



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, September 13, 2022

6:00 PM

Roll Call

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Pineda Neufeld at 6:02 pm and adjourned at 7:19 pm. Councilor Wilson moved to adjourn, and the motion was approved by roll call vote.

Others present: Hannah Carrillo - Mayor's Office, Cathy Piantigini - Libraries, Janaki Perera, Timothy Zessin - KP Law, Jason Piques - Law Office, Mark Sternman, Ashley Speliotis - Council on Aging, Neeraj Wadhera, Stephanie Widzowski - Assistant Clerk of Committees.

Present: Jake Wilson, City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo and Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld

Absent: Jesse Clingan and Charlotte Kelly

1. Order
(ID # [22-1459](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the City Solicitor update this Council on the 8/11/22 Civil Service Commission decision Fairchild, Matthew v. City of Somerville, and the impact on the confirmations process.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked Mr. Zessin how he would recommend the committee shift its appointment process after this decision. Mr. Zessin explained that the Civil Service Commission was trying to balance Matthew Fairchild's rights with the Council's right to review appointments. They did not state that the Confirmation of Appointments committee could not conduct a review, but there needs to be good reason when bypassing a candidate. He said that their ruling affects the scope and direction of review. He also talked about how the anti-discrimination statute and the Americans with Disabilities Act impose more restrictions on the city as a whole than Chapter 31, which is the statute referred to by the commission.

Councilor Strezo asked how much this case will cost the city, and about the viability of executive sessions. Mr. Zessin said that he could get the cost information for Councilor Strezo at another time. He also replied that the appellant would have certain rights to the discussion that led to the bypass appeal.

Councilor Wilson asked if the political considerations from the ruling refer to the stance of not approving police appointments in the wake of George Floyd's death. Mr. Zessin said that he did not know, but the fact that a councilor made that statement did not help the case. The commission's

purpose is to make sure decisions are made only based on merit. Councilor Wilson asked if the ruling leaves any sort of role for this committee in appointments for civil service commissions. Mr. Zessin said that he thought there is still a role, but that it is a “moving target”. Assistant City Solicitor Piques summarized that the Civil Service Commission will be looking for candidates to be reviewed on their own merit.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**

2. Order
 (ID # [22-0209](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Committee on Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters discuss and revise the process for reviewing appointments and re-appointments.

Councilor Wilson asked if the sequencing of the appointment process should be changed. If so, it would need to be a full City Council discussion. Councilor Strezo commented that this topic had been addressed before, and that the councilors on the Confirmation of Appointments committee make the decisions to bring to the full council. Chair Pineda Neufeld said that she preferred to make a decision on this item when all committee members are present.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

3. Mayor's Request
 (ID # [22-1087](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Neeraj Wadhra to the Council on Aging.

Dir. Speliotis spoke to Ms. Wadhra’s history in Somerville and long-time experience at Fidelity. Councilor Wilson asked the candidate what Somerville could do better for seniors. Ms. Wadhra said that her observations are limited to her visits to the Senior Center, but that there should be a choice of activities that would engage a diverse group of seniors.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Kelly

4. Mayor's Request
 (ID # [22-1512](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Lamia Mamoon to the Library Board of Trustees.

Councilor Wilson asked the candidate how libraries can continue to innovate in Somerville. Ms. Mamoon spoke to her experience in the field of biotechnology and how that informs her connections between reading and good health. She said she would like to see libraries incorporate therapy and assistance animals. Councilor Wilson asked for one lesser-known service provided by libraries. Ms. Mamoon said that device lending programs are

key.

Councilor Strezo asked one thing that the candidate would change in Somerville libraries in 5-10 years. Ms. Mamoon said that she would like to get to know the community better. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked if there are any other improvements to make, to which Ms. Mamoon suggested a mix of virtual and in-person events - as well as fun and whimsy.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Kelly

5. Mayor's Request
(ID # [22-1513](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Janaki Perera to the Library Board of Trustees.

Dir. Piantigini commented that Ms. Perera is a perfect fit for the board. Councilor Wilson asked the candidate how libraries can continue to innovate in Somerville. Ms. Perera said that the Somerville library has a program for sending resources home, but that the library should expand device lending services. Councilor Wilson asked for one lesser-known service provided by libraries, to which Ms. Perera replied with museum passes.

Councilor Strezo asked one thing that the candidate would change in Somerville libraries in 5-10 years. Ms. Perera said she would increase knowledge of current services. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked if there are any other improvements to make, to which Ms. Perera suggested a Kindle loan program.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Kelly

6. Mayor's Request
(ID # [22-1510](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Mark Sternman to the Library Board of Trustees.

Dir. Piantigini spoke to Mr. Sternman's work experience and involvement in activities around Somerville. Councilor Wilson asked the candidate how libraries can continue to innovate in Somerville. Mr. Sternman suggested libraries offer CharlieCards. He also talked about equity and how Somerville libraries can stand up for free expression - perhaps hosting forums on controversial local topics, such as safe consumption sites - in a time when some libraries are banning books. Councilor Wilson asked for one lesser-known service provided by libraries, to which Mr. Sternman replied with the myriad of services provided by libraries, such as musical instrument

lending and even tax help. Libraries should present these opportunities in a way that does not overwhelm users.

Councilor Strezo asked one thing that the candidate would change in Somerville libraries in 5-10 years. Mr. Sternman said to do as much as possible to make services available, including governmental services such as license renewal. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked if there are any other improvements to make, to which Mr. Sternman suggested bringing back periodicals.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Kelly