse University; part of the work that she did included collaborative governance looking at how to engage the public during the public comment process.
- e. Susan (or Mara) MacDonald-Bolanos is a member of the Human Rights Commission and is a senior at Smith College studying government. The HRC focuses on inclusivity and diversity, especially as a committee member, and she is interested in seeing how this committee can work to advance this issue.
- f. Javier Luengo-Garrido is originally from Chile and has been living in Massachusetts for the past fourteen years, all of which has been in Northampton. Javier works for the ACLU in Massachusetts as a lobbyist. In western Mass he is in charge of the advocacy and works with public officials, writes ordinances, and works with state representatives to pass legislation and runs campaigns for the ACLU.
- g. Gwen Nabad lives in public housing in Northampton and is close proximity to single parents who experience various challenges. Gwen has been a single mom since she was seventeen; over the years she has seen a lot of challenges in terms of overcoming barriers. She has seen what might be considered alternatives to help others participate and she would like to contribute these ideas. One aspect might be parents' hours.

3. Minutes of Previous Meetings: Tabled until the next meeting.

4. General discussion about goals/expectations/data needed and people to invite

Goals:

- a. Explore whether people know if the boards exist. Examine how openings are publicized. Share details about how to access meetings and recorded videos via

NOM/Youtube.

- b. Examine ways to explain what investments of time and talent are required to participate on a board or committee.
- c. Examine the process of on-boarding and training individuals so that they are prepared to serve on a committee. Examine ways in which new participants can be mentored or trained so that they feel qualified.
- d. Since the public is not subject to open meeting law, explore whether there is the possibility to allow for public participation using the hybrid model.
- e. Consider what it would take to keep the remote participation available to public officials. Explore whether a home rule petition would be an option.
- f. Examine what it means that appointments are at the pleasure of the Mayor. Examine ways in which there can be wider influence about what names are put forward for consideration.
- g. Query the decision making process for appointments by the Mayor. Examine how appointments are made. Examine ways to provide greater transparency in the process.
- h. Regarding meeting participation, evaluate what other communities are doing. Examine other models to get public participation. Explore problems that other communities, such as Amherst, are having at getting the public to participate.
- i. Consider what policies would encourage more participation by a wider demographic. Compensation policy? Other?
- j. Invite community leaders (such as the Director of Community Care) to help understand how to get underrepresented populations involved in membership.

Gather Data:

- a. What boards and committees currently exist? What is their function?
- b. What openings exist for each board? Who is applying to open positions? How does the applicant pool compare to the demographics of Northampton?
- c. What are the demographics of the people who are currently serving?
- d. Gather data about how existing boards operate; what is the average amount of time per week required to serve on committee?
- e. Poll what is stopping people from joining.

Comments & Notes:

The state's remote participation legislation due to the COVID pandemic expires July 15, 2022. Chair Luengo-Garrido has been discussing with Council President Jim Nash about the possibility of a hybrid model for member/public participation.

A recent Gazette article discussed the difficulties Amherst is having at getting people to participate on committees. They seem to be struggling to get a diverse representation

of the public.

Experience by the Planning Board suggests that remote meetings have influenced public participation; more people have been participating in recent times.

It is a privilege to serve on boards: privilege of money comes with free time to participate. It is also a privilege to be able to speak freely. The demographics that this committee would like to involve to give advice to the city and to participate at a different level won't have this privilege and this needs to be recognized. There is a wide representation on this committee that will help to engage more of the community in the conversation. There is a mystique about public participation that may impact whether people will join a group.

People like to participate in things when they know that it makes a difference and they want to know that the time they spend on the committee is worthwhile. The city has the responsibility to create committees that are relevant and that the recommendations that get made by the committee will change people's lives.

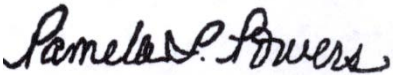
People who participate in public meetings are at times subjected to criticism or worse. Being treated poorly could be a barrier.

5. Description of the process for becoming a city committee/board member:
Tabled for a future discussion.

6. New Business: The next meeting is scheduled for June 30th from 7 pm – 8:30 pm. Chair Luengo-Garrido will send a doodle poll to plan for the meeting following the 6/30/2022 meeting.

Public comment will be added to the agenda. As soon as the agenda is posted, the Chair asks that committee members share it on social media and encourage people to participate.

7. ADJOURN: At 8:00 pm Councilor Perry motioned to adjourn the meeting; Cynthia Suopis seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 7 Yes (Nabad, Perry, Suopis, White, Luengo-Garrido, Gore, MacDonald-Bolanos), 0 No.

Attest: 
Pamela L. Power, City Clerk