



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 30, 2025

6:30 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Ewen-Campen at 6:02 pm and adjourned at 7:55 pm on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Pineda Neufeld, Clingan, Strezo, and Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, and 1 absent (Councilor McLaughlin).

Councilor Strezo joined the meeting at 6:03 pm.

Others present: Sarah Lewis - Senior Planner, Amanda Nagim-Williams - Director of Racial and Social Justice, Kimberley Hutter - Legislative Liaison, Cindy Amara - City Solicitor, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

Roll Call

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

Absent: Ward Three City Councilor Kristen Strezo

1. Committee Minutes
(ID # [25-0759](#))

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

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

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

ABSENT: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

2. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-0657](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Paola Mendez to the Human Rights Commission.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld opened the questioning by asking the candidate if they are involved in any Somerville specific programs, specifically with the Human Rights Commission (HRC), and the events they have attended. The candidate shared their participation in Somerville for Palestine groups, as well as their current roles as an intern and student. They also mentioned attending various training sessions focused on the available resources in the city. The councilor then asked about the pressing issues that residents are facing, to which the candidate responded that it is essential to listen to residents, provide safety, and address any concerns, particularly if individuals feel their rights are being violated. The candidate emphasized the

importance of ensuring that residents feel heard and their issues are properly addressed. Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked follow up questions about the candidate's involvement with Somerville for Palestine and whether it could distract from the work of the HRC. The councilor questioned if the candidate would use their position to promote their personal goals. In response, the candidate assured that they would focus on the work of the HRC and not allow their personal beliefs to interfere. They affirmed that they would remain neutral and prioritize the core values of the HRC, ensuring that no issue is given precedence over another. The councilor continued questions and asked whether the candidate could maintain neutrality when residents with differing views come to the HRC with complaints. The candidate reiterated that it is crucial to listen to everyone, regardless of political or personal differences, and ensure all individuals feel seen and respected. They emphasized the need to uphold the core values and norms of the HRC to guarantee fair treatment for all.

Councilor Strezo then asked if they could treat all people equally even if they disagreed with that person's political stance. The candidate responded that being open, actively listening, and building relationships in the community are key to earning trust. By fostering these relationships, the candidate believes they can ensure everyone feels heard and valued.

Chair Ewen-Campen followed up with a question about whether the candidate would find it difficult to speak out against the administration if needed, particularly during investigations. The candidate emphasized the importance of questioning those in power and ensuring transparency. They asserted that holding others accountable is essential for growth, and they would not hesitate to speak up when necessary to maintain integrity and promote accountability within the commission.

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 Three City Councilor Strezo

3. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0656](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Salma Kazmi to the Human Rights Commission.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

4. Mayor's Request Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Suelin Chen to the Human Rights Commission.
(ID # [25-0655](#))

Director of Racial and Social Justice (RSJ) Nagim-Williams provided an overview of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the ongoing recruitment efforts to keep the commission a functioning body. She explained that the recruitment process for the current candidates included an applicant pool of 17 individuals and multi-round interviews. These interviews focused on assessing the candidates' understanding of the HRC, their advocacy work, and what they hoped to contribute to the commission if they were recommended to serve. The process also involved collaboration with staff and current commission members. Councilor Strezo raised a question regarding why some candidates had submitted resumes while others had not. Director Nagim-Williams clarified that candidates were allowed to submit either a resume or a letter of interest. Legislative Liaison Hutter further explained that the requirements vary across boards and commissions, and some allow candidates to submit a statement of interest instead of a resume. Multiple options can be helpful for individuals who may not have professional experience but can still demonstrate their potential during the interview process.

The questioning from the committee began with Councilor Pineda Neufeld asking if the candidate had been involved in any Somerville-specific organizations. The candidate responded that they are actively engaged in the community, organizing neighborhood book clubs and being involved in the parent community. The councilor then asked what events the candidate had attended related to the HRC. The candidate shared that they have attended several open monthly meetings and are focused on understanding how the commission functions, especially as it re-establishes quorum. The candidate emphasized that ensuring all residents have their human rights protected is their primary goal in interviewing for the commission. Councilor Pineda Neufeld followed up by asking what pressing issues residents are facing. The candidate acknowledged that there are many important issues, but their focus entering the commission is on finding common ground and establishing group norms for collaboration with the commission, the city, and other stakeholders. They stressed that the ability to collaborate effectively is vital at the outset.

Councilors Pineda Neufeld and Strezo also asked the candidate about their statement on "dehumanizing beliefs." The candidate explained that society and upbringing influence individual beliefs, and their personal journey has

involved deconstructing their own belief system, including challenging hierarchies and biases. They emphasized the importance of being able to identify and call out such dehumanization when it occurs. Councilor Pineda Neufeld closed her questioning by asking how the candidate would handle a complaint of unconscious bias within the commission. Later, Councilor Strezo asked how the candidate would address an act of dehumanization occurring in the community. The candidate replied that addressing such issues is inevitable and that it is essential to set strong communication norms and provide non-violent communication training to ensure productive conversations. They noted that disagreements within the community are natural, and the focus should be on maintaining respectful dialogue, correcting behaviors, and learning from each other.

Chair Ewen-Campen whether the candidate would find it difficult to speak out against the administration during investigations. The candidate stated that while it may be challenging, questioning power and authority is necessary for holding others accountable. They emphasized the importance of setting strong communication norms within the commission and bringing their training into these conversations, ensuring that all members focus on creating an open, respectful environment for addressing complaints and fostering learning.

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 Three City Councilor Strezo

5. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-0654](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Primrose Chareka to the Human Rights Commission.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld opened the questioning by asking the candidate about their involvement in the community, their attendance at events related to the Human Rights Commission (HRC), and the pressing issues residents are currently facing. The candidate shared that they are a member of the Somerville Museum and have attended various community events, one of which included a Somerville Police Department (SPD) gathering. This event, which featured representatives from families and communities, was an eye-opening experience for the candidate, as it highlighted the animosity between residents and police officers. They noted that seeing the SPD engage with the community and showcasing available resources had a

significant impact on how they view the department and the importance of accessible information and resources within a community. In response to further questions from the councilor, the candidate emphasized that trust and belief in others' experiences, particularly regarding bias, is crucial. They stressed the importance of speaking with others to gain clarity before taking any action.

Councilor Strezo asked the candidate how they believe the city can work together to create a more open community and whether they would be able to defend all people. The candidate responded by highlighting that isolation is a significant issue and that to build community, there needs to be more interaction. They advocated hosting events that have a diverse participation, allowing people to come together, feel safe, and engage with one another. The candidate acknowledged that not everyone will agree or get along but stated it is individual to one to find a community. They also suggested utilizing online resources to help promote community events and ensure more people are informed and able to attend. Additionally, the candidate reiterated their belief that human rights should be viewed as a universal concern and everyone should have the same rights.

Chair Ewen-Campen asked a similar question regarding investigations, specifically whether the candidate would find it difficult to conduct investigations as part of the commission. The candidate responded that they would not find this difficult and expressed appreciation for the passionate individuals working in the city. They noted that there are multiple avenues through which issues can be addressed in an appropriate manner, highlighting the importance of addressing concerns effectively while maintaining respect and professionalism.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

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

6. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0653](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Jovana Calvillo to the Human Rights Commission.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

7. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0732](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Martin Pavlinic to the Urban Design Commission.

Senior Planner Sarah Lewis provided an overview of the Urban Design Commission (UDC), explaining that it is an advisory body to the Planning Board (PB), focusing on design review. The UDC is composed mainly of professionals from the design and architecture fields. The candidate being interviewed is filling the vacant landscape architecture position, and there are still two alternate positions available, which are listed on the Somerville website.

Chair Ewen-Campen began the questioning by asking how the candidate approaches design in a city where residents often have varying opinions on what is aesthetically pleasing. The candidate responded by acknowledging that beauty is subjective, and emphasized that the role of the UDC is to encourage designs that are personally beautiful while also adhering to the guiding documents set out by the commission. As trained professionals, they can offer valuable input on the best direction to take in design decisions or better material choices, which the general public may not always understand or be aware of.

Councilor Strezo then asked the candidate, who is a lifelong resident, about their thoughts on the changes that have occurred in the city's appearance over time. The candidate reflected that it has been fascinating to observe the transformation of Somerville, particularly noticing who has moved in or out, and how different areas have evolved. They mentioned that these changes have made the city feel like their own forever home. Councilor Strezo followed up by asking how the candidate envisions making parks more accessible in future designs. The candidate emphasized that all public spaces should be completely accessible. They stated that in future designs, there should be no reason why accessibility would not be a primary consideration, ensuring that public spaces are welcoming to everyone and serve the needs of the entire community.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

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

8. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0404](#)) Requesting confirmation of the re-appointment of Sean Browne as Somerville Housing Authority Police Officer.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

9. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0403](#)) Requesting confirmation of the re-appointment of Michael De Bethencourt as Somerville Housing Authority Police Officer.
RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE
10. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0402](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Alfred William Rymill III as Somerville Housing Authority Police Officer.
RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE
11. Order (ID # [25-0757](#)) By Councilor Strezo
That this City Council convene in Executive Session with relevant departments, to discuss the interaction between the Commission for Persons with Disabilities and Racial and Social Justice Department and to receive an update on what steps and goals have been established to resolve the disconnect between both parties.
RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- CAPM - 2025-04-30 SHA Memo re SHA Police 4-28-2025_Redacted (with 25-0404, 25-0403, 25-0402)