



## CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

March 16, 2021

### REPORT OF THE CONFIRMATION OF APPOINTMENTS AND PERSONNEL MATTERS COMMITTEE

| Attendee Name                   | Title                    | Status  | Arrived |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------|---------|
| Mary Jo Rossetti                | Chair                    | Present |         |
| Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott | Vice Chair               | Present |         |
| Wilfred N. Mbah                 | City Councilor at Large  | Present |         |
| Jesse Clingan                   | Ward Four City Councilor | Present |         |
| Kristen Strezo                  | City Councilor at Large  | Present |         |

Others present: Sarah White - OSPCD, Dr. Vanessa Boukili - OSPCD, Doug Kress - HHS, Tom Galligani - OSPCD, Ellen Collins - HR, Lauren Racaniello - Legislative Liaison,

Rose Durham - Clerk of Committees, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Rossetti and adjourned at 7:49 PM on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Clingan, Strezo, Scott and Rossetti), 0 against and 0 absent.

#### **204679: Requesting the re-appointment of Denis Chagnon as an Alternate Member of the Historic Preservation Commission.**

Senior Planner Sarah White introduced Mr. Chagnon and said he has been a member of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) for several years and his experience has been invaluable. Mr. Chagnon said that he has enjoyed being on the commission for the past 15 years and that his service has provided him with a municipal perspective that has helped him in his work as a landscape architect. Councilor Mbah asked what project he's particularly proud of and Mr. Chagnon said that it was Cremin Playground. Councilor Scott asked if he found that he wasn't able to come to a consensus with some people on preservation and Mr. Chagnon replied that it has occurred with some developers who weren't willing to discuss options. Councilor Strezo asked the candidate if he wanted to share anything from a landscape perspective and he commented that the HPC doesn't have the purview of making minor changes to landscape designs, so he focuses more on how the overall project fits into the neighborhood. Councilor Clingan asked Mr. Chagnon what he thought about the 12-month demolition delay period and he replied that he thinks it strikes a good balance, but if developer is willing to wait for however long, then the delay period is ineffective. The problem, he said, is to find the breaking point. Chair Rossetti asked if he sees any areas for improvement and Mr. Chagnon said the biggest would be those aspects where a developer doesn't want to work with the

HPC. He said that strides have been made over the past 15 years. Chair Rossetti thanked all who were involved in preserving parts of the old Somerville High School.

Chair Rossetti moved for approval of the item.

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| <b>RESULT:</b> | <b>APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]</b>           |
| <b>AYES:</b>   | Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Clingan, Strezo |

**211030: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Leah Grossman to the Urban Forestry Committee.**

Dr. Boukili introduced landscape designer Leah Grossman to the committee and said that she would be a good fit for the Urban Forestry Committee (UFC) and that she has been attending meetings as a member of the public for the past several months. Ms. Grossman stated that she is excited about the possibility of joining the UFC. Councilors Clingan and Scott thanked her for volunteering her time and Councilor Mbah asked her about her internship in Toronto and Ms. Grossman explained that it provided her with some relevant experience in urban design, adding that some aspects from Toronto could be applied to Somerville. Chair Rossetti asked Ms. Grossman about her involvement with *Landscape Perspectives for Future Publics*, (mentioned on her resume) and she explained that she was an event organizer for a student landscape architecture organization at the University of Virginia and she, along with others, brought together a panel of 9 diverse young landscape architects to discuss race in public space and how that manifests itself in the City of Charlottesville. Chair Rossetti asked a question submitted by a constituent about pollinators, ecosystems and native plants and Ms. Grossman stated that all are important to have in urban spaces because cities have been drastically changed to be cities and not country sides. She believes that pollinators are extremely important to support the ecosystem and the food system as well as providing opportunities for education about ecosystems.

Chair Rossetti moved for approval of the item. The candidate was advised that the appointment would still have to be approved by the City Council.

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| <b>RESULT:</b> | <b>APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]</b>           |
| <b>AYES:</b>   | Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Clingan, Strezo |

**210953: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Christopher Spicer Hankle to the position of Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission.**

Director Kress introduced Christopher Spicer Hankle, who has been an active and inactive member of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and said that he has been a dedicated volunteer and would be a great addition to the commission. Mr. Spicer Hankle said that the HRC stands as an aspirational achievement and has served the people of Somerville well. He believes that all people need to be treated with respect and said he would approach the position as such, with the awareness of his being a white male. Councilor Mbah asked if he thought that the structure of the HRC was meeting its expected purposes and goals and Mr. Spicer Hankle replied that the commission can do more than just act symbolically and needs a full commission to provide follow through with issues. Councilor Clingan thanked him for stepping up and being an activist in human rights issues and Councilor Scott appreciated the passion that the candidate brings to the table. Chair Rossetti, noting that Mr. Spicer Hankle is fluent in Spanish, asked him to reach out to the city's population of non-English speakers to make them aware that the city is here to help them. Mr. Spicer Hankle said that he has already begun

to do so in his daily dealings with residents that he encounters. Councilor Strezo asked about his plans for recruitment and community engagement, and he replied that we should be imaginative and create events that would be enjoyable. He also said that the virtual ability to get people together should be utilized.

Chair Rossetti moved for approval of the item. The candidate was advised that the appointment would still have to be approved by the City Council.

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| <b>RESULT:</b> | <b>APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]</b>           |
| <b>AYES:</b>   | Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Clingan, Strezo |

**210753: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Christine Stone to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority.**

Mr. Galligani introduced Christine Stone as a long-time resident of the city who would be a wonderful addition to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA), filling a critical niche, to round out the Authority. Ms. Stone said she applied for the position in 2019 and is happy to be here tonight. She has watched the city grow in both good and bad ways and is passionate about volunteering and wants to help the city continue to grow. She has a financial background that she feels would be helpful in this position.

Councilor Scott spoke about the role of the SRA in revitalization and demonstration models and asked if she had experience in demonstration models and Ms. Stone responded that she did not. She thinks that transparency needs to be maintained and she is willing to work with whatever model is selected. Councilor Scott asked about civic buildings and space as well as mixed modal development and asked about her mixed modal experience. Ms. Stone related that she represented a client in a project in Boston and she explained the various uses and how that project could be sustainable. Councilor Scott asked the candidate to confirm that she is not working on the Boynton Yards or the 15 McGrath Highway projects and she said that although her employer owns both parcels, she is not involved with day-to-day decisions involving those projects, however, as a partner, she is invested in them. To the extent that any SRA projects are involved with or adjacent to either of those projects, she would have to recuse herself. Councilor Mbah asked what challenges she sees to take the city to the next level, and she said family affordable housing is an issue for people in the middle, i.e., those who are not wealthy or who are not legacy residents. She said that once that is achieved, everything else will follow. People want to stay in the city, and many aren't able to. Councilor Clingan said that Ms. Stone's financial background will bring a unique perspective to the SRA. The candidate said she has been following the Winter Hill redevelopment discussions and had identified the former Star Market property as a development opportunity for the city. She said a successful project needs transparency and all stake holders should be heard. Chair Rossetti asked Mr. Galligani about possible conflicts of interest and he said he was aware of the potential and if there are any concerns, steps will be taken not to put Ms. Stone in a compromising position. He said that situation it's easily avoidable.

Chair Rossetti moved for approval of the item. The candidate was advised that the appointment would still have to be approved by the City Council.

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| <b>RESULT:</b> | <b>APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]</b>           |
| <b>AYES:</b>   | Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Clingan, Strezo |

**206240: That the Administration establish an independent task force to look into hiring more minorities in various departments, most especially the Fire and Police Departments.**

Councilor Mbah spoke about the Employee Demographics chart and said that the hiring percentages were unacceptable and asked what the plan of action is going forward and Ms. Racaniello explained that the administration wants to bring in the Racial and Social Justice (RSJ) Director to contribute to the next steps. Councilor Strezo asked about the city's hiring freeze and Ms. Collins said that some positions are being filed. Councilor Scott spoke about the chart and the difficulty in pulling apart the data and asked to have the raw data provided to him for analysis. Ms. Collins explained that the city has a policy of hiring from a diverse pool of candidates, adding that the Human Resources (HR) Department tries to fill positions as quickly as possible. She asked that the Council help HR to reach out to people about available jobs in the city. Councilor Scott spoke about creating structures that sustain diverse hiring and he is looking forward to discussions of how to create them. Councilor Mbah commented that there's a lot that can be done before the RSJ person comes on board and he asked about the creation of an equity task force. Ms. Racaniello said that the administration wants to be mindful to include the RSJ person in all discussions that will fall under his/her purview. This item was marked as 'work complete' initially but after Councilor Mbah stated that he was conflicted about that disposition, the item was marked as 'kept in committee'.

Chair Rossetti asked that the March 12, 2021 vacancy list be assigned an item number so that the committee may discuss it at its next meeting.

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| <b>RESULT:</b> | <b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b> |
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**206939: That the Administration create an equity task force to look at the city's hiring practices for all city positions and boards/commissions.**

See 206240. This item was marked as 'work complete' initially but after Councilor Mbah stated that he was conflicted about that disposition, the item was marked as 'kept in committee'.

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| <b>RESULT:</b> | <b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b> |
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**Referenced Material:**

- FY21 Vacancy List Update 3.12.21 (with 206240, 206939)
- Resume - D Chagnon - (with 204679)
- Somerville Police Department roster 03.12.2021 (with 206240, 206939)
- Council Request - Employee Demographics - 12 March 2021 (with 206240, 206939)