



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 5, 2025

6:30 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Ewen-Campen at 6:33 pm and adjourned at 8:26 pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Sait, McLaughlin, and Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

Others present: Kimberley Hutter - Legislative Liaison, Steven Flythe - Deputy Director of the Department of Racial and Social Justice, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait, Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan and Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld

The Chair opened the meeting inviting the Councilors to ask any questions about the appointment process or the Human Rights Commission Specifically (HRC). Councilor McLaughlin opened asking what the nature of the work that is done in the HRC. Staff member Steven Flythe, Deputy Director of Racial and Social Justice (RSJ) was present to answer questions. Director Flythe first answered the question of what the HRC does by stating the commission aims to reach a space of neutral respect and understanding among all constituents, while also working to improve discourse and discrimination in Somerville through collaborative relationships with RSJ. Chair Ewen-Campen pointed listeners and members of the public to Somerville's Municode website, specifically to Sec. 2-238 where he read the functions and duties given to the HRC by ordinance.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened his own questioning by asking for clarification on how recruitment and final appointments are made within the city. Legislative Liaison Kimberley Hutter shared the HRC has their own process, through an ad hoc panel made up of current members and city staff, who do the interview process. For each open seat two candidates are recommended by the commission to the Mayor and the Mayor makes the final determination for who gets put in front of CAPM. Director Flythe elaborated on the response and shared the call for new members was out for a minimum of four weeks and was advertised through city socials as well as community events. In total the first call brought in six applicants, five were selected for a panel interview, and the three before the committee tonight were

recommended by the commission and the Mayor. Following this discussion Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked how many vacancies there are currently on the commission, Director Flythe shared maximum number of seats is 12, there are currently four and if all three are appointed tonight the body will reach quorum. Councilor Clingan asked for confirmation on quorum, Legislative Liaison shared the state's Open Meeting Law supersedes what may be written in an ordinance.

Councilor Sait asked if current members speak any additional languages skills, in response Liaison Hutter shared the city is actively working on supporting multilingual members and supporting them in this process. Councilor Sait went on to ask if candidates who were not selected spoke any additional languages, Director Flythe said the answer is not currently available. Director Flythe shared the process includes a letter of interest sharing ways in which they wish to serve and any additional qualifications or lived experiences they see fit to add.

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0095](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee Meeting of January 8, 2025.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-1699](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Jenny Bonham Carter to the Human Rights Commission.

The candidate, Jenny Bonham-Carter, introduced herself as a Somerville resident of nine years, originally from Sweden, who works in Social Work and has spent time volunteering for many interfaith, climate change, and asylum-seeking groups. Ms. Bonham-Carter shared she was approached by a current HRC member to apply for the commission.

Councilor Clingan asked the candidate their level of ability to converse with Haitian Creole residents with their French speaking skills. Ms. Bonham-Carter said she does not speak Haitian Creole but many people who speak Haitian Creole also speak French and then is able to converse.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hopes to accomplish if

she is appointed to the commission. Ms. Bonham-Carter replied any work around de-escalation, homelessness, and how to further educate the public about what human rights really mean, and everything associated with multiculturalism. Councilor Pineda Neufeld followed up asking what the candidate thinks she can bring to the HRC, Ms. Bonham-Carter shared her main objective at the start is to learn and listen but is also hoping to be hands on with whatever tasks are presented to the HRC.

Councilor Sait asked what the candidate's involvement with the HRC has been so far, in response Ms. Bonham-Carter shared she has attended a few meetings and multiple events that have been hosted by RSJ and HRC. Councilor Sait asked what connections the candidate has to the immigrant community. Ms. Bonham-Carter replied in life with children in school, within her community, and as a member of her church.

Councilor McLaughlin asked why the candidate thinks it is important to have an HRC. Ms. Bonham-Carter responded that she thinks it is important because it is an international concept and being able to address at a local level is important.

Chair Ewen-Campen asked if the candidate would be able to address complaints brought forth in an unbiased matter, and the candidate said it is a part of the responsibilities as a commissioner to remain neutral.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

3. Mayor's Request
(ID # [24-1696](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Lauren Chapman to the Human Rights Commission.

The candidate, Lauren Chapman, shared she has lived in Somerville for five years and is currently pursuing her master's at Tufts, she went on to share from lived experience of feeling excluded and how her work has been inspired by those experiences and is working to make sure everyone feels they have a safe space.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hopes to accomplish if she is appointed to the commission. In response, Ms. Chapman shared that recognizing what the needs of the community are and connecting with

residents and making them know they have people to advocate for them and their rights and not just the desires of the commission. Councilor Pineda Neufeld followed up asking what the candidate thinks she can bring to the HRC. Ms. Chapman said she wants to collaborate with more departments, for example SomerViva, to build capacity through collaboration.

Councilor Sait asked what language skills the candidate has, Ms. Chapman responded conversational Spanish. Councilor Sait asked what connections the candidate has to the immigrant community. Ms. Chapman shared through visiting the library she has made human connections with individuals utilizing the tech resources completing language courses. Ms. Chapman went on to elaborate the HRC can build connections with businesses and locations that these community members may visit and better understand the work that needs to be done.

Councilor McLaughlin asked why the candidate thinks it is important to have an HRC. Ms. Chapman responded that people who will experience hate crimes or discrimination do not have the time to serve on such bodies and having a commission built in to advocate have the voices that are available to do that for them is important.

Chair Ewen-Campen asked if the candidate would be able to address complaints brought forth in an unbiased matter, Ms. Chapman said there would be no problem carrying out that role.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

4. Mayor's Request
(ID # [24-1698](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Brian Sokol to the Human Rights Commission.

The candidate, Brian Sokol, shared his background on living in Union Square with three children and accessing services from children to elders. Mr. Bokol's work has been within vulnerable populations since 2002 after moving to this area. He highlighted work with public policy within homelessness as well as volunteering at shelters and contributing his background in technology and using data to track and drive policies. Mr. Sokol shared his interest in being a member of the HRC in bringing the high level, federal, work to a more local level in the community he lives in.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hopes to accomplish if he is appointed to the commission. Mr. Sokol shared the work to maintain the welcoming and sanctuary city status and how to ensure vulnerable populations receive the resources needed. Further elaborating he is looking to support the many other populations that are currently being targeted to continue to receive support. Councilor Pineda Neufeld followed up asking what the candidate thinks he can bring to the HRC. Mr. Sokol stated great interest in moving forward with organizational structure and strategically driving the mission through the many functions of the HRC.

Councilor Sait how asked how Mr. Sokol has been involved with the HRC so far, Mr. Sokol responded he has attended every meeting since starting the process of interviewing to be a commissioner and attended events put on by the HRC. Councilor Sait asked what language skills the candidate has, Mr. Sokol responded with none. Councilor Sait asked what connections the candidate has to the immigrant community, Mr. Sokol responded not much of a connection and is looking to get more involved and learn more.

Councilor McLaughlin asked why the candidate thinks it is important to have an HRC. Mr. Sokol said the goal is to ensure the issues happening on a micro, local scale, which are being watched and addressed.

Chair Ewen-Campen asked if the candidate would be able to address complaints brought forth in an unbiased matter, Mr. Sokol said there would be no problem carrying out that role

Following the first round of questioning Chair Ewen-Campen began dialogue directed at Mr. Sokol, referring to the candidate's active role in the community by way of written articles, attendance at community events, demonstrations, and public testimony made on various platforms. There was lengthy discussion where many questions, asked by Chair Ewen-Campen and Councilor Sait, given his history of activism in the community, if he felt he could be an unbiased member of the commission and if that would present challenges working with diverse groups. Councilor Sait referred to an email sent from Mr. Sokol prior to his appointment. The document is entitled, *CAPM - 2025-02-05 Brian Sokol Appointment (with 24-1698)*, specifically asking if the candidate felt they could defend all people while serving on the HRC. In response Mr. Sokol highlighted his hope that his presence on the HRC will not only increase the diversity of voices

represented in Somerville, but that he will aim to serve as an example to open dialogue and approach conversations in a fair and unbiased manner, regardless of an individual's political view that has been shaped through their own lived experiences.

In conclusion, Councilor Pineda Neufeld expressed her unease in evaluating candidates put before this body with materials that were either submitted by other members of the public, were searched for by other councilors on the web, or were not submitted by the candidate to be considered when being evaluated for a role as this one. The Chair shared his process in allowing such questions, and welcoming questions as such in this forum allows the Councilors to better understand who is going to be appointed to the bodies they are working on, and community work is completely relevant to serving on this volunteer-based body.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

NAY: Ward Five City Councilor Sait

5. Mayor's
Communication
(ID # [24-1726](#))

Conveying changes to the reappointment policy for boards, commissions and committees.

Legislative Liaison Kimberley Hutter spoke to a communication that was shared out with all the current members of the city's various board, commissions, committees, and their liaisons about changes to the reappointment policy. The letter sent out outlines the change to a two-term limit to introduce new voices and allow other community members the opportunity to serve. This change does not prevent current members from reapplying but, after two full terms, opens the position up to all who may be interested in applying.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked the thinking behind the order in which boards are addressed in this process and why not start with the adjudicatory boards. Liaison Hutter stated that the alphabetical order is to provide some sense of timeline and approach in an unbiased manner, if bodies reach quorum issues during this process the liaisons have been instructed to let the Intergovernmental Affairs Teams know, and they will be addressed sooner. Councilor Pineda Neufeld inquired what questions have come up since this letter has gone out, Liaison Hutter shared most have been surrounding term

lengths and when this review will happen of their own board.

Councilor McLaughlin asked why this is a priority for the administration and if this will solve the quorum and diversity issues that persist within the bodies. Councilor Clingan agreed on Councilor McLaughlin's points that this new policy may deter folks from applying, or volunteering and if this is supposed to fix the quorum and diversity issues present. Liaison Hutter clarified that no person is disqualified from applying, the two-term limit allows for others to serve on the board. This change also comes after the Mayor's staff filled 91 vacancies addressing quorum issues.

Councilor Clingan went on to ask if enabling legislation shows what the liaison should and shouldn't be doing and how it differs from commission to commission. There was no specific response to this request.

Chair Ewen-Campen closed the questions by expressing it is the job of the Mayor to make priority decisions about who is serving and there seems to be a more logical order to address this, and if someone is no longer satisfying the requirement of the role then the Mayor should remove them, at her will.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- CAPM - 2025-02-05 HRC Summary Report Email
- CAPM - 2025-02-05 Brian Sokol Appointment (with 24-1698)