



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, July 10, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Pineda Neufeld at 6:01 pm and adjourned at 7:00 pm with a roll call vote of all in favor (Councilor Wilson, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Burnley, Councilor Clingan and Chair Pineda Neufeld), none against, and none absent.

Others present: Morena Zelaya – OSPCD, Colin Zeigler – ISD, Elizabeth Champion, Francine Rogers, Michael Switkes, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Judy Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Jesse Clingan, Willie Burnley Jr., Kristen Strezo and Jake Wilson

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1084](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee meeting of June 20, 2023.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo and City Councilor At Large Wilson

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1075](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Elizabeth Champion to the Condominium Review Board.

Housing Policy Coordinator Zelaya talked about the Condominium Review Board's scope and purpose - for example, to ensure tenant protections when rental housing is taken off the market. She introduced Ms. Champion, who is being considered for the vacant tenant seat on the board. Ms. Zelaya noted that Ms. Champion has experience with international affordable housing policy.

Councilor Burnley asked the candidate about the impact of affordable housing on people with disabilities and to speak to disproportionate rates of evictions. Ms. Champion noted in her response that it is critical to support people through transitions. Councilor Wilson said that even after changes to the condominium ordinance, landlords will clear out tenants in violation of the ordinance, and immigrant tenants are especially at risk to be exploited and kept from official Condominium Review Board proceedings. He asked the candidate ideas for how to revise the ordinance to address these issues. Councilor Strezo asked what Somerville can do to address poverty. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate would like to accomplish on the

board. Ms. Champion said that she would like to make sure that people who want to stay in the community can do so.

In response to questions from Councilor Clingan, Ms. Zelaya said that the seat has been vacant since 2021 and needs to be filled by a renter. Some of the seats on the board have seen turnover in recent years.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Clingan, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Strezo and City Councilor At Large Wilson

3. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1064](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Francine Rogers to the Biosafety Committee.

Environmental Health Coordinator Zeigler talked about the Biosafety Committee's purpose and membership. He said that the Administration has been working in the past year to develop a new biosafety ordinance that includes a new committee structure: there will be seats for ISD, HHS, OSE, Fire, Emergency Management and Response, and OSPCD staff; as well as two community representative seats and a seat for an academic expert. Mr. Zeigler talked about Ms. Rogers' experience as a Safety Director for Tufts biology labs.

Councilor Wilson asked how many biology or chemistry lab emergencies Ms. Rogers had seen at Tufts - about 20 - and whether she feels Somerville is prepared to deal with similar incidents in industry. Ms. Rogers emphasized the registration process in her response. Councilor Wilson also asked how Somerville regulations stand both competitively and as a best practice. Ms. Rogers said that regulations need to be updated as science updates and talked about advancements since COVID. Chair Pineda Neufeld talked about plans for a wet lab on the Cambridge-Somerville border that prompted resident concerns, and asked what Somerville's role is when working with other municipalities on regional biosafety. Councilor Clingan asked how Ms. Rogers sees the Biosafety Committee's role in issues that are out of local purview but need to be addressed - for example, if potentially hazardous materials were stored on train lines near residential areas. Ms. Rogers stressed the need for an open dialogue between Somerville and federal representatives in such an event.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Clingan, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and City Councilor At Large Wilson

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Strezo

4. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1059](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Michael Switkez to the Biosafety Committee.

Mr. Zeigler explained that Dr. Switkes, program manager for the National Security and Space division of Draper Inc, is being considered for the community representative position on the committee. Councilor Clingan asked the candidate the role of the Biosafety Committee in the scenario where trains are storing dangerous chemicals close to neighborhoods and local transit. Dr. Switkes said that the committee would need to assess the level of hazard and, if hazardous, determine whether there is a better place for storage. He also talked about the need for both perceived and actual safety. Councilor Wilson asked the candidate's opinion on Somerville's biosafety regulations, to which Dr. Switkes said that safety should not be compromised to attract businesses. He added that there are practices that add cost without much benefit, and those should be avoided. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate would like to accomplish on the committee, to which Dr. Switkes said he would like to create more opportunities for biotech in Somerville.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Clingan, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Strezo and City Councilor At Large Wilson