



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, July 2, 2024

7:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 7:00 PM by Chair Pineda Neufeld and adjourned at 7:50 PM on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Sait, Burnley, McLaughlin, Pineda Neufeld) none opposed.

Others present:

Charles Femino - Police Chief, Sean Tierney - Deputy Fire Chief, Christopher Johnson - Candidate, James M. Donovan -Candidate, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

The Committee meeting was in Executive Session from 7:39-7:48 PM.

Roll Call

Councilor McLaughlin joined the meeting at 7:05 PM.

Present: Chairperson Judy Pineda Neufeld, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr., Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait and Ward One City Councilor Wilfred N. Mbah
Absent: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0890](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee Meeting of June 11, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward One City Councilor Mbah
ABSENT: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0894](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Christopher Johnson to the position of Firefighter.

Deputy Chief Tierney Honan introduced the candidate, Christopher Johnson, and highlighted appropriate qualifications for the position of Firefighter. Including various positions throughout the city and additional safety training in electric and gas work through the National Grid that will provide extra knowledge on calls.

Councilor Mbah asked Mr. Johnson what his motivation is to work for the

fire department. Mr. Johnson responded with having aspirations since he was a child and has been working towards this for a while.

Councilor Sait asked what Mr. Johnson was most excited about, he responded he is most excited about the opportunity to learn the field and take on new opportunities through this position.

Councilor Burnley asked how long he has been on the civil service list, Mr. Johnson responded he has been on the list for 5 or 6 years. Councilor Burnley continued to ask how his previous work experience will aid in this new position. Mr. Johnson spoke to his positions having responded to calls where fire has also been present, and the call was related to electrical, or gas issues and he has knowledge on where to look for those things. Councilor Burnley asked if the candidate has worked on issues with common gas leaks, candidate said yes first year of experience of National Grid was dedicated to teaching. Burnley also asked what the last job he was in, National Grid working in electric and alignment.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked if the candidate has any concerns about the job description, Mr. Johnson responded he knows it can be a high-risk dangerous job, but experience has prepared him to respond appropriately.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on July 11, 2024.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward One City Councilor Mbah

3. Mayor's Request
(ID # [24-0895](#))

Requesting confirmation of the promotion of James M. Donovan to the position of Deputy Police Chief.

Police Chief Femino presented the candidate, James Donovan, with a brief background and his journey through the ranks with various supervisory positions held. Chief Femino highlighted recent accomplishments and among them acting as a liaison to the community make him more than qualified for this promotion.

Councilor Mbah asked what changes he hopes to bring forward in the

department. Acting Deputy Donovan replied he has seen policing change in the past 30 years and is excited to bring forth more transparency to the police department, new policies, procedures, and more accreditations. He went on to address the morale in the police department, specifically in the patrol division, and working on getting the department fully staffed.

Councilor McLaughlin spoke to the changes in morale in the police department, including turnover and asked specifically what has changed in the department and asked the candidate what needs to keep happening to bring the department into the future. Acting Deputy Donovan identified he has seen more reactive policing, becoming more attuned to the community needs from policing, and becoming more responsive in the department's efforts.

Councilor Burnley asked about homeland security grants and asked the candidate how they would work with the Council to ensure the grants being applied for align with council priorities. Acting Deputy Donovan stated as an example, the Road Safety Grant, and having the opportunity to work with Brad Rawson and the community as a special interest group. The groups had the ability to take it back to the public and give the constituents what they are asking for in a revised version. Councilor Burnley also asked as Deputy how the candidate planned to work with the future police chief, the candidate responded the ability to support the chief in their success and ability to provide historical knowledge on what the community wants and what they are looking for. As well as acting as a liaison between all departments that he has already built relationships with. Burnley also asked about policy and procedures for the department, how would he take on the role to bring new policies to the police department. Acting Deputy Donovan responded that policy reflects what the community asks for and the department must be fluid with the changing membership, this promotion would allow him to make strides towards the changes he wishes to see.

Councilor Sait asked how he plans on collecting feedback. Acting Deputy Donovan stated he enjoys attending community meetings, and specifically in their new format, allows for more opportunities of conversation with residents.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what concerns about the job description the candidate may have, he reiterated an earlier point of concern around moral and the inability to recruit new, and qualified, police officers to the

department. Chair Pineda Neufeld also asked about his philosophy on mentoring new officers. Acting Deputy Donovan responded that it is important to interact like anyone is their family and how each interaction can make an impact and perception for the rest of their lives regarding police.

The committee voted to enter Executive Session at 7:39 PM on a roll call of 5 in favor (Councilor Mbah, Sait, Burnley, McLaughlin, and Pineda Neufeld) non opposed.

The committee returned from Executive session at 7:48, Chair Pineda Neufeld explained no votes were taken.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on July 11, 2024.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward One City Councilor Mbah