



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

May 18, 2021

REPORT OF THE CONFIRMATION OF APPOINTMENTS
AND PERSONNEL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Mary Jo Rossetti	Chair	Present	
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Vice Chair	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Ward Four City Councilor	Present	
Kristen Strezo	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Sarah Lewis - Director of Planning, Nick Antanavica - Director of Inspectional Services, Anne Gill - Director of Personnel, Lauren Racaniello - Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Rossetti and adjourned at 8:16 PM on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Clingan, Strezo, Scott and Rossetti), 0 against and 0 absent.

Chair Rossetti informed the members that the next committee meeting was scheduled for May 20th. The committee will hear from OSPCD Director Proakis regarding the Urban Design Commission and will also deliberate on 5 Reserve Firefighter appointments.

208284: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Nicholas Antanavica to the position of Director of Inspectional Services.

Chair Rossetti informed Mr. Antanavica that he was free to make opening and closing statements, if desired, and would be interviewed in open session and in Executive Session and would then return to open session to conclude the interview.

Mr. Antanavica stated that is has been a privilege working for City of Somerville for the past 2 years.

Chair Rossetti confirmed that the candidate received and understood the notice of possible executive session and was willing to enter into executive session. She then made a motion to enter into executive session to review protected personnel information or to discuss matters related to individual candidates pursuant to MGL c30A s21(a)(1). That motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Strezo, Scott and Rossetti), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Clingan). The committee moved into Executive Session at 7:20 PM.

The regular meeting reconvened at 7:40 PM. Chair Rossetti announced that no votes were taken in Executive Session other than the vote to return to the regular meeting.

The committee continued Mr. Antanavica's interview and Councilor Mbah thanked him for his work and asked how far back violations are tracked. Mr. Antanavica explained how complaints are handled and said records in the database can be searched back to 2014 and that files prior to that date may be found in the street files. He noted that all background information is reviewed prior to deciding on a penalty or the amount of time that would be allowed to bring a violation into compliance. Asked about how snow removal violations are handled, he explained that CitizenServe has all of the data in one spot. Until recently, the process was mailed out from CitizenServe, but was not being received by the violator until 3 days later, so people weren't aware that they were in violation of the ordinance at the time the citation was issued. Now, a warning tag is attached to the door of the property to make violators aware of the infraction. Councilor Mbah continued his questioning and asked about public requests and Mr. Antanavica explained that during the pandemic, the department's offices were closed to the public, however, information is being issued when requested. He noted that the file repository is larger than previously thought, since many of the old files have been scanned in.

Councilor Clingan asked the candidate what he considered to be the most challenging aspect of his job and Mr. Antanavica said that it was achieving expectations. For a one-year period, there were 14,000 complaints and 15,000 inspections to be handled by only 6 inspectors. This creates a real challenge to handle the work-load with the resources available. He commented that he was proud of many actions taken by the department, e.g., working to develop a construction safety program, working to keep continuity in the department as staff leaves, improving the permitting process, and establishing a building permit checklist.

Councilor Scott commented that homeowners are frustrated with the permit process and he compared the 14,000 complaints to service calls made to investigate restaurant health code issues, rat problems, snow, trash and building code violations, etc. Mr. Antanavica estimated that complaints lean more towards the health side rather than building side of the city's codes. Councilor Scott asked what needs to happen in the department from a personnel and funding standpoint and Mr. Antanavica responded by saying that in order to handle the volume of work and provide the expected results, everything should be doubled.

Chair Rossetti spoke about problems getting updates from ISD and asked when Constituent Services will provide updates on cases. Mr. Antanavica said that weekly meetings have been established with Constituent Services and department directors are including more notes than before to items, but from a constituent standpoint, it's not realistically possible to provide updates due to the volume of items. Chair Rossetti asked if the drop down menu could include a "citation issued" choice, suggesting that this might ease residents' anxiety. Mr. Antanavica thought that to be a good suggestion and said that the departments are trying to change the drop downs.

Chair Rossetti read a question from a resident about the imposition and payment of fines. Mr. Antanavica explained that demand notices are sent 12 months after a violation occurs and if the property has a lien placed on it, the record will show that the fine is closed. Mr. Antanavica pointed out that permits and licenses are withheld if fines are due. He said that 3,972 tickets were issued over the past year. There is one inspector vacancy that is anticipated to be filled in June and 3 other positions open and posted.

Chair Rossetti also inquired about a North Street project and Mr. Antanavica said it would be appropriate to have that discussion off-line.

Chair Rossetti's motion to approve this item was approved on a unanimous roll call vote. The candidate was advised that the committee's recommendation would be before the City Council on May 27th for approval.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Clingan, Strezo

209512: Requesting confirmation of the re-appointment of Nick Antanavica as Director of Inspectional Services.

See item 208284.

Chair Rossetti's motion to approve this item was approved on a unanimous roll call vote. The candidate was advised that the committee's recommendation would be before the City Council on May 27th for approval.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Clingan, Strezo

211296: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Nick Antanavica as Director of Inspectional Services.

See item 208284.

Chair Rossetti's motion to approve this item was approved on a unanimous roll call vote. The candidate was advised that the committee's recommendation would be before the City Council on May 27th for approval.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Clingan, Strezo

211904: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Erin Geno to the Planning Board.

Chair Rossetti pointed out that there's a BioMed project coming up soon and that 1 member of the Planning Board will have to be recused, so it's important that consideration of appointments go forward so that the Planning Board will be able to achieve meeting quorums. The Board is comprised of 7 members and currently, there are vacancies for 2 alternate members and 1 full member.

Ms. Lewis introduced Ms. Geno to the committee and said that the Appointment Advisory Committee considered a wide range of qualifications as being needed to perform in this position, adding that Ms. Geno fulfills those needs. This is a 2-year position, expiring in 2023. Ms. Geno applied for the position this year.

Chair Rossetti informed the candidate that she was free to make opening and closing statements, if desired.

Ms. Geno, a Somerville resident since 2011, gave her rationale for applying for this position by saying that although her background is as a chemist, the Planning Board interests her and she wants to get more involved with some of the things she cares about, e.g., climate change, livable streets, and find ways to bring these things together.

Councilor Scott asked the candidate how closely she followed the site review processes. Ms. Geno said that she had followed them and commented that she wonders where mid and high-rise

development fits into SomerVision, i.e., does a particular deviation negatively impact the city and why is it needed? Councilor Scott pointed out that Ms. Geno was describing the work of the Zoning Board of Appeals, not the Planning Board, and went on to explain what site plan review is and how the Planning Board is involved in the process to mitigate neighborhood concerns about a development. Ms. Geno said she hasn't looked at site plan reviews in the last couple of months. She then spoke about setbacks, sun shading, GLX and parking concerns, noting that neighborhood feedback is important.

Councilor Scott commented that more often than not, residents bring a wealth of knowledge to the table. He said it's important to have an understanding of the long-term impacts of developments. Ms. Geno assured him that she would do her best to get up to speed on the issues before the Planning Board.

Councilor Mbah spoke about SomerVision and asked if it's still relevant post pandemic. The candidate replied that the pandemic changed how we think about community and how we interact. She believes that there should be more iteration on SomerVision to make it a living document, since the city is changing faster than SomerVision's plan. Councilor Mbah asked her about her architectural interest and how that would help her on the Planning Board and she said that her interest is mainly as a hobbyist. Councilor Mbah continued his questioning and asked her thoughts on transportation modalities and street design. Ms. Geno said the community has strong opinions and the challenge is how to strike the right balance, since for a lot of people, driving a car is a convenience. So the question becomes how to make other modes just as convenient.

Councilor Strezo inquired about Ms. Geno's experience as the president of her Condo Association and the candidate spoke about how difficult it is to convince people to spend money for the maintenance of their property.

Chair Rossetti's motion to approve this item was approved on a unanimous roll call vote. The candidate was advised that the committee's recommendation would be before the City Council on May 27th for approval.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Strezo
ABSENT:	Clingan

211905: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Deborah Howitt-Easton as an Alternate Member of the Planning Board.

Ms. Lewis introduced candidate Deborah Howitt-Easton who is an experienced attorney and familiar with real estate. She is currently employed by an energy services company, has an interest in renewable energy solutions and is a long-time resident of the city who raised her family here. This is a 3-year appointment, expiring in 2024.

Chair Rossetti informed the candidate that she was free to make opening and closing statements, if desired. Ms. Howitt-Easton stated that she enjoys the city and is excited to see its changes over the years.

Councilor Strezo asked to hear about her speaking engagements and how she views landlord-tenant relations, especially post-covid. Ms. Howitt-Easton said it's challenging and that she agrees with the long-term monthly payments being proposed by the current federal administration and she hopes that some relief might be generated from developments in the city.

Councilor Mbah asked about her thoughts on SomerVision, post-pandemic and Ms. Howitt-Easton replied that she likes the idea of revisiting it more frequently and especially after we're through this pandemic. She said that development should be thought of with the pandemic in mind and wonders if the impacts of how we lived under the pandemic require modifying SomerVision.

Councilor Scott said residents are frustrated when they ask for conditions and a developer comes back and says 'the numbers don't work'. He asked the candidate what her approach would be to resolve this. She said what matters to her is what the community wants and the Planning Board has to be driven by SomerVision and the city's zoning codes. Ultimately, a development has to look like what residents want it to look like. Councilor Scott said he fears that the new zoning may take as absolute, what is written, adding that the site plan review process exists to modify things and he hopes that the Planning Board will continue to inject its discretion to make developments beneficial to the whole city.

Chair Rossetti asked the candidate why she got involved with the Somerville Academy of Leadership and Ms. Howitt-Easton replied that it seemed interesting and it got people excited about public service.

Chair Rossetti's motion to approve this item was approved on a unanimous roll call vote. The candidate was advised that the committee's recommendation would be before the City Council on May 27th for approval.

Councilor Mbah submitted a motion that the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development re-evaluate SomerVision, post-pandemic, and how to mitigate the impact from the pandemic.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Strezo
ABSENT:	Clingan

211906: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Russell Pildes as an Alternate Member of the Planning Board.

Mr. Pildes was unable to attend this meeting due to illness. His confirmation hearing will be rescheduled.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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