



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

February 5, 2020

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	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One City Councilor	Present	

The meeting was held in the Sub-Committee Room and was called to order by Chair Rossetti at 6:02pm and adjourned at 8:10pm.

Others present: David Shapiro - Law; Ellen Collins - Personnel; Frank Golden - Assessing; Angela Allen - Purchasing; Linda Dubuque - Treasurer/Collector; Luisa Oliveira - OSPCD; Kushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Kimberly Wells - Assistant Clerk of Committees

Approval of the January 22, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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204521: Requesting the appointment of Francis J. Golden as Chief Assessor and Chairman of the Board of Assessors.

The Chair introduced the members of the Finance team, with the exception of Ed Bean, who was unavailable. She noted that several of the items are repetitive, as some appointments were never confirmed prior to re-appointment. Councilor Scott commented that Assessor Golden has successfully used his network to find candidates for the Board of Assessors and asked about how Assessing refers issues to the Inspectional Services Department (ISD). Mr. Golden shared that Somerville is a "653 community" for permits, which means the value is argued as of June 30. The bill file is closed around June 1 and the department must estimate where each permit will be as of June 30. There are three assessors that share 100 or more maps, and ISD can help determine the true percentage of work completed as of a particular date. Assessing would not be aware of the permitted work, and does not fine properties based on permits, that would be the purview of ISD. With the proximity of residences in the City, neighbors are often policing each other. The new growth is phenomenal as it stands. Councilor Scott noted that for the re-assessment process, there have been huge increases in the last few years. Mr. Golden trusts the Assistant Assessors to handle abatements by map. He will conduct field work and ask questions if he disagrees, and the public has a right to appeal the decision to the Board of Assessors. There is a

further appeal that can take place as well to the Appellate Tax Board. The new growth projections tend to be conservative; last year it was underestimated by \$1M. This is particularly the case when construction can take place throughout a mild winter. Mr. Golden stated he anticipates \$10M in revenue this year.

Councilor Mbah wondered how the department ensures that the process is fair throughout the City. Mr. Golden noted that the Vision software will offer five comparable sales within a close proximity, and is pretty accurate. If there are complaints, he will take the three closest property sales and conduct a fee-simple appraisal, which may help or hurt. Assessing is a year behind the market, so FY21 will look at CY19 sales. The department never wants to have an assessment greater than 100%. Councilor Clingan wondered whether complaints come from both high and low assessments, and they do. Mr. Golden would like to see assistance to connect property owners struggling to pay tax bills to potential renters. The Chair noted that the Office of Housing Stability is starting some similar programs but has difficulty reaching the target constituents.

Chair Rossetti wondered why Mr. Golden had worked in so many municipalities. He responded that he sought better jobs to consistently improve his professional position. The field is changing and technology is important now, and will be linked to GIS and other online processes. Mr. Golden noted that the volume in this City is intense and he continues to work to improve his skills. Chair Rossetti added that Mr. Golden was calm and patient in answering her many questions during budget session and thanked him for his work. She encouraged him to work more with the senior population.

RESULT:

APPROVED

209511: Requesting confirmation of the re-appointment of Frank Golden as Chief Assessor.

See 204521

RESULT:

APPROVED

204906: Requesting the re-appointment of Angela Allen as Purchasing Agent.

The Chair pointed out that a re-appointment does not typically necessitate a resume. Ms. Allen has worked for the City since 2008 and in the role of Purchasing Director since 2010. Councilor Scott thanked Ms. Allen for her work on the Wage Theft Ordinance and asked if she also worked on the School Committee contracts. Broadly speaking, all contracts that the Mayor must sign cross her desk, but there are some agreements that may be prepared by the Law Department. The Purchasing Department office does not conduct the procurement for school supplies and services, that is processed through the School Business Office, but the department does work with them to ensure that all purchases are compliant with the relevant laws and processes them into the financial software system. Ms. Allen clarified the written contract threshold (which must be signed by the Mayor, as the only officer who can bind the City into a contract). Anything under \$10,000 does not require a contract. Ms. Allen suggested that this threshold be raised from \$5,000 to align with the state's threshold, which is an efficiency that she is proud of. There is a purchase order required for smaller items to maintain a record for transparency. Councilor Scott asked about the status of the initiative to receive online unsealed bids and it is still in progress. There is not a software to allow this that is cost effective, and the vendors must opt-in and pay a fee. The Commonwealth is making progress in this area, which will hopefully bring the cost down for municipalities. Bid Express is the platform, and the bid package would be posted on their external site, which can be linked through the City's website. Anyone can view it; payment is only required to submit a bid. Because of this payment threshold, the City cannot require that the system be used. There are also challenges with the formatting to enable a PDF that can be used as the public document.

Councilor Clingan wondered whether Ms. Allen could streamline anything further, and she is a member of MAPPO and actively works to share ideas and issues with colleagues. There is a constant challenge with the number of regulations that must be followed, which are important but can be resource-consuming. Ms. Allen recently took steps to remove the requirement of the Clerk's seal, which has made processes more efficient. Councilor Clingan asked about the staffing and there is currently a vacancy of the Assistant Director position. Ms. Allen echoed Mr. Golden's sentiment that the volume in this City is immense and it is exciting, but more staff could always be utilized to help with new initiatives, such as vendor recruitment and retention, training, and documenting diversity efforts. Councilor Clingan asked about the process once the Mayor signs a contract and at that point it is considered fully executed, a purchase order is attached, and it can be used by the department. Ms. Allen also added that a contract cannot be signed unless the funds can be encumbered.

Chair Rossetti asked for more details about why the Assistant Director position was vacant since last summer and Ms. Allen noted that many candidates were interviewed, an offer was accepted and an extension requested, which was granted, and then another extension was requested until April, which was not feasible, so the hiring process has begun again. Councilor Mbah asked for an update on how inclusive and diverse the contracts are. Ms. Allen shared a commitment to diversifying the vendor pool. The Supplier Diversity Office's website provides resources, and the department has conducted workshops with the Operational Services Division to market this to Somerville businesses. She suggested that the Councilors could share information about the certification through their newsletters and outreach to expand the pool. Chair Rossetti thanked Ms. Allen for her work, particularly around the Wage Theft Ordinance.

RESULT:	APPROVED
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205937: That the Director of Purchasing inform this Board of how it monitors the gender and ethnicity/race of employees of City contractors in compliance with “good faith” efforts as specified in the City’s procurement guide.

Ms. Allen met with Councilor Hirsch on this item in May, and clarified a statement within the procurement guide on what data are collected. The guide will also be further updated this year.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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207404: Requesting confirmation of the re-appointment of Angela Allen as Purchasing Agent.

See 204906

RESULT:	APPROVED
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209493: Requesting confirmation of the re-appointment of Angela Allen as Purchasing Agent.

See 204906

RESULT:	APPROVED
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206978: Requesting the appointment of Linda Dubuque to the position of City Treasurer

and Collector of Taxes.

Councilor Scott congratulated Ms. Dubuque on the new online payment system and commented that the department is very customer-facing and wondered about the communications process. Ms. Dubuque noted that anything must go through the Office of Communications before it can be disseminated. Councilor Scott noted that a communications position was added to the Engineering division and it has enabled more responsive and relevant communication and relationship building and wondered if the Treasurer/Collector's office could benefit from something similar. Ms. Dubuque responded that the primary focus is collections, and a paralegal is focused on assisting those in need, particularly seniors. Ms. Dubuque noted that her responsibility is to the City, and most rates are set by law, so while the office can recommend alternative financing options, there is limited room to address hardships, but they will work with anyone to avoid properties being put into tax title, a process which covers about three and a half years. Ms. Dubuque has the goal to increase e-billing and use of technology to decrease costs (such as those of mailings). An additional staff member to process payments would probably be more useful than a communications position. She is also looking forward to the first experience being fully staffed since she joined the office. Councilor Scott also asked about streamlining constituent requests and Ms. Dubuque is constantly emphasizing the importance of great customer service through all avenues - at the window, on the phone, and via email. There are many new employees and there is constant training and coaching, including creating documents for FAQs and organizing shadowing and information sharing for new staff to foster a positive experience.

Councilor Mbah clarified that most of the public information requests are published on the website, so constituents can be directed there for efficiency. Councilor Clingan wondered why so much of the staff is new and of the three clerical staff - one was promoted to a newly created role from a part-time role, one moved to another office within the City, and there was a retirement. Ms. Dubuque clarified that customer service is not a problem, but it remains a top priority as it is so important. Many customers are very thankful for the department's work and the office has a great relationship with the community. Chair Rossetti thanked Ms. Dubuque for her service, particularly for her willingness to be flexible and make sacrifices during the budget process.

RESULT:	APPROVED
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209517: Requesting confirmation of the re-appointment of Linda Dubuque as Treasurer/Collector of Taxes.

See 206978

RESULT:	APPROVED
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205473: That the Director of Personnel provide information on which positions that work less than 20 hours per week receive pension credit and health insurance.

Chair Rossetti shared Ms. Cooper's response that except for some Boards and Commissions, there are no part-time positions that work less than 20 hours per week that receive pension credit and health insurance. Ms. Collins clarified that the exceptions are just the elected officials, who are classified differently and paid monthly, but the assumption is that their work hours average more than 20, though they may be variable. Councilor Clingan wondered if any retirees get credit for municipal service, and Ms. Collins will look into that further.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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209594: Director of Personnel responding to #205473 re: pension credit and health insurance for employees working less than 20 hours per week.

See 205473

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

207511: That the Administration meet with the Committee on Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters to discuss the implications of designating every commission's members as Special Municipal Employees.

Chair Rossetti noted that there were a number of individuals on various Commissions and Boards that applied for this designation and she wondered if it made sense to apply more globally.

Mr. Shapiro noted that all members holding the same position must hold the same designation. For example, one member of the School Committee could not be a Special Municipal Employee, it would need to be all members if any. The designees must comply with all ethics requirements, but have areas where they get more flexibility (to contract with the City, or be a municipal employee). Chair Rossetti shared the Commissions that already have the Special Municipal Employee designation. It is a lengthy list: Affordable Housing Trust Fund; Arts Council Board; Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change; Conservation Commission; Design Review Committee; Ethics Commission; Historic Preservation Commission; Housing Authority; Human Rights Commission; Municipal Job Creation and Retention Board of Trustees; Redevelopment Authority; School Committee; SomerPromise Board of Trustees; and Zoning Board of Appeals.

Attorney Shapiro reminded the Committee that under MGL Chapter 268A Section 20, there may be certain exemptions for particular individuals, but these are only for specific instances. Individuals with the designated status may need to obtain additional approvals for certain actions.

Councilor Mbah asked when this concept came into effect and it dates back to at least the 1990s. Councilor McLaughlin noted that his concern with allowing every Commission and Board member to be a Special Municipal Employee is that it might hurt the diversity and participation to have the same individuals serving on multiple bodies. Councilor Scott agreed and added that it is also unhealthy to have all Board and Commission members also serving as municipal employees, and there are some cases where residency may hurt or hinder the ability to remain unbiased.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

208666: Requesting that Urban Forestry Committee members be designated as Special Municipal Employees.

Ms. Oliveira noted that a number of members of the Committee have specialty knowledge, and there is a benefit from members with expertise so the request is to not have to limit them from their ability to consult or conduct other work within the City. The arborist has resigned, and it will be difficult to attract another, as they are employed by companies who do work in cities all across the Commonwealth. Councilor Clingan wondered if that individual would return if the Special Municipal Employee designation is granted, and Ms. Oliveira noted that a vacancy would have to be available on the Committee. Councilor Clingan clarified that the Senior Urban Forester is the staff to the Committee and the Urban Forester and Landscape Planner does substantial work with them as well, so the need for that expertise is not clear, and refraining from requiring the positions to be experts will allow for further diversity of ideas. There is one landscape designer required through the ordinance, and the current member filling that role has expressed that she may also step down if her firm is awarded business in the

City. The other role required is in the field of urban forestry. Chair Rossetti noted that this is a new Committee and she would like to offer the opportunity for other residents who are passionate about the subject to join, and this can be revisited in the future if the Committee is not successful in filling the roles. Ms. Oliveira noted that the value of an arborist or landscape architect should not be understated, as the Committee is specifically to work with trees. Ms. Webber added that it is not the case that members can simply recuse themselves from decisions.

Councilor Scott added that the purpose of Board and Commissions is to provide a breadth of experience that is not possible to find among City staff.

RESULT:

NOT APPROVED