



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 6, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Pineda Neufeld at 6:00 p.m. and adjourned at 8:11 p.m. on a Roll Call Vote: 5 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Strezo, Burnley, Clingan, Pineda Neufeld), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Hannah Carrillo – Legislative Liaison; Adrienne Pomeroy – ADA Coordinator, Department of Racial and Social Justice; Francis Golden – Chief Assessor; Christine Blais – Director, Office of Sustainability and Environment; Christopher Spicer – Co-Commissioner, Somerville Human Rights Commission; Richard Scanlon – Candidate for Appointment to the Board of Assessors; Michael Flynn – Candidate for Appointment to the Board of Assessors; Alexis Washburn -Candidate for Appointment to the Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change; M. Michael Shaps – Candidate for Appointment to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities; Nick Altschuller – Candidate for Appointment to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities; Sheila Tracy – Candidate for Appointment to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities; Murshid Buwembo – Candidate for Appointment to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities; Laurie Brandt – Candidate for Appointment to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities; Ingrid Schneider – Candidate for Appointment to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities; Helen Corrigan – Candidate for Appointment to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

Roll Call

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

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1774](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee of the Whole Meeting, of November 30, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

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

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1633](#)) Requesting confirmation of the reappointment of Richard Scanlon to the Board of Assessors.

Director Golden introduced the candidate as a retired assessor from Billerica who has been on the Somerville Board of Assessors for many years.

Candidate Scanlon stated that they have been on Somerville's Board of Assessors since 2018, and retired from their position in Billerica in 2021.

Councilor Wilson asked about the value of having a Board of Assessors, and the candidate replied that it creates a good working relationship among the assessors, as well as allows them to get in touch with each other quickly and easily when necessary.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on December 14, 2023.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

3. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1631](#)) Requesting confirmation of the reappointment of Michael Flynn to the Board of Assessors.

Director Golden introduced the candidate as a career assessor who has spent his entire career working in Massachusetts, and who teaches assessing courses at UMass.

Candidate Flynn stated that they were first appointed to Somerville's Board of Assessors in December of 2006, and that they are currently also on Chelsea's Board of Assessors and a consultant for Quincy.

Councilor Wilson asked if there was anything to add regarding the benefit of having a three-person Board of Assessors, and Candidate Flynn responded that most cities do have Boards consisting of three people, and that this current Board has the benefit of having worked together for many years.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on December 14, 2023.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

4. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1763](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Alexis Washburn to the Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change.

Councilor Wilson asked how many positions were open on the Commission, and Director Blais responded that this candidate would fill the last remaining vacancy.

Director Blais introduced Candidate Washburn as the Northeast Regional

Director for the Emerald Cities Collaborative working to promote economic inclusion, who also has an MA in Urban and Environmental Policy from Tufts and has shown tremendous enthusiasm for joining the Commission.

Candidate Washburn added that their work at the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources was heavily focused on climate change, and that they have been following federal policy to better understand how it will impact communities at the local level.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what Candidate Washburn hoped to accomplish if appointed to this position, who responded that increasing communication and engagement with the community to build a better understanding of climate change and how each individual can have a role in improving it.

Councilor Wilson asked how we can build a broader climate coalition in Somerville, and the candidate replied that it would be crucial to create a common understanding among people around the ways that environmental improvements can also lead to other quality of life improvements, such as healthier living.

Councilor Wilson asked about regulating building emissions in Somerville from an equity perspective, and the candidate replied that it is a challenge that some communities within the city may not understand how a regulation like that can impact them, and explained the importance of being careful in how the regulations are designed and implemented, noting a necessary regulatory distinction difference between a hospital that operates continuously as compared to a traditional commercial building of the same size, for example. Candidate Washburn added that implementation of such regulations should also be sensitive towards affordability and equitable compliance timelines.

Councilor Clingan expressed support for the candidate and their qualifications for the appointment.

Chair Pineda Neufeld expressed support for this candidate's approval.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on December 14, 2023.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

5. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1771](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of M. Michael Shaps to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

Coordinator Pomeroy began by explaining that these candidates are before the Committee tonight because the Commission increased its membership size in June 2023, and these candidates would be filling the vacancies created by that expansion, creating a Commission with a total of 13 members.

Coordinator Pomeroy introduced the candidate as a Somerville resident who has been a school psychologist for 30 years, has a disability and a son with a disability, and that they are now looking to leave their role as a school psychologist.

Candidate Shaps also noted that they worked with homeless people for many years, including many who were elderly and had disabilities.

Councilor Strezo asked if the candidate has ideas on ways to connect special needs families with students in Somerville schools with the Commission, and Candidate Shaps replied that the most important way is to give these families a feeling that they are being heard, and that things like feelings of isolation and language barriers can come in the way of that.

Councilor Wilson asked about the role of the Commission, and the candidate replied that its role is to make sure the city follows laws protecting people with disabilities, and also to improve the lives of people with disabilities who live in Somerville. Councilor Wilson also asked what an easy thing the city can do to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Somerville, and the candidate replied that outreach from the city to that community would be highly beneficial in creating awareness.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hopes their impact will be if appointed to the Commission, and the candidate replied that they are simply happy to have an opportunity to give back, and will be able to do even more when they learn more about the way the Commission operates.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on December 14, 2023.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

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

6. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-1770](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Nick Altschuller to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

Coordinator Pomeroy introduced the candidate and stated that they have lived in Somerville for four years, and their oldest son has dealt with a

health issue that has helped them better understand disabilities and the resources available to persons with disabilities, which has inspired them to use their experience as a journalist to improve communication for the Commission.

Councilor Strezo asked how the city can unite families with children who have disabilities, and the candidate replied that simplifying communication so parents of children with disabilities are on the same page.

Councilor Wilson asked about the candidate's view of the Commission's role, and the candidate replied that it should be for advocating for access and equity so that everyone has an even playing field.

Councilor Wilson asked about an easy thing the city can do to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Somerville, and the candidate replied that streamlining communication would benefit parents of children with disabilities regarding the options available to assist their children.

Councilor Wilson asked what is a fairly easy and straightforward thing the city can do to improve the community for persons with disabilities, and the candidate replied that improved communication would also help with this, and could help those people have a better awareness of the resources available to them.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hopes their impact will be if appointed to the Commission, and the candidate responded that they hope to be able to educate parents and people with disabilities who need resources the best ways to go about obtaining them.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on December 14, 2023.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

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

7. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-1769](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Sheila Tracy to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

Coordinator Pomeroy introduced the candidate as a lifelong Somerville resident who has a family member with a disability that requires the use of a wheelchair, and as a founder of the Somerville Games.

The candidate added that their disabled family member was also nonverbal, causing the candidate to devote a substantial portion of their life to helping

persons with disabilities. Candidate Tracy also noted that they were the City Treasurer for Somerville for about 10 years and have a good sense of how municipal government works.

Councilor Strezo asked about the candidate's thoughts on what the city is currently doing well and what could be improved with regard to street design and mobility limitations, and the candidate replied that there have been issues with development and the closing of sidewalks, which can make it difficult or impossible for people in wheelchairs or with other mobility limitations to get around.

Councilor Wilson asked the candidate to explain the creation of the Somerville Olympics and the candidate's role in it, who replied that it was a way for Somerville residents with disabilities to participate in something similar to the Special Olympics, but who could not otherwise do so because the Special Olympics has competitive entry requirements.

Councilor Wilson asked about the candidate's view of the Commission's role, and the candidate replied that the Commission should have an advocacy role, and that they look forward to being a part of developing what that means as a member.

Councilor Wilson asked about an easy thing the city can do to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Somerville, and the candidate replied that the city could include consideration of people with disabilities when evaluating development proposals.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hopes their impact will be if appointed to the Commission, and the candidate responded that they will bring the benefit of their lived experience to help bring the disabled community into planning decisions that are made within the city.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on December 14, 2023.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

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

8. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1768](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Murshid Buwembo to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

Coordinator Pomeroy introduced the candidate as a lifelong advocate for persons with disabilities with international experience in disability advocacy, and who is an Ambassador on the Somerville Arts Council that

also works at Home Depot.

The candidate added that they are from Uganda and has had a disability since the age of 3 when they were diagnosed with polio. The candidate added that they were also a politician and policymaker in Uganda.

Councilor Strezo asked what the candidate would like the next generation to know about building cities that better include persons with disabilities, and the candidate replied that they would tell them to make people with disabilities more involved in the planning process, and also to eliminate the “medical model” of categorizing persons with disabilities as “sick” and needing hospital treatment, for example, and instead use the “inclusion model,” which assumes persons with disabilities are healthy and deserving of the same treatment and benefits as everyone else.

Councilor Strezo asked the candidate what they think the city can do better regarding street design, and the candidate replied that the city could be more inclusive in its design process, and one way to do that is to understand the needs of the community from a data-driven approach.

Councilor Wilson asked about the candidate’s view of the Commission’s role, and the candidate responded that the Commission should have a role in networking and facilitating inclusive research.

Councilor Wilson asked about an easy thing the city can do to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Somerville, and the candidate replied that there should be additional activities in the city for persons with disabilities to bring members of the community together.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hopes their impact will be if appointed to the Commission, and the candidate replied that their impact would be to bring the benefit of having a disability for 44 years, and to use it to create networks with other communities that can bring benefits back to Somerville.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on December 14, 2023.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

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

9. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1767](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Laurie Brandt to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

The candidate was present at the beginning of the meeting, but was not when this Item was called. Coordinator Pomeroy later indicated that the candidate would be unable to return to the meeting.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

10. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-1766](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Ingrid Schneider to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

Coordinator Pomeroy introduced the candidate as a Somerville resident of 13 years who is living with multiple sclerosis, and who is a mother of two boys, one of whom is on the autism spectrum.

Councilor Strezo asked what the city could do to improve mobility, and the candidate replied that although the sidewalks have improved over the years, construction and the location of construction vehicles can make it difficult for those with mobility disabilities to get around.

Councilor Strezo asked about the candidate's views on connecting the Commission with other parents of students with disabilities to help them get the resources they need, who replied that the most important thing is for these families to have visibility and to not feel alone, and that connecting parents of children with autism would be a very important way the Commission could help alleviate that.

Councilor Wilson asked about the candidate's view of the Commission's role, and the candidate responded that its role should be focused on inclusion and community interest so people feel less alone, perhaps through encouraging volunteering.

Councilor Wilson asked about an easy thing the city can do to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Somerville, and the candidate said something as simple as being mindful of neurodivergent children when planning public events, for example, by being mindful to minimize excessively loud noises that can overstimulate those children at those events.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked what the candidate hopes their impact will be if appointed to the Commission, and the candidate replied that a major goal would be connecting parents of children with autism to increase community engagement.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on December 14, 2023.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

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

11. Mayor's Request
(ID # [23-1765](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Helen Corrigan to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

Coordinator Pomeroy introduced the candidate as a former at-large member of Somerville's Board of Alderman who served for 10 years, and that during that time they served as the liaison between this Commission and the Board. Coordinator Pomeroy added that the candidate has two disabilities and would like to serve on the Commission to collaborate and serve people with similar experiences.

Candidate Corrigan added that they were on the Board of Alderman when the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed, and that it really opened their eyes to the many things that could be done to help people with disabilities in Somerville. Candidate Corrigan also added that during this very meeting they have learned more about the importance of supporting children with disabilities and hope to work on that as a member of the Commission.

Councilor Wilson asked if the City Council should have a liaison with the Commission, and the candidate replied that not only should it, but that they believed it was a requirement, and that such a liaison would be very important for the Commission to bring concerns to the City Council, and vice versa.

Councilor Wilson asked about the candidate's view of the Commission's role, and the candidate replied that there needs to be more awareness about the Commission itself and what it can do for persons with disabilities, and that, for example, many people do not know how to obtain handicapped parking placards. Thus, the Commission's role should be increasing awareness in the community of the resources to which disabled persons have access.

Councilor Wilson asked about an easy thing the city can do to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Somerville, who replied that there should be more careful consideration of the locations of handicapped parking spaces.

Councilor Clingan expressed strong support for the Commission and all of the candidates who will be joining it.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on December 14, 2023.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

12. Order
(ID # [22-1597](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Kelly
That the Director of Racial and Social Justice present an update to this Council on efforts to hire an Executive Director for the Human Rights Commission.

Legislative Liaison Carrillo stated that the focus of the department is on recruitment, but no additional information is available at this time. Chair Pineda Neufeld asked about the number of vacancies on the Commission, and Legislative Liaison Carrillo replied that there are twelve positions and that only one is currently filled.

Councilor Wilson stated that, to the extent the delay in hiring for this position is based on the development of a strategic plan, perhaps it is the lack of an Executive Director that is facilitating the lack of that plan.

Councilor Burnley expressed strong support for filling this position, and noted that one role this person will fill will be to begin the process of developing the civilian police review board recommended by the city's consultants in this Committee's most recent meeting.

Councilor Wilson and Chair Pineda Neufeld sponsored Christopher Spicer, who expressed strong support for hiring an Executive Director for the Somerville Human Rights Commission, noting numerous instances of human rights violations in Somerville and Massachusetts more generally in support.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**