



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

6:00 PM

Others present:

Roberta Cameron - Community Preservation Act Administrator, Charles Breen – Acting Chief Fire Engineer, Cindy Amara – Acting City Solicitor, Anne Gill – Director of Human Resources, Dr. Vanessa Boukili - Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner, Kimberly Wells – City Clerk, Hannah Carrillo – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Pineda Neufeld and adjourned at 9:23 PM on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Strezo, Burnley, Clingan and Pineda Neufeld), none against and none absent.

Roll Call

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

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-0255](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee Meeting of February 15, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

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

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-2127](#))

Requesting confirmation of the re-appointment of Darcy Haynes as Constable.

City Clerk Wells introduced the candidate, who has been a constable in the city since 2000.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on March 23rd.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

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.

3. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0111](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Ryan Kiracofe to the Community Preservation Committee.

Director Cameron spoke briefly about the search process and introduced the candidate. Mr. Kiracofe has been a resident of the city for 8 years. His background is in planning and developing affordable housing and he is interested in what the CPC deals with. Councilor Strezo asked for his priorities for the position and he said he would be working more on open space and recreation issues. The plan is to guide the priorities. Councilor Strezo asked for his thoughts on historic preservation in the city and he said that he has worked on adaptive projects and is familiar with the intricacies of making preservation work.

Councilor Wilson asked what position this appointment fills and Director Cameron replied that this opening was created by a member stepping down in the last year of her second term. Councilor Wilson asked the candidate what opportunities he sees in this position and Mr. Kiracofe replied that he sees CPC funds used best for as gap fill funding for affordable housing. He said that CPC can be impactful on smaller developments and noted that there are opportunities for in fill development in East Somerville. Councilor Wilson asked what proposals the candidate prefers to see get funded and how he feels about administration vs. community proposals. Mr. Kiracofe said that housing is at the top of his list. He also favors green, open and recreation spaces, greening, and cooling projects and he believes that every project should merit a serious review. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate what he's looking forward to and what challenges he sees and Mr. Kiracofe replied that housing is his #1 goal and that he's excited to see other projects as well. He sees prioritization of projects as a challenge.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on March 23rd.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

ABSENT: Vice Chair Clingan and City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

4. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0122](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Calla Taylor to the Urban Forestry Committee.

Dr. Boukili reported that there are currently three vacancies on the committee and that there are candidates on tonight's agenda to fill two of those spots. She introduced the first candidate, Calla Taylor, who is a sophomore at Somerville High School. She is interested in environmental science and preserving nature. Councilor Strezo commented on the lack of sound barriers and asked Dr. Boukili if she had any thoughts or ideas on the matter, to which she replied that the plantings near the East Somerville Stop & Shop are meant to help with air quality. Additionally, she noted that the

city is looking into other micro forest locations. Ms. Taylor said that she thinks expanding tree the planting program would be helpful. Councilor Wilson noted that is the second of two youth positions on the committee and he asked the candidate what she would like adults to understand. Ms. Taylor replied that it's important for more people to be aware of the committee and what it does and she feels that the committee's social media presence should be expanded to attract students and get them involved. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked the candidate what she was looking forward to working on the committee and what she sees as challenges. Ms. Taylor replied that she wants to learn more about the city and that she's not sure about what the challenges might be, although she did comment on the many steps that it takes to get things done in city government.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on March 23rd.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

ABSENT: Vice Chair Clingan and City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

5. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-0326](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Dorothy Suput to the Urban Forestry Committee.

Dr. Boukili introduced Dorothy Suput as a candidate to fill a seat as a general member. Her background is in regenerative agriculture and environmental policy. Ms. Suput told the committee that she's interested in the committee's work in meeting the climate change goals of the city and working to meet commercial justice issues. Councilor Wilson asked her about regenerative agriculture and she explained that it's along the lines of sustaining, maintaining and improving resources that sustain agriculture. Councilor Wilson asked about urban orchards and Ms. Suput commented that she would like to think that there's room for them in the city, but doesn't know if they could bear fruit here since it's a difficult process here in the northeast and that there could be issues with pest management. Councilor Strezo asked for her thoughts on rooftop plantings and Ms. Suput said her understanding is that it's a good thing, but there are concerns, e.g., with weight issues, and she can't speak to the exact role of them in the vegetation scheme of things. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked about what the candidate is looking forward to what she sees as challenges. Ms. Suput responded by saying that she is looking forward to learning the role of the committee and about the health and care of trees and how she can help. As for challenges, she's not sure since the committee serves in an advisory capacity.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on March 23rd.

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

6. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0060](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Cynthia L. Amara as City Solicitor.

Director Gill spoke about the 11 month process to fill this vacancy and introduced candidate, Cynthia Amara. Acting Solicitor Amara addressed the committee and said that she has past municipal government and environmental protection experience and that she enjoys the challenges of municipal law. Councilor Wilson asked why she wanted to return to the public sector and she explained that she appreciates the ability to be able to focus on the issues before her without worrying about the extraneous things present in the private sector. Councilor Wilson spoke about the two branches of Somerville's city government and asked her views regarding the City Council having its own counsel. Ms. Amara replied that she doesn't think it's wise to have separate counsel since she represents the whole city and acts in the city's best interest. Councilor Wilson asked how to approach trade offs when something might leave the city open to litigation and Ms. Amara explained that it's the policy makers who make those decisions, adding that it's her job to provide the benefits and risks within the law. The weighing of those risks belong to the policy makers and she doesn't see the city from shrinking from a challenge if it's in the best interest of the city. Councilor Wilson asked the candidate for her views about using in-house counsel vs. out sourcing and she replied that her preference is to handle as much as possible in-house. Councilor Strezo noted the candidate's real estate and hazardous waste experience and Ms. Amara said her work involved brownfields and reuse of those properties, noting that the culture of dumping waste has changed for the better. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked Ms. Amara what her biggest professional challenge was and what she learned from it. Ms. Amara replied that it occurred when executive and legislative bodies were constantly at odds with each other and she had to tell them that they had to find common ground. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked her why she chose Somerville and Ms. Amara replied that it's vibrant, changing, has diverse issues, land use issues, housing issues, has a progressive bend, entertainment, and a growing population and she wants to help the city achieve its goals.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on March 23rd.

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

7. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0059](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Charles J. Breen, Jr. as Fire Chief Engineer.

Director Gill introduced the candidate who has been an employee of the city for 37 years. She explained the selection process and said that the city hired an assessment center, with the approval of Civil Service, to assist in the process since this is a leadership position and the city was looking for various management skills. Four candidates took the assessment test and top three were interviewed for this position, with Acting Chief Breen coming out on top. Acting Chief Breen told the committee that it has been a privilege to serve the past five years as the city's provisional chief. He gave a history of the positions he held in the SFD over the past 37 years and noted that he is also a certified fire investigator. He went on to say that the Covid period was a stressful time and he's grateful for the cooperation from staff and the union to rapidly change direction when needed in order to keep everyone safe. He spoke about advocating for additional gear for firefighters, the planning required to navigate city with three bridges out during the GLX construction, advocating for a fire station at Assembly Square and rehabilitating fire stations. All apparatus has been equipped with iPads to aid in fighting fires by providing information on additional companies at or coming to the scene of an incident. Additionally, Engine 3 has been revamped to make it more maneuverable around the city. The department is always looking to increasing the diversity of staff and is taking a look at the City of Boston's cadet program. Finally, training is continuous with fire fighters going for haz/mat training, including training for dealing with battery fires.

Councilor Strezo asked when this position would be filled and what the cost is and Director Gill explained that Acting Chief Breen is the city's candidate for the position and that the city is asking for his confirmation now. Councilor Strezo asked what would happen if this item was not voted on tonight. Councilor Clingan commented that pieces of the process are missing since this is a Civil Service issue and he asked how the city arrive at nominating Acting Chief Breen for the position. Director Gill explained that it was a combination of score plus assessment, noting again that Civil Service approved of the using the assessment center. She continued by saying that the assessment center sends the scores to Civil Service, then Civil Service sends the rankings to city. That is followed by the interview process. Councilor Clingan asked why three candidates were interviewed if Acting Chief Breen was at the top of the list and Director Gill replied that the interview is an integral part of the hiring process.

Councilor Burnley asked how recruiting diverse members to the SFD is handled and Acting Chief Breen noted that recruitment comes from the Human Resources Department but he has worked on making videos in various languages, having Deputies attend career days, etc. Councilor Burnley commented that his conversations with firefighters mentioned

utilizing radio and newspaper ads to attract people to apply for positions in the department and he feels that it's important for all departments to represent the diversity of community.

Councilor Wilson asked about overtime and any policies implemented to keeping it in check. Acting Chief Breen said he's limited to what's in the collective bargaining contracts, but he's allowed to reassign personnel when necessary. Part of the problem was not being able to replace retirements, especially during COVID, but by the end of June, the department staff will be increased by 7 bodies. Councilor Wilson asked about public safety threats and Acting Chief Breen replied that bio-labs, lithium ion batteries and high rise buildings could pose challenges. He told the committee that firefighters undergo constant training to deal with these matters as well as learning about emerging new ways to deal with them.

Asked what he was most proud of, Acting Chief Breen said that it was getting through COVID with the group of people assembled by the city and that although it was stressful, the department never missed a call. His biggest challenge was learning to be patient since things don't happen overnight at the management level. Asked about his vision for the department he said that bringing the Assembly Square station online will provide the department with more flexibility and that manpower levels will continually being assessed.

Councilor Clingan asked about the sense of morale in the department and Acting Chief Breen said it's kind of low due in part to the contrition of the stations and because the department hasn't been expanding in light of the city's expansion and development. He feels that moving on these concerns should increase morale. In terms of the rank and file, he sees the relationship to be the rule of 3's, i.e., 1/3 of the staff supports you, 1/3 doesn't, and 1/3 depends on the issue. He said he's not trying to win people over, but he would like to be respected and viewed as doing what's best for the department and the city. Councilor Strezo asked what makes Somerville special to him and he replied that he loves that it's always changing, its diversity, challenges, and different type of calls.

The meeting was recessed at 8:16 PM so that the Committee could discuss this item in Executive Session. The meeting was reconvened at 9:00 PM and Chair Pineda Neufeld reported that no votes were taken in Executive Session, other than the vote to adjourn.

Councilor Strezo inquired about the conditions at some of the fire stations, e.g., repair area had no heat, sleeping quarters had no heat, employees were bitten by rats, and infrastructure crumbling and said that the Acting Chief should be screaming to get things fixed. He replied that rather than screaming, he has conversations with the appropriate departments to resolve issues. He explained that the heating system in the repair shop broke and

temporary portable heaters were installed while waiting for repair parts. He pointed out that the SFD has no control over the buildings since they come under the DPW and that he and his staff continually report problems when they arise. When things are reported to him, he makes sure that people know that they have to be addressed and he advocates for them. He went on to say that two firefighters were bitten by rats and that the trash barrels at the station have holes in them. Regarding the no heat condition on the 2nd floor of a station, he said that he was not aware of that issue. Councilor Strezo asked if he's advocating for his employees and said that she is aware that he's not the groundskeeper of the property, but that he does have a say, adding that there's a budget process to get funds to make repairs. This is nothing new and conditions were there in 2020 while the candidate was Acting Chief.

Chair Pineda Neufeld moved to approve the item. Councilor Clingan noted that the candidate has served in this capacity for five years and thinks that he has done a good job. Councilor Strezo thanked Acting Chief Breen for answering her questions and asked him to contact the City Council if there are issues that need to be dealt with.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on March 23rd.

Note: during the roll call vote on the motion, Councilor Strezo voted "Present", however Rule 23 of the Rules of the City Council does not permit such a vote, therefore, she was recorded as "Absent" for the vote.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and City Councilor At Large Strezo