



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, November 1, 2023

6:00 PM

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Pineda Neufeld and adjourned at 7:10 PM on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Burnley, Clingan and Pineda Neufeld), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Strezo).

Others present:

Director Christine Blais – OSE, Finance Director Ed Bean, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

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

- Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1322](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee Meeting of September 6, 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.

- Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1349](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Courtney Koslow to the Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change.

Director Blais introduced Courtney Koslow, a Somerville resident and climate activist who is a candidate for one of the two vacant positions on the commission. Twelve individuals applied for this position and Ms. Koslow was selected because of her extensive background in climate based issues and her dedication to the city. Ms. Koslow addressed the committee and said that she is driven by climate issues and uses affordable housing development to show how climate issues may be addressed.

Councilor Strezo asked about incentivizing retrofitting to create affordable housing and Ms. Koslow replied that there are differences to achieving decarbonization on smaller vs. larger projects. She said that the city could learn about funding options and explain the process to those interested in developing and, since it's difficult to find people that know how to decarbonize, the city should create a pool of developers and contractors familiar with the work. Additionally, the city could reach out to larger property owners and explain the process, pointing out that if it's done right,

it might cover the cost of retrofitting. Councilor Wilson asked about regenerative design and Ms. Koslow replied that it's more of a community process where more than just the building is used and surrounding land is used to create ecosystems. Where possible, some materials are able to be swapped out in the construction. She explained that costs can be reduced by setting the intention and talking to those who know how to perform this type of construction. Councilor Wilson asked about Community Choice Electricity (CCE) and Ms. Koslow replied by saying that many people don't understand that the city has the ability to purchase energy in bulk. Education is needed to explain how it relates to what you pay now and what its benefits are. Councilor Burnley asked about the candidate's experience with green energy and climate resilience locally. Ms. Koslow replied that she was involved with the development of all three phases of St. Polycarp Village and spoke about efforts to improve the sustainability on each subsequent phase, targeting zero net energy on phase III. Councilor Burnley asked how more can be done around green infrastructure and Ms. Koslow said stormwater is a big issue and reducing pervious surfaces and utilizing green infrastructure would allow the water to go where it's meant to. Councilor Clingan asked Ms. Koslow about curbside composting and she replied that this is something that needs to be done, adding that there is no reason to throw organic waste out since the system is already there and it reduces the city's disposal costs.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that this appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council (at its next meeting on November 9th).

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 # [23-1632](#)) Requesting confirmation of the reappointment of Linda Dubuque as City Treasurer and Collector of Taxes.

City Treasurer Linda Dubuque introduced herself to the committee and said that she has been in this position for 5 years. Councilor Wilson asked about her investment philosophy and she said it's dictated by the city's policy statement. She is a big proponent of safety first and letters of credit, which she explained as being a sort of guarantee that the city's funds would be available in the event of a bank failure. She also stated that she does not like Depositors Insurance Funds. Part of her job involves monitoring investment rates for competitiveness to get the city the most return on its money. She noted that the city is receiving Certificate of Deposit rates on money market accounts from banks. Councilor Wilson asked about collecting receipts using vendors. Treasurer Dubuque commented that the city uses a company

that does not charge bill payors a fee for Automated Clearing House (ACH) transactions, so she doesn't see that changing. Convenience fees are charged by credit card companies who set their own rates and do not provide any portion of the fees to the city. She doesn't see how the city would be able to handle this payment process in-house. Councilor Wilson asked about optimizing Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) for vendors and Treasurer Dubuque stated that there is a group that has been looking at different vendors to see what's available. As the city moves through the process, it will have to decide what it wants to accomplish and which direction to follow. Several city departments are involved in this. On a side note, Treasurer Dubuque spoke about the scholarship program saying that in 2016, a situation had been brought to light. Since then, Mayor Ballantyne has directed that the Scholarship Committee be reconstituted. Treasurer Dubuque's role is to ensure that the funds go to the schools that the scholarship recipients will be attending. Work is continuing to get the situation resolved.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that this appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council (at its next meeting on November 9th).

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

4. Mayor's Request Requesting confirmation of the reappointment of Francis J. Golden as Chief Assessor and Chair of the Board of Assessors.
(ID # [23-1635](#))

Chief Assessor Frank Golden introduced himself and said that he has been in this position since November 2019 and has a total of 24 years as an assessor.

Councilor Wilson spoke about rising residential taxes and asked the candidates views on setting rates. Assessor Golden explained that the state set the guidelines and residential properties will see rates drop when commercial value exceeds residential. Presently, commercial is driving growth and the residential rate will see the benefit of that. The percentages in the city are 70.8 residential and 29.2 commercial, and through planning, the shift is happening. He noted that the cost of the new high school is part of the debt exclusion and will result in lessening the reduction of taxes on residential property. Councilor Wilson asked about reforming the residential property tax exemption and Assessor Golden noted that only Boston has a larger exemption, adding that 55-60% of Somerville property owners receive the exemption. He also briefly commented on revaluating properties, treatment of non-profits, and PILOT's, noting that Mass General Brigham does not have a PILOT with the city - it has a 20 year agreement.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that this appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council (at its next meeting on November 9th).

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

5. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-1631](#))

Requesting confirmation of the reappointment of Michael Flynn to the Board of Assessors.

Finance Director Bean explained why the city went from electing its assessors to having them appointed. Chief Assessor Golden informed the committee that candidate Flynn was in attendance at this meeting earlier and had to leave. He told the members that the candidate has much experience and that the city is fortunate to have Mr. Flynn as an assessor

This item will be rescheduled for the next committee meeting on December 6, 2023.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

6. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-1633](#))

Requesting confirmation of the reappointment of Richard Scanlon to the Board of Assessors.

Chief Assessor Golden informed the committee that candidate Scanlon was in attendance at this meeting earlier and had to leave. He told the members that the candidate has much experience and that the city is fortunate to have Mr. Scanlon as an assessor

This item will be rescheduled for the next committee meeting on December 6, 2023.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

7. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-0439](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Michael Santangelo to the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE PLACED ON FILE**