



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

January 12, 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	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Rossetti at 6:00pm and adjourned at 7:39pm.

Others present: Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Lauren Racaniello - Mayor's Office; George Proakis - OSPCD; Sarah Lewis - OSPCD

Approval of the December 3, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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209705: Requesting confirmation of the re-appointment of Orsola Susan Fontano to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Mr. Proakis shared that Ms. Fontano has served on the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) for many years and is a trusted advisor. She has served as Chair for many years and also owns two small businesses. She has Chaired the ZBA through a key transition with the new Zoning Code, as well as during the pandemic, and has been integral to the Board's success.

Chair Rossetti confirmed that there is a vacant alternate position on the Zoning Board of Appeals. Ms. Fontano shared that it is a privilege to serve and be considered for re-appointment. The opportunity to work with different City departments and many neighbors has been enlightening and rewarding. She looks forward to a growing Somerville with the new Zoning Ordinance. Chair Rossetti confirmed that Ms. Fontano's record of attendance is strong, and Mr. Proakis could not recall a missed meeting in 11 years. Ms. Fontano clarified that she missed one when she broke her leg. She emphasized that serving on a Board is an important role, which she prioritizes, and attendance is important to the team's decisions.

Councilor Scott clarified that Ms. Fontano has served for 17 years (since 2004), and 5 years as Chair. He noted that the role of the ZBA has changed, even in the last few years, adding that there have been some contentious cases, and asked how Ms. Fontano approaches neighborhood input and

accountability for developers. The candidate shared that there is great neighborhood participation, through meetings and emails, and she values that and wants to hear what people have to say. If something is important to someone, they should make it known. She tries to make as many site visits as possible, and welcomes participation at meetings. Councilor Scott noted that the format of the ZBA meetings often excludes the public, aside from their allotted two minutes to speak, which causes frustration. He asked the candidate for any improvements that she would suggest to address this. Ms. Fontanto noted that she recommends using email to share lengthy opinions and questions, as well as continued attendance and meetings, and she also keeps the public process open as long as possible and encourages feedback, as the ZBA is there to listen. She suggested that with the by-right additions to the new ordinance, there may be more time available for discussion.

Ms. Fontano also noted that the ZBA is not involved in enforcement, and does not know whether the conditions were violated until a complaint is filed. Councilor Scott asked about offering forgiveness when conditions are disregarded and the candidate was emphatically against it. She would prefer that Inspectional Services (ISD) or other departments fine the violators. Ms. Fontano also noted that some things are beyond the ZBA's control and she is most concerned with doing what is best for the neighbors. Councilor Scott elaborated that now, more than ever, the laws must apply to all people. He expressed appreciation for the ZBA's continued vigilance in holding applicants to the conditions outlined. Councilor Mbah thanked the candidate for her communication with Councilors and her work on the ZBA.

Chair Rossetti shared that she is impressed with the candidate's dedication and hours devoted to this work, and commended her communication with the Councilors. She added that there are instances where the meetings are very long, and that the members (along with Planning Board members and possibly others) should receive training on the Open Meeting Law and best practices for running a meeting. Chair Rossetti added that she appreciates Ms. Fontano's passion for the City and is blown away by her attendance record.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Clingan, Strezo

211063: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Tim Talun to the Urban Design Commission.

Mr. Proakis noted that there are three individuals serving on the Interim Urban Design Commission (UDC) in place currently, approved in February. The goal is to increase the size of the UDC to a completed five person membership, to better facilitate the ability to achieve a quorum. There are currently three members appointed, with a three member quorum, and one member is recused on a major upcoming project.

Ms. Lewis introduced Mr. Talun, an architect by profession, who has been active in Somerville for a number of years, and commended his interest in serving. Mr. Talun commented that this Commission mirrors his experience and interests well, and expressed appreciation for the transition of the Design Review Committee to the Urban Design Commission, to better focus on the public realm. He shared that he has experience in large-scale projects in the area and around the country. He is also serving on Boston's Net Zero Carbon Initiative with the Boston Planning & Redevelopment Agency.

Councilor Strezo asked about the candidate's work as a mentor with the affordable housing design competition. Mr. Talun elaborated that it is an interdisciplinary project, sponsored by Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston, and Mr. Talun helped the students understand metrics and questions related to housing, but it was their design of intergenerational veterans housing in Natick that won the award.

Councilor Strezo also asked the candidate's thoughts on design in addressing the changing world of 2021 and Mr. Talun noted that design is about balancing interests and thinking about what is possible.

Councilor Clingan noted that Mr. Talun is a good fit for this role. Councilor Mbah added that Mr. Talun has conceptualized great design ideas and he is excited for the candidate to take on this role. Councilor Scott agreed that the candidate is a great fit and commended his approach to design in the public realm. Chair Rossetti noted that Mr. Talun has expertise that will be useful to the UDC's discussions, and also appreciated his commitment to green spaces and his service to the City.

Chair Rossetti elaborated for the Committee that the UDC is an interim Board, and permanent appointments will come before the Committee in the future.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Clingan, Strezo

211064: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Heidi Cron to the Urban Design Commission.

Ms. Lewis shared that Ms. Cron has a background in brand design, and also deep international and strategic experience, which is a different perspective than the urban designers and landscape architects currently on the UDC, and she is a great complement. Ms. Cron has been a Somerville resident since approximately 1991, and a homeowner in Davis Square for the last 9 years. She is trained as an architect, and worked in corporate branded environments, notably Starbucks and Dunkin' Brands. She learned how to incorporate the ideas of different stakeholders into a design, while still maintaining brand identity. This can transfer to neighborhoods or other environments as the "brand". She added that she looks forward to bringing her expertise in consensus building to the group. She also expressed that she enjoys managing teams and people, and collaborating and engaging with many different stakeholders. She noted that she was not involved sooner due to her travel schedule, but she is excited to have an impact in the City now that her schedule allows.

Councilor Mbah recognized the candidate's international work, and asked her thoughts on the different disciplines within the UDC. Ms. Cron elaborated that it is about the user experience - bringing communities together, and thinking about something that doesn't exist yet. Councilor Strezo asked about the candidate's introductory comment that she feels connected to the community as a homeowner, and Ms. Cron elaborated that there is a transient student community, which is very vibrant and allows the City to reinvent itself, and the City has evolved greatly in her time here. Councilor Strezo emphasized that Somerville has many renters, and they are engaged in the community as well. Councilor Scott noted that a street character that doesn't feel manufactured is an important component to some developments, and the brand identity of individual neighborhoods can vary greatly. Ms. Cron agreed that each neighborhood has its own identity.

Chair Rossetti sought clarification that Ms. Cron is interested in supporting Somerville, not the interests of corporate development, despite her corporate background. Chair Rossetti emphasized that the Commission members are representing the people, particularly since the meetings are not specifically public hearings. Ms. Lewis clarified that it is generally a design discourse between the applicant and the Commissioners. Councilor Rossetti asked about the candidate's LEED certification, and Ms. Cron shared that it has been mainly in interior design, though the education and exam does give a well-rounded sense of green building. She confirmed that it is something that is important to her and she will keep this in mind in her decision making.

RESULT:

APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]

AYES:

Rossetti, Scott, Mbah, Clingan, Strezo

211065: Requesting confirmation of the appointment of Kerri Connolly to the Urban Design Commission.

Chair Rossetti informed the Committee that Ms. Connolly has withdrawn her application for this role, as she is serving on another Committee within the City and wants to devote her attention to that position.

RESULT:

WITHDRAWN