

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

MEETING MINUTES for **February 28, 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	
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 the standard 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 to table the minutes of February 14, 2023 since they were not yet ready for acceptance. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Motion:	Motion by:	Second:	Vote:
To table the minutes of February 14, 2023	Javier Luengo	Cynthia Suopis	5 Yes, 0 No

Javier announced that Susan MacDonald-Bolanos is stepping down from the committee for personal reasons. They are extremely grateful of the work she has done and the insights she has brought to every meeting, he said.

4. General Discussion Items

- o General Survey Update
- ❖ He sent the updated results of the survey this afternoon, Javier said. He stated his intention to review the demographic information for the respondents again in order to understand the data points collected in the context of who completed the survey. Thanks to the second outreach/survey distribution, participation increased 20%. The number of responses went from around 105 to 110 to 145. The survey went out to

chairs, vice chairs and former members, he reminded. The number of people responding who applied but were not appointed was relatively high, (31.7%) or 46.

- ❖ Javier reviewed the results of the survey. Regarding how people found out about the position applied for, it was unexpectedly high and surprising that nearly 20% read or heard about the opening on the city website, he noted. Nearly 30% of those responding said that either the mayor contacted them directly or a city councilor or another city official told them about it. Personally, he sees the need to potentiate the website and social media as sources for this information. He'd like to see more people learning about vacancies because the information is readily available instead of because they know someone.
- ❖ He opened the floor to comments.
- ❖ Gwen agreed she'd like to see the information placed more prominently on the city website and shared more through social media.
- ❖ He encouraged fellow members not to view the results as disconnected from the last meeting. Based on their previous conversation, they have a profile of those who responded as being upper middle-class, computer savvy people with access to computers and relatively high income.
- ❖ The people can also be assumed to be somewhat familiar with city processes since they have already gone through a couple of hoops to be appointed to boards and commissions, Cynthia added. The big unknown for them is people who are *not* on boards and commissions because they didn't survey them. This would be characteristic of people who got through the first and the second door so they're going to be a little more adept, she pointed out.
- ❖ They don't have the ability to do a city-wide survey but maybe they want to encourage the city to do a city-wide survey on accessibility, Javier Luengo-Garrido suggested.
- ❖ Councilor Gore agreed they need to open up more to social media so somebody who is not as connected to the city would hear about it. 19.64% reporting hearing about it from someone else is a lot, she noted.
- ❖ The few people he has talked to mentioned hearing about a vacancy from their neighborhood association, Javier shared. It still goes back to knowing somebody. One aspect of accessibility is sort of 'democratizing' access to information by decentralizing it, he suggested.
- ❖ Cynthia Suopis asked Councilors Gore and Perry what they have done to reach out to build a base of voters.
- ❖ Councilor Perry said a lot of what he's been doing is just being out in the community and making himself as available as possible. He's done a number of 'sit-ins' with Northampton Neighbors and Zoom meetings with Hampton Court.
- ❖ As an At-Large councilor, Councilor Gore said she goes to different wards. She will get a call from a councilor about something happening in their ward and she will go there.
- ❖ Cynthia Suopis said it would be great if there were a central clearing house where councilors could go to disseminate information.
- ❖ His ward councilor is exceptionally good at communicating, Javier shared. He himself is a member of an advisory board to the Mayor on elected officials' compensation. If someone had asked him a month ago, he would have said councilors should spend way more time communicating but, if you were to ask him now, he would say the time councilors already put in is way more than they are compensated for. If Select Committee members feel elected officials play a role in democratizing information, he feels it would be appropriate for them to say that they should be compensated for this in a way that makes it part of their job. Their charge is not to make recommendations with an eye on the budget, he reminded.
- ❖ Javier said he was struck by the fact that nearly 40% of people either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "I knew what to expect throughout the application process," and "I knew what the city was looking for in new members of the board."
- ❖ These were people who were adept and still found it confusing as to what to expect through the application process. It points strongly to the need for more clarity; i.e. - people getting an automatic response that 'we got your application. You will hear back in two weeks.'
- ❖ Councilor Gore said she thought a page outlining the process on the website would be helpful.

- ❖ Javier said he was also surprised by the number of people who had served from five to eight years. It suggested to him a lack of plurality. He wondered if they should talk about term limits. He also referred to the need to manage expectations since there were indications that some people were feeling frustrated and disrespected and/or feeling that they were giving their time and expertise and being ignored.
 - ❖ He opened the floor to comments on the three points raised: 1) the possibility of term limits, 2) how to insure the city doesn't create a unification of thinking but maintains a diversity of thinking, 3) managing expectations.
 - ❖ With respect to term limits, there are a significant number of vacancies and some boards are unable to meet because they don't have a quorum, Councilor Perry pointed out. As far as feeling respected, the overwhelming majority of people said they would apply again, he pointed out. He hopes managing expectations could be solved by more onboarding. He thinks one of their recommendations will be having some kind of a handbook. Chairs can also encourage realistic expectations by making accurate estimates of the time commitment involved and what kind of change can be expected.
 - ❖ As a member of the Board of Health, all she has to do to be reappointed is say she is willing to continue serving. If more were required, it might not be as automatic, she reflected.
 - ❖ Javier suggested a possible recommendation to the city that it has an untapped source of willing volunteers in members who have applied but were not appointed.
 - ❖ Cynthia Suopis reminded members they had talked before about inviting Court to discuss the appointment process in greater detail. They might need to find out where an application goes once it is received. Council President Nash/Laura agreed to reach out to the Mayor's office to see if Court could attend the meeting March 14th.
- March 12th Listening Session
 - ❖ Javier referred to the communication plan leading up to the event. Members agreed to move the listening session from March 12th to March 19th. Javier asked Cynthia to adjust the dates accordingly.
 - ❖ Members volunteered/committed themselves to various assignments. Javier said he and Councilor Gore would work on a press release/flyer for distribution to the Gazette, Shoestring, etc. Councilor Perry was asked to contact media outlets such as the Bill Newman and Monte Belmonte shows to make promotional appearances if possible. Jamila and Garrick were asked to announce the listening session at City Council and other public meetings. Other members will take advantage of committee meetings such as the Board of Health and Elected Officials Compensation Advisory Committee to also make announcements.
 - ❖ Javier said he would sit with the list tomorrow and add contact information for the community organizations. Once he and Jamila have the press release, they will just send it out. Councilor Perry asked if it would be possible to share the tentative flyer.
 - ❖ Laura Krutzler was asked to set up the Zoom meeting for the listening session and send out the link to Javier.
 - ❖ Javier said he would send a 'to do' list tomorrow.

5. New Business

6. Adjourned at 8:46 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.	Councilor Perry	Councilor Gore	Yes, 5 No, 0