



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 31, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Pineda Neufeld at 6:01 p.m. and adjourned at 7:35 p.m. on a Roll Call Vote: 4 in favor (Councilors Strezo, Burnley, Clingan, Pineda Neufeld), 0 opposed, 1 absent (Councilor Wilson).

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Daniel Coughlin – Candidate for Appointment to the Historic Preservation Commission; Denise Price – Candidate for Appointment to the Historic Preservation Commission; Colin Curzi – Candidate for Appointment to the Historic Preservation Commission; Doris Jenkins – Candidate for Appointment to the Urban Forestry Committee; James E. Torres – Candidate for Promotion to Police Sergeant; Hannah Carrillo – Legislative Liaison; Wendy Sczechowicz – Preservation Planner; Charles Femino – Chief of Police; Sarah White – Senior Planner, PPZ; Vanessa Boukili – Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner.

Roll Call

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

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-0517](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee Meeting of March 28, 2023.

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

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0795](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Daniel Coughlin to the Historic Preservation Commission.

Preservation Planner Sczechowicz introduced the candidate, stating that they currently own a condo in Somerville in a historic district and has a background in commercial and residential architecture.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a question written by Councilor Wilson: “How do you determine whether a property has historical significance?” The candidate replied that they would consider whether the building is located in a historic district, and if the application is to demolish the building, whether that building is over 75 years old and if more than

50% of its surface area would be demolished.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a second question written by Councilor Wilson: “When do you feel a potentially historic property in close proximity to transit should be preserved?” The candidate replied that they would make those determinations on a case-by-case basis balancing the important need to preserve the history and character of Somerville against the need to provide for the city’s future and growth.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a third question written by Councilor Wilson: “Do you see a role for the Historic Preservation Commission in helping to expedite the process of considering local historic district creation requests?” The candidate replied that they believed the Commission could play a big role in expediting those requests.

Councilor Clingan thanked the candidate for their willingness to serve on the Commission, and noted that the candidate should be aware that there can be a political element to the role. Councilor Clingan expressed support for the candidate.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hoped to accomplish if appointed to the position. The candidate replied their goal would be to maintain the character of Somerville that they have come to love, while at the same time balancing the consideration of other important policy issues like sustainability, affordable housing, and development.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on June 8, 2023.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Wilson

3. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-0793](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Denise Price to the Historic Preservation Commission.

Preservation Planner Sczechowicz introduced the candidate, who has experience as a real estate broker and contractor in Somerville, and who also lives in a local historic district property and has done work on historic properties around the city.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a question written by Councilor Wilson: “How do you determine whether a property has historical significance?” The candidate replied that they would first determine if the

building is more than 75 years old, and then engage in research to determine its historical significance.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a second question written by Councilor Wilson: “When do you feel a potentially historic property in close proximity to transit should be preserved?” The candidate replied that Somerville residents invested considerably in expanding public transit in the city, but that the historic significance of a building should be carefully considered before it is altered to accommodate further growth.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a third question written by Councilor Wilson: “Do you see a role for the Historic Preservation Commission in helping to expedite the process of considering local historic district creation requests?” The candidate replied that historic districts are important in preserving the city’s character, and that it would be important for the Commission to participate in keeping those requests moving forward.

Councilor Clingan expressed support for the candidate.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hoped to accomplish if appointed to the position, and the candidate replied that they would like to see the Historic Preservation Commission Award reinstated to commend city residents who have worked hard to restore their historic properties.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on June 8, 2023.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Wilson

4. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-0792](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Colin Curzi to the Historic Preservation Commission.

Preservation Planner Sczechowicz introduced the candidate, who has experience as a municipal employee and has been involved in real estate and environmental sustainability.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a question written by Councilor Wilson: “How do you determine whether a property has historical significance?” The candidate replied that they would consider the building’s appearance, whether it is historically and culturally significant, and what it means to the city.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a second question written by Councilor Wilson: “When do you feel a potentially historic property in close proximity to transit should be preserved?” The candidate replied that there needs to be a balance regarding transit-oriented development, and noted that buildings can have significance and value to Somerville residents as navigational landmarks.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a third question written by Councilor Wilson: “Do you see a role for the Historic Preservation Commission in helping to expedite the process of considering local historic district creation requests?” The candidate replied that they do see a role for the Commission in that process, particularly as the Commission itself grows.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hoped to accomplish if appointed to the position. The candidate replied that they would make sure the Commission considers the navigational relevance of buildings when making decisions regarding historical significance, noting that the value of a building is also derived from its connection with residents.

Councilor Clingan expressed support for the candidate.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on June 8, 2023.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Wilson

5. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0831](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Doris Jenkins to the Urban Forestry Committee.

Dr. Boukili introduced the candidate, who is a Massachusetts certified arborist and an engineer with experience in climate resiliency and green infrastructure.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked the candidate how they found out about the Urban Forestry Commission and how they came to be involved. The candidate replied that they have lived in Somerville for a number of years, and that they work professionally with municipalities and their urban forest committees. The candidate added that they learned of Somerville’s Committee because they are interested in increasing the tree canopy cover in their own neighborhood.

Councilor Clingan asked if the candidate would recuse themselves in

situations where their employer might be involved, and the candidate replied that they would, and that they have spoken to their Human Resources Department regarding the same prior to submitting their candidacy.

Chair Pineda Neufeld conveyed Councilor Wilson’s strong support for the candidate, and noted that they are a certified arborist. Chair Pineda Neufeld then presented the candidate with a question written by Councilor Wilson: “What role do trees play in keeping our city cooler during our increasingly hot summers?” The candidate replied that this topic is something that arises in the daily context of their employment, where they analyze urban heat islands and how those islands disproportionately affect minorities and underserved communities. The candidate continued that one of their goals would be understanding the ways tree canopy cover can be increased in Somerville in a sustainable way.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked if the candidate had considered ways that the community could become more engaged in caring for newly planted trees, which often do not survive due to drought conditions. The candidate replied that they would like to see increased youth engagement, and that Somerville could explore a program similar to one that exists in Cambridge, where high school and college students are paid to ride bikes around the city during the summer months to water the trees, which raises awareness for green job opportunities and provides a valuable service to the city at a low cost. Councilor Clingan expressed support for such a youth program for watering trees.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked the candidate if they had any additional goals or ideas for their work on this Committee, and the candidate replied that they would also bring their experience in stormwater utility to bear on their role, which would provide the Committee with insight into potential infrastructure projects.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on June 8, 2023.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Wilson

6. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-0882](#))

Requesting confirmation of the promotion of James E. Torres to the position of Police Sergeant.

Chief Femino introduced the candidate, who has served with the Somerville Police Department since 2015 as a Patrol Officer, has a Master’s Degree in

Criminal Justice and a 40-Hour Certification in Crisis Intervention. The candidate has also received several awards, including two life-saving awards, and is well respected by his peers.

The candidate stated that they have lived in Somerville for the past 14 years and that they enjoy living and working in the city and raising their young family as members of the community.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a question written by Councilor Wilson: “What is something that you picked up in crisis intervention training and de-escalation training that you use on a regular basis in your job right now?” The candidate replied that in crisis situations, the main goal is to slow things down and get the person the resources they need.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked about the candidate’s approach to traffic violations by bicyclists, and the candidate responded that most often those interactions are about educating the cyclist because many times they are not aware that they cannot, for example, ignore red lights. The candidate added that issuing citations in those situations is not common.

Chair Pineda Neufeld presented the candidate with a second question written by Councilor Wilson: “In light of the national discussion regarding police misconduct, have you even been in a position where you have witnessed misconduct, and if so, what did you do about it?” The candidate replied that they have not been in such a position, but that if they were to witness any misconduct, they would find it completely unacceptable and immediately intervene and report it to a supervisor.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked the candidate what they are most looking forward to about the position, and what worries them the most. The candidate replied that they are looking forward to continuing the efforts of the Somerville Police Department regarding compassionate policing, and to inspiring their fellow officers to be the best police officers they can be. The candidate indicated that they are not worried about any aspects of the position, and would adjust to the additional responsibilities of their supervisory role.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what draws the candidate to Somerville and what makes them want to serve the city. The candidate replied that they love Somerville for its diversity, its great restaurants, its convenient location, and because of the overall vibe of the city.

Chair Pineda Neufeld moved to enter executive session at 7:15 p.m. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of: 4 in favor (Councilors Strezo, Burnley, Clingan, Pineda Neufeld), 0 opposed, 1 absent (Councilor Wilson).

The Committee returned from Executive Session at 7:33 p.m. No votes were taken in executive session except the vote to adjourn.

Chair Pineda Neufeld informed the candidate that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on June 8, 2023.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

NAY: City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Wilson