



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, November 2, 2022

6:00 PM

Others present: Nicholas Salerno – Election Commissioner, Sarah Lewis – Director of Planning and Zoning, Chris Major – Assistant Chief SFD, Kathryn Gallant – Manager of Water Works – SHA, 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. The meeting was recessed at 8:12 PM and reconvened at 8:15 PM. The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 PM on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Clingan, Kelly, Strezo and Pineda Neufeld), none against and none absent.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Judy Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Kristen Strezo, Charlotte Kelly, Jesse Clingan and Jake Wilson

Committee Minutes
(ID # [22-1624](#))

Approval of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee Minutes of September 13, 2022.

RESULT: APPROVED
AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Wilson

Committee Minutes
(ID # [22-1680](#))

Approval of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee Minutes of October 6, 2022.

RESULT: APPROVED
AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Wilson

Mayor's Request
(ID # [22-1720](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Sisia Daglian to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Director Lewis introduced the candidate. Ms. Daglian told the committee that her background is in architecture and that she was a voting member of the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) in Cambridge and also served as an Assistant Building Commissioner there for 4 years. She has been practicing in her field for 25 years and has her own company in Somerville. Ms. Daglian commented that she likes following and enforcing rules and that she values being able to work for the city. Councilor Kelly asked the candidate how she would work to

make the ZBA accessible to residents and Ms. Daglian replied that there has to be consistency and logic to its decisions, taking into account precedents and support/non-support for cases. Councilor Kelly the candidate how she would use her experience to balance the requests before the ZBA and Ms. Daglian said that she's not there to advocate for architecture and that she would apply the rules to the applications before her. Councilor Kelly asked the candidate her opinion on the legal rights of property owners vs. residents coming before the ZBA and Ms. Daglian responded by saying that landowners have the ability to do much on their property and that should be respected, adding that most property owners are willing to talk over the concerns of others. She went on to say that there is only so much that can be accomplished through zoning ordinances. Councilor Kelly asked the candidate what she sees as roll of the ZBA in making recommendations regarding variances to the Planning Department and/or City Council. Ms. Daglian said the bar to acquire a variance is very high and is set by the state and she would like to get a sense of what Somerville is doing and trying to accomplish with variances. Councilor Wilson asked the candidate about her 40B experience in Cambridge and Ms. Daglian said she understands the spirit and rules of 40B and she thinks that 40B projects are difficult to stop in their tracks. Often neighborhood concerns lead to requesting the developer to make changes to address them. Councilor Wilson asked the candidate her thoughts about a developer seeking a variance to allow residents of a development to be eligible for resident parking permits regardless of the law on the books. Ms. Daglian said if it's not allowed, then it shouldn't be granted, however, in extenuating circumstances it would be worth it to look at the particulars of the case. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked the candidate what she's looking forward to and Ms. Daglian replied that she wants to get to know the city better and feel a greater sense of connection to the it. Ms. Daglian asked how often she may be called upon at the ZBA, since this is an alternate position and Director Lewis explained that alternates serve as full members but are only called on to vote when a quorum is not present. Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment to this position is not official until it is approved by the City Council.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Wilson

Mayor's Request
(ID # [22-1719](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Brian Cook to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Director Lewis presented the candidate and told the committee that he has an academic background, is willing to make compromises within the confines of regulations and is not afraid to debate the issues. Dr. Cook addressed the committee saying that he is a fairly new resident of the city and previously

lived in Worcester. His background is in public policy and administration and he has had experiences with urban planning design dimensions. He thinks that Somerville has a lot going, on which makes the position challenging, and he's interested to see how the city works to achieve its aspirations.

Councilor Strezo asked how many applications for ZBA positions were received in the past several months and Director Lewis replied that 8 applications were received for the 3 vacant positions and that the 2 candidates here tonight, plus one other who was unable to appear tonight, were the top 3 of the pool of candidates. Director Lewis said that the qualities the city was looking for were open mindedness, the ability to make difficult decisions, and independence in thinking. Councilor Strezo asked the candidate what city's quality of life looks like to him. Dr. Cook responded by saying that Somerville is an attractive place for many groups of people and young professionals and offers family-oriented activities and good schools, all of which makes for a stimulating mix. He said that there's a life to the city that makes it an enjoyable place to be. Councilor Strezo asked why he chose to apply for the ZBA position and Dr. Cook said he likes the challenges that may arise and he has the time to give to the city, which gives him the opportunity to sink his teeth into the position, plus, it fits in nicely with his interests. Councilor Strezo asked about the city's demographics and Dr. Cook answered that population of the city is mainly white with a large number of ethnic and language groups. There's an attractive distribution of age and background and the fairly high turnover, resulting from being situated close to many colleges, brings a certain life to the city.

Councilor Kelly asked how the candidate would work to make ZBA accessible to residents and Dr. Cook replied that in addition to making well-reasoned decisions, it's important to listen to citizens and developers and encourage them to articulate what they're trying to achieve. Councilor Kelly asked how he would use his experience to balance the concerns of residents before the ZBA and Dr. Cook said he would use a less formal professional approach and be able to help translate regulations to residents. Councilor Kelly asked his opinion on the legal rights of property owners vs. the concerns of residents regarding gentrification and Dr. Cook said that each case should be decided on its merits, but there should be no prejudice regarding gentrification. Councilor Kelly asked what the candidate sees as the roll of the ZBA in making recommendations regarding variances to the Planning Department and/or City Council. Dr. Cook said that decisions need to stay within the confines of state law and local ordinances and that the ZBA should be building a record of variances to show which type the city may be open to.

Councilor Wilson asked about the candidate's 40B experience and Dr. Cook said he has no experience with that but he understands that building affordable housing is a challenge. He recognizes that he's going to have a learning curve in this position. Councilor Wilson asked about his thoughts on when to prioritize city-wide good vs. local impact and Dr. Cook said that it's the ZBA's responsibility to try to convey to residents what those other concerns are, e.g., providing affordable housing as well as other impacts that may increase the quality of life in the city.

Councilor Clingan asked the candidate if he thinks that he has a read on the city overall and Dr. Cook said that he likes to keep track of what's going on here and noted that there's not a lot of open conflict in the city. He also said that he likes the way that Somerville's city government and departments work together.

Councilor Strezo expressed concern that there's a lot to learn about the community. She said that many residents are struggling and that there are many intense situations going on. She noted the large amount of displacement in this city where most residents are renters and mentioned that developers are increasing rents leading to a demographic turnover. She noted the shortage of 3- and 4-bedroom units as well as the increase in evictions. Councilor Strezo said that she is concerned that with Dr. Cook on the ZBA, there may be some nuances that he's not familiar with yet. Dr. Cook responded by saying that he's well aware of the affordability problems and he applauds the city's continuation of the eviction moratorium (which has since ended) beyond the state's ending date.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked the candidate what he's looking forward to working on and Dr. Cook said that he's wants to hear from residents and make decisions that will benefit the city.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment to this position is not official until it is approved by the City Council.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Wilson

Mayor's Request
(ID # [22-1825](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Kelly J. Cooper to the Election Commission.

Commissioner Salerno introduce the candidate, Kelly Cooper, for the Democrat position on the Election Commission and told the committee that she lives and works in Somerville and has helped in the city's polling locations since 2013 and has become a poll warden where she served honorably and professionally. Ms. Cooper told the committee that she believes in free and fair elections. Councilor Kelly asked the candidate what she thinks the goal of the Election Commission is and Ms. Cooper said that the commission should make people aware of the voting process to get them on the voting list. Councilor Kelly asked about non-resident and 16-year-old youths voting and Ms. Cooper replied that it's the commission's job to make voting as easy as possible, according to the law.

Councilor Wilson asked Ms. Cooper her view of how the city is doing with elections and she said that Somerville is very well organized and has fewer problems than other city/towns. She noted that the elections staff is provided with the tool they need to do the job.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the city could do better and Ms. Cooper

replied that making people aware that they need to respond to the census in order to keep them on the active voting roll. She would also like more election materials provided in other languages.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment to this position is not official until it is approved by the City Council.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Wilson

Mayor's Request
(ID # [22-1676](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Adeleine Mannion to the Somerville Housing Authority Board of Commissioners.

Councilor Clingan asked if this is the Mayor's position appointment and Ms. Gallant said that it was and explained that there are 5 total positions and that a posting went out to fill 2 slots. The union position will be filled later and the Governor's appointment position will also be coming up. Ms. Gallant noted that there is a resident who is presently a member of the board.

Kathryn Gallant presented the candidate, who she said is highly accredited in education and understands that housing is an important factor in helping children to learn. Dr. Mannion told the committee that she is originally from Haiti and grew up in Cambridge in public housing and she believes that she will bring diversity to the board. She has been teaching since 1997 and is aware of issues going on in public housing. Dr. Mannion spoke about the large Haitian population in Somerville's public housing buildings and would like to give them a voice. She explained that there are many undocumented people in the city who are not familiar with public housing policy and she wants to be a role model and example for them and treat all tenants fairly and equitably.

Councilor Wilson asked the candidate how the SHA can meet the needs of children and Dr. Mannion said they could provide volunteer tutoring and listen to families to find out what the needs are. Children are struggling because of the language barrier since English is not spoken at home in many cases. Many of the families are not literate, even in their native language, causing them to feel embarrassed. Dr. Mannion explained that being present and listening is the first step. Councilor Wilson asked what the biggest misconceptions about public housing were and Dr. Mannion replied that there are so many, but it's important to let people know that they can get out of their situations if they work for it.

Councilor Clingan commended Dr. Mannion for wanting to go beyond the functions of the position and asked how she would make herself accessible to residents of SHA properties and Dr. Mannion replied that she would start by being visible, listening to people, and asking what their concerns are.

Councilor Kelly asked what she sees as the Housing Authority's job in educating residents of their rights and what role she might play in keeping residents in SHA buildings from getting evicted. Dr. Mannion replied that it's

important to make them feel comfortable to talk to her and then to talk things through in simple language that they can understand as some problems may be the result of a lack of understanding the policies.

Councilor Strezo commented that some SHA residents feel marginalized and fear retaliation and she asked how those voices are heard and listened to. Dr. Mannion said that having events, with native food, in a relaxed setting where tenants feel comfortable to talk informally would be a step in the right direction.

Councilor Clingan highlighted some issues at some SHA properties, especially with respect to parking fairness and he would like to see an effort made to alleviate the parking situation. Dr. Mannion thinks that having visitor parking might help and she thinks that tenants should be involved in the parking policy discussion.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment to this position is not official until it is approved by the City Council.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Wilson

Mayor's Request
(ID # [22-1588](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Brian Langton to the position of Firefighter.

Councilor Wilson asked if any of the appointments before the committee tonight involved a bypass of the Civil Service list. Director Carrillo will provide the info.

Deputy Chief Major introduced the candidate, Brian Langton and told the committee that he has certifications as an EMT and OSHA and boat safety.

Councilor Wilson asked the candidate why wanted to be a fire fighter and Mr. Langton said that he wants to help people. His current position in the health care field requires him to be on-call and he thinks this will help him to adjust to life in the fire house. He told the committee that he tries to keep both physically and mentally fit.

Councilor Kelly asked the candidate how he sees his role in de-escalating situations and responding with trauma informed practices. Mr. Langton said that he would approach the situation with empathy, respect and support.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked the candidate what excites him and what concerns him about being a fire fighter and Mr. Langton said that he looks forward to being able to work on a team and to make an impact on a person's life. He's concerned about what he doesn't know about the job but said that he's willing to learn.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that any action taken by the committee tonight regarding this appointment is not official until approved by the City Council.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Wilson

Mayor's Request
(ID # [22-1587](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Alex Artinian to the position of Firefighter.

Deputy Chief Major introduced the candidate, Alex Artinian, who is a Paramedic Certified EMT and served in Somerville's Auxiliary Fire Department. Mr. Artinian has been living in the city for 13 years and is currently employed by Armstrong Ambulance.

Councilor Wilson asked the candidate why he wanted to be a fire fighter and he replied that no family member has served in the military, or in a police or fire department, and he thought it would be a good course of action to set an example for his nieces and nephews. Mr. Artinian said that his ambulance job has afforded him the opportunity to get a close up look at some aspects of firefighting.

Councilor Kelly asked the candidate how he sees his role in de-escalating situations and responding with trauma informed practices and Mr. Artinian replied saying that he would have to try to understand what the person going through at that time and then determine the best way to help. He commented that one thing he learned by working as an EMT is to treat people as he would want his mother treated.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked the candidate what excites him and what concerns him about being a fire fighter and Mr. Artinian said that he's aware that there is so much to learn and that he looks forward to continuing to pursue knowledge of the job. He said that he nervous about attending the Fire Academy.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that any action taken by the committee tonight regarding this appointment is not official until approved by the City Council.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Wilson

Mayor's Request
(ID # [22-1586](#))

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

Deputy Chief Major introduced the candidate, Christopher Tirrell, who moved to Somerville after his discharge from the Navy.

Councilor Wilson asked the candidate why he wanted to be a fire fighter and Mr. Tirrell replied that he missed the team atmosphere of the Navy and he has desire to make a difference. He believed that his military experience with a chain of command, pre-planned responses, and attention to detail will help him as a fire fighter.

Councilor Kelly asked the candidate how he sees his role in de-escalating situations and responding with trauma informed practices and he said that he'd

be there to help and get the situation under control using compassion and respect.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked the candidate what excites him and what concerns him about being a fire fighter and Mr. Tirrell said he's looking forward to helping people and feeling good about what he did at the end of the day and he's concerned about the unknown but ready to confront it.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that any action taken by the committee tonight regarding this appointment is not official until approved by the City Council.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Wilson

Mayor's Request
(ID # [22-1585](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Mark Scullari to the position of Firefighter.

Deputy Chief Major introduced the candidate, Mark Scullari, an Air Force veteran who still serves in the reserves.

Councilor Wilson asked the candidate why he wanted to be a fire fighter and Mr. Scullari replied that he wants to follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, who were both fire fighters, and he wants to help people. He continued by saying that this is his dream job and he believes that his military experiences with the chain of command, brotherhood, camaraderie, training, integrity, and service before self will serve him well as a fire fighter.

Councilor Kelly asked the candidate how he sees his role in de-escalating situations and responding with trauma informed practices and he said that his role is to remain professional, assess the situation, and show empathy and compassion, and to reassure the person that he's there to help.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked the candidate what excites him and what concerns him about being a fire fighter and Mr. Tirrell said he's excited about the variety of work and doing something he can be proud of. He's nervous about the calls where fire fighters are not able to help someone.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that any action taken by the committee tonight regarding this appointment is not official until approved by the City Council.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Strezo, City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and City Councilor At Large Wilson