

City of Northampton, MA
City Council Select Committee to Study Barriers to Serving on City Boards and Commissions

MEETING MINUTES for **February 14, 2023**

Submitted by: Laura Krutzler

1. Chair Javier Luengo-Garrido called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m. He announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

City Council Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler called the roll:

Members present and absent:

Member	Present	Time if arriving late or leaving early
Javier Luengo-Garrido, Chair, Citizen	X	
Jamila Gore, Councilor At Large, Vice Chair	X	
Garrick Perry, Ward 4 City Councilor	X	
Cynthia Suopis, Citizen	X	
Gwen Nabad, Citizen	X	
Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Citizen	Absent	
Staff	Present	Time if arriving late or leaving early
Laura Hill Krutzler, Administrative Assistant	X	

2. Public comment

No members of the public were present. Javier Luengo-Garrido repeated his usual reminder that the first 15 minutes of every meeting is reserved for public comment.

3. Minutes of Previous Meetings

A motion was proposed and seconded. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Motion:	Motion by:	Second:	Vote:
To approve the minutes of December 27, 2022 and January 10, 2023	Garrick Perry	Cynthia Suopis	5 Yes 0 No 1 Absent

4. General Discussion Items

- o Discussion with City Services Committee Chair Karen Foster
- Councilor Foster explained the City Services Committee's process for reviewing the Mayor's recommendations for appointment.
- Cynthia Suopis asked Councilor Foster to help her dispel the feeling that the committee acts as a rubber stamp. Her concern comes from the perspective of being on the Select Committee for a few months and wondering how decisions are made when vacancies occur, since, as a Board of Health member, they have never had a discussion about what kind of person they need. There doesn't seem to be a vehicle for that kind of input to happen. The process to her seems to be extremely top down because of that.

- Before she was serving on the council, she was at a full City Council meeting where somebody did remove a name from the consent agenda so they could vote no and all of the air went out of the room in Council Chambers, Councilor Foster related. It is tricky because people from the public are putting forward their name to serve. There is a balance between vetting their appointment and honoring their putting forth their name.
 - She personally grappled with an appointment last term that she wasn't sure she wanted to vote positively for, but it was very difficult to think about voicing that in a public setting. City Council does have the authority to make a positive or negative recommendation on the appointment but the public nature of that makes it really challenging.
 - Councilor Perry said that kind of sums up his approach. He doesn't see it as a rubber stamp. He's approached his time on City Services as a chance to talk a little more in depth with the candidates and to orient them to public service. He does see it as a way to make a first step into public service.
 - His take away from Cynthia's comment is that there doesn't seem to be a way for the boards to offer up what they want, Garrick said. By the time it comes to City Services, they are assuming that these are people who have been vetted by either people on the committee or the Mayor.
 - Cynthia Suopis said she views the challenge to their committee to be to question those assumptions. The committee is reacting to what is set up, making the assumption that due diligence is happening. "We're looking at what are the barriers; what's stopping people. . ."
 - Councilor Foster said she shares Garrick's understanding that the mayor's office has done its due diligence prior to making the recommendation.
 - Councilor Nash said he wanted to defend the charge of the committee being a rubber stamp. "I don't think this is a bad thing." They are asking people to be public servants and this is a public vetting of their qualifications. He thinks it's very good that the council handles that very delicately. During his time on council, only one appointment has been opposed because they don't want to be grilling residents who are trying to step forward in service. He compared the process to the point in a wedding ceremony where the officiant tells anyone who has an objection to speak or forever hold their peace.
 - Councilor Foster fielded other questions and comments. She said she could also put discussion of the process on the City Services Committee agenda.
- General Survey Update
 - Javier Luengo-Garrido gave an overview of survey results. 113 responses have been received. Of people responding to the survey, over 55% are from the age of 55 to 80 and 80% of members are white, he reported. From the standpoint of diversification, this is the information they're looking for.
 - He screen-shared a sampling of the results, showing that the narrative answers are visible. He is looking for a way to give access to the results to other members.
 - 46% of respondents are either current or former board members. 22.12% are current or former chairs or vice chairs. Almost 32% were never appointed.
 - He reviewed responses to various questions, such as how people are finding out about vacancies and what barriers or challenges have been experienced. Top answers to obstacles/barriers were as follows:
 - ❖ 18% - 'something else;'
 - ❖ 15.63% - 'feelings of ineffectiveness or not making a difference;'
 - ❖ 3.13% - lack of reliable childcare and
 - ❖ 13% - lack of onboarding/mentorship
 - As far as ethnic background, 86.24% of those surveyed described themselves as white/Caucasian. 10% said they preferred not to say.
 - 22% of people answering the survey live in Ward 5 and 13% in Ward 3.
 - Almost 63% of respondents stated that they were married. 5.45% stated they were unmarried but with a partner

- 71.82% stated they had no disability but 20.91% stated they did have a disability
- The other data point that shows why people are not talking about access to childcare is that, when asked the number of dependents, 72.22% replied 'zero.'
- Councilor Nash said 'great work.' It seems to be really well-designed and they are getting information that tends to be helpful. They are getting older people who don't have to worry about dependents. They are missing a lot of those people who have school-aged kids; as parents, it's harder to be part of this process.
- The lack of answer from young parents and parents of school-aged kids is 'abysmal.'
- Since they got 25% responses from the 400 contacted, Javier Luengo-Garrido said he doesn't think it's because the survey itself is not representative; he thinks they are not serving. "The lack of answer; it is an answer," he suggested.
- All those things are going to push them to have a conversation about how to envision a participative process where people can come.

Councilor Gore said she was surprised that people said one of the barriers was onboarding/mentoring and not feeling like they were making a difference. She was surprised by that.

Cynthia Suopis said she was not as surprised by how many without kids are serving. She doesn't know what the demographic is for Northampton as a whole for people with and without children. She thinks that is something else they would have to consider when talking about the demographics of people who are serving.

- Assignment Updates
 - Councilor Perry said he informally talked to Bill Newman about setting up a date on his radio show and to Chief of Staff Alan Wolf about coming to a Youth Commission meeting, and he thought it was a good idea. Sarah Williams from Northampton neighbors has reached out to him about setting a date. In his past of promotion he thinks it's better to get the ball rolling.
 - Susan asked that an agenda item be added next month to allow her to share/present her research. Javier said he would put her on the agenda for the last week of February for a small presentation.
 - The Qualtrics system has a 'collaboration code.' Members will have to create a username and password.
- Discussion about Outreach/Survey Distribution
Not discussed

5. New Business

6. Adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

- A motion was proposed and seconded and a roll call vote was taken. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Motion	Motion by:	Second:	Vote:
Adjourn.	Susan MacDonald-Bolanos	Councilor Perry	Yes, 5 No, 0 Absent, 1