



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

7:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 7:01 PM by Chair Pineda Neufeld and adjourned at 9:11 PM on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Sait, Burnley and Pineda Neufeld), none against and 1 absent (Councilor McLaughlin). Councilor Sait arrived at 7:16 PM.

Others present:

Steve Cary - Planner, Ben Demers - Senior Planner, Neha Singh – Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Anne Gill – Director of Human Resources, Cindy Amara – City Solicitor, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Judy Pineda Neufeld, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr. and Ward One City Councilor Wilfred N. Mbah

Absent: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin and Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait

- Committee Minutes (ID # [24-1026](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee Meeting of July 2, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward One City Councilor Mbah

ABSENT: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

- Mayor's Request (ID # [24-1232](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Lynn Richards to the Planning Board.

Planner Cary introduced the candidate and gave a brief summary of her background. Ms. Richards, a self described code wrangler, told the members that she recently started her own consulting business which allows her the time to serve on the Planning Board, if confirmed. The candidate was asked to give her thoughts about balancing housing and community needs with development, best practices, site approval, special permits and challenges unique to Somerville.

Ms. Richards said that Davis Square is under utilized, some rehabs are under construction for almost a year and that strategies are needed to complete them on time. Making a third unit affordable, she believes, is preventing developers from creating that 3rd unit. She also commented that a

motorized vehicle policy is needed for the community path. Having worked in over 200 communities, she noted that mistakes are made and that one way to avoid those mistakes is to get everyone on board and heading in the same direction, to go into the community and talk to people who are unhoused, to make relationship with churches and to develop a 100 day agenda. She also believed that participants in public participation should be paid. Ms. Richards noted that she has found examples of red tape that should be cut down to streamline processes and that the zoning code feels long, bulky and overly complicated.

The candidate noted the importance of thinking creatively, saying that research has found that although something may be allowed by code, best practices need to be applied to avoid unintended consequences. She said that Somerville is doing a lot of things right, but it can do better by building on its successes. Ms. Richards told the members that she doesn't have an agenda but she would like to deal with land speculation to reduce the degree of it. She said that she views challenges as opportunities, especially with any new markets coming in, adding that redevelopment opportunities are there.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on October 10, 2024.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward One City Councilor Mbah

ABSENT: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

3. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-1226](#)) Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Courtney Brunson to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority.

Senior Planner Demers introduced the candidate and gave brief background. Ms. Brunson told the members that she feels comfortable with federal and state policy making, but that she's not that familiar with local policy, however she's excited about the opportunity to make a difference.

The candidate noted that, in this position, she will need to balance a lot of considerations and will try to preserve the resident/families/culture in the city. She spoke about having the SRA act as a lease holder. Ms. Brunson commented that she would like to attend a few meetings to get the pulse of the city and she wants to be pro active to create opportunities.

Asked about closing the racial wealth gap in the city, the candidate said she thinks there are ways to narrow it by working for individual families, adding

that the SRA is more focused on community wealth. She spoke about finding ways to protect people so they can stay in their homes and said that she is excited about the pro activism in the city.

Ms. Brunson said she has some ideas about eminent domain but noted what is legally possible vs. what is appropriate. She commented that certain areas have not been getting the effort and time needed to help them develop and that the SRA should exercise its powers to not leave neighborhoods behind, adding that it's not about when it acts, but rather how it acts.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on October 10, 2024.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, City Councilor At Large
Burnley Jr., Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward One
City Councilor Mbah

ABSENT: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

4. Mayor's Request
(ID # [24-1170](#))

Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Shumeane Benford to the position of Chief of Police.

Director Gill introduced the candidate and spoke of his 30 years in the public safety field as a police officer. The candidate has a range of experiences that will help him to make the Somerville Police Department into what the community wants.

The candidate spoke about programs being resource driven, operational needs in urban centers, having conversations with the mayor and city government, engaging the community to build trust and transparency. He said that he wants to lead by example and to be out in the city, having open and candid conversations with the community.

The Chief was asked about the Ferguson protest and he responded by saying that during the height of the protest, officers were put on the line who didn't understand the protesters' passions and he tried to educate officers about why it was important to provide service in an equitable manner. He went on to speak about having conversations about disenfranchised communities and noted that although he had a diverse work force, they didn't have a platform to be heard, so he made an outlet available to them to express their thoughts.

The Chief said that he has seen the city's Police Study and is open to how the department can implement the most important and appropriate recommendations, adding that he favors having conversations on the front end to reach common goals. He spoke about what Jurisdictional Point of

Contact (JPOC) grants could provide to the city, noting that it's not just about terrorism.

The candidate spoke about his leadership style and said that he welcomes inclusiveness in the decision making process. He has attempted to meet with every officer and staff member in the department to get their input, and he plans on meeting with the community. He wants to submit an 18 month plan and noted that no job is above or beneath him. He performs his duties to achieve the greatest good. He applied for this position because the job posting spoke about some of the things that were hallmarks of his career and because he feels that Somerville is dynamic and vibrant and he believes that he has the skills to help usher it into the 21st century.

The Chief said that the opioid crises affected all neighborhoods of Boston and he spoke about working with public health staff there. He stated that law enforcement has to be a stakeholder in the conversation, but doesn't have to be the lead, adding that he wants to think about ways to engage with the community and have conversations with groups throughout the year to bring the community into the problem solving process.

Asked about his worst day on the job, Chief Benford replied that one of the worst was watching the death of George Floyd saying that it was heartbreaking and went against the police oath and human decency. He commented that after that incident it was difficult to convince people that police were equitable.

The committee recessed at 8:53 PM to enter into Executive Session to discuss item #24-1170.

The Committee reconvened at 9:05 PM.

Chair Pineda Neufeld reported that no votes were taken in Executive Session other than the vote to adjourn.

Chair Pineda Neufeld explained that the appointment would not be official until it is approved by the City Council at its next meeting on October 10, 2024.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Pineda Neufeld, City Councilor At Large
Burnley Jr., Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward One
City Councilor Mbah

ABSENT: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin