

MINUTES OF MEETING August 26, 2021

The regular monthly meeting of the Northampton Retirement Board was called to order by Chairperson Joyce Karpinski at 1:32 p.m.

Members present were Joyce Karpinski, Michael Lyons, Charlene Nardi, Thomas Sullivan and Tammy Suprenant. Also present was Retirement Administrator David Shipka and Member Services Assistant Elsie Vazquez.

This meeting was held remotely via Zoom teleconference.

Visitors

New Business

Regular Business

The Board received applications for the following new members:
Raphael Deh-Atheba (IT Dept)

On a motion made by Ms. Suprenant and seconded by Mr. Sullivan, the Board voted unanimously by roll call (5-0) to accept the aforementioned new member(s) (Karpinski: Yes, Lyons: Yes, Nardi: Yes, Sullivan: Yes, Suprenant: Yes).

The Board received superannuation retirement application(s) for the following members:
Ann Carpenter (School)

On a motion made by Mr. Sullivan and seconded by Ms. Suprenant, the Board voted unanimously by roll call (5-0) to accept the aforementioned retirement application(s) (Karpinski: Yes, Lyons: Yes, Nardi: Yes, Sullivan: Yes, Suprenant: Yes).

The Board reviewed retirement allowances for the following retirees:
Ann Carpenter (School)

On a motion made by Ms. Suprenant and seconded by Mr. Lyons, the Board voted unanimously by roll call (5-0) to approve the aforementioned retirement allowance(s) (Karpinski: Yes, Lyons: Yes, Nardi: Yes, Sullivan: Yes, Suprenant: Yes).

The Board reviewed the following deceased members/retirees/survivors:
Paul Maynard (Fire)

On a motion made by Ms. Suprenant and seconded by Ms. Nardi, the Board voted unanimously by roll call (5-0) to approve the minutes of the regular meeting held on July 29, 2021 (Karpinski: Yes, Lyons: Yes, Nardi: Yes, Sullivan: Yes, Suprenant: Yes).

The Board reviewed and approved the following warrants:

Pension payroll warrant totaling \$1,025,852.08

Accounts payable warrant totaling \$70,432.62

Board and staff payroll warrant totaling \$13,162.27

On a motion made by Ms. Suprenant and seconded by Ms. Nardi, the Board voted unanimously by roll call (5-0) to approve the aforementioned warrants (Karpinski: Yes, Lyons: Yes, Nardi: Yes, Sullivan: Yes, Suprenant: Yes).

The Board reviewed the following reports:

June Trial Balance

Transaction journal from the de Burlo Group, Inc. for July

PRIT Statement for July

The Board reviewed the following wire transfers for the current month:

\$12,329.79 from PRIM to Peoples' United Bank (distribution)

\$820,000 from Peoples' United Bank to Florence Bank

The Board reviewed the treasurer's report on the Florence Bank account for June:

Bank statement: \$239,555.77

Outstanding disbursements: \$202,362.55

Adjusted bank balance: \$37,193.22

Outstanding receipts: \$13,981.83

Trial Balance end of month balance: \$51,175.05

The Board reviewed the following makeup/buyback requests:

Abigail Averbach

Former member from February 3, 1992 to February 9, 1993, refunded on May 1, 1993. Currently a member of the State Retirement System. Requesting acceptance of liability amounting to 1 year of creditable service upon completion of a buyback.

On a motion made by Ms. Suprenant and seconded by Mr. Lyons, the Board voted unanimously by roll call (5-0) to approve the aforementioned request (Karpinski: Yes, Lyons: Yes, Nardi: Yes, Sullivan: Yes, Suprenant: Yes).

The Board reviewed the following correspondence:
PRIM Monthly Update
PERAC #24 Important Amendment to G.L. 32, Section 100

Old Business

Staff Committee

The Board discussed the compensation levels of the two staff positions. The annual committee to review the staff, this year consisting of Mr. Sullivan and Ms. Suprenant, began the discussion.

Mr. Sullivan referenced the Retirement Administrator's 17 years of experience with the Board, commended his performance, and spoke of his goal to retain him.

Mr. Sullivan spoke of the advantages of salary schedules in that it is helpful for budgeting. In order to keep the position in line with some of the other local systems he proposed placing the position of Retirement Administrator in a grade similar or equivalent to the City's grade "K", a 12 step scale created for many city department heads. He supported placing the position at step 8 of such a scale.

Ms. Suprenant concurred with Mr. Sullivan's comments and noted that she did not agree with the Collins Center's study. She took issue with the inclusion of some of the more distant or smaller communities in its review, citing insufficient relevance in terms of cost-of-living and workload.

Ms. Karpinski proposed staying with the current scale and performing a review in another year or two. The Retirement Administrator was out of steps she noted, but the assistant position had one step available next year.

Ms. Suprenant and Mr. Sullivan both referenced salary reviews for other entities in the past which they had been involved in. Mr. Sullivan had seen cases where employees with experience left their positions and subsequently had to be replaced at a higher rate and was therefore trying to avoid that happening here. Ms. Suprenant noted that in an unrelated study she assisted with, comparable towns were referenced and the positions were placed roughly in the middle of the pack, which was what she was aiming for with these two positions.

The Board briefly discussed the merits of utilizing the City's scales versus creating new scales. Ms. Suprenant said that because an appropriate rate for the Retirement Administrator position would fall comfortably within the City's "K" scale, it made sense to utilize that scale for this purpose rather than create a new one.

As the discussion continued, Ms. Karpinski sought additional comments from the Board.

Mr. Sullivan reiterated his position favoring a placement in a scale similar or equivalent to the City's "K" grade for the position. Without room for growth, he was concerned about the possibility of losing staff members to another retirement system.

Ms. Nardi spoke of her experiences at the Town of Williamsburg, where the increases were typically of a lower level.

Ms. Suprenant noted that placement of the position in the "K" scale would be in line with increases the City of Northampton had implemented for department heads and other employees in recent years. She said she thought the proposal was fair and noted she was open to any ideas of a different way to proceed.

Mr. Lyons said he did not think that the Collins Center study had been fair to the staff and cited transparency issues with the Center. He noted he did not think it was appropriate that the Center would not take his questions on the study and instead referred questions away to a former member of the Board, Susan Wright. He said he would be in favor of placing the Retirement Administrator in a scale equivalent to the City's "K" grade scale.

As the discussion wound down another opportunity for comments was provided. There were no further comments on the matter.

The Board briefly discussed a summary of the exchange. On a motion made by Mr. Sullivan and seconded by Ms. Nardi, effective July 1, 2021, the Board voted by roll call (4-1) to place the compensation of the Retirement Administrator position at \$48.2319/hr, or step eight, of a twelve step scale that begins at \$40.5700/hr and increases annually at 2.5% per step to end at \$53.2302/hr, with future cost-of-living adjustments being applied annually to the scale. (Karpinski: No, Lyons: Yes, Nardi: Yes, Sullivan: Yes, Suprenant: Yes). A current year cost-of-living adjustment is included in the proposed scale.

The Board proceeded to discuss the position of Member Services Assistant.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the Retirement Administrator had given Ms. Vazquez a good report on her job performance. He commended the performance of both staff members during the COVID-19 closure.

Mr. Sullivan noted that many of the points he made during the prior discussion, such as those regarding employee retention, the benefits of scheduled salary increases, and the general methodology of comparing other similar retirement systems applied to this discussion as well.

Mr. Sullivan thought it would be appropriate to place the assistant position in a grade similar or equivalent to the City's "H" grade, a 12 step City scale used for two benefits-oriented HR positions. This would place the salary at a level comparable to similar

retirement systems. He thought it would be appropriate to place the current salary at step 3 of such a scale.

To better reflection the position's scope of duties, Mr. Sullivan was in favor of changing the title of the position. He proposed the title Associate Retirement Specialist but was interested in hearing other suggestions.

Ms. Suprenant agreed with Mr. Sullivan's comments. She noted that in looking at other retirement systems, the proposed rate might place the salary a little low comparatively, however there was room for growth and she was not comfortable extending the increase any higher at this time.

Ms. Karpinski noted that position titles of assistant-level employees in other retirement systems varied and not all positions are performing at the same level of responsibility.

The Retirement Administrator noted that the position required a good deal of experience and knowledge, such that in the event it became necessary to refill the position, it could take several years for a new employee to get sufficiently up to speed in some very important areas.

Mr. Lyons began a brief discussion on the staffing levels of other retirement local retirement systems. The Retirement Administrator noted staffing levels of several local systems and noted that the titles of these various positions are not always indicative of the scope of duties in that there are some systems with several staff members that have spread the responsibilities out more.

At the conclusion of the discussion, an opportunity for additional comments was provided. There were no further comments on the matter.

The Board briefly discussed a summary of the exchange. On a motion made by Mr. Sullivan and seconded by Ms. Suprenant, effective July 1, 2021, the Board voted by roll call (4-1) to change the title of the Member Services Assistant position to Associate Retirement Specialist and place the compensation of the position at \$29.5228/hr, or step three, of a twelve step scale that begins at \$28.1008/hr and increases annually at 2.5% per step to end at \$36.8876/hr, with future cost-of-living adjustments being applied annually to the scale. (Karpinski: No, Lyons: Yes, Nardi: Yes, Sullivan: Yes, Suprenant: Yes). A current year cost-of-living adjustment is included in the proposed scale.

At the conclusion of the business, the staff thanked the Board for the increases. The other members of the Board thanked the Staff Committee for its presentation.

Other Business

None

Adjournment

On a motion made by Mr. Lyons and seconded by Ms. Nardi, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) by roll call to adjourn the meeting at 2:49 p.m. (Karpinski: Yes, Lyons: Yes, Nardi: Yes, Sullivan: Yes, Suprenant: Yes).

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 28, 2021 at 1:30 p.m. via Zoom.

Respectfully Submitted,

Retirement Administrator

**THESE MINUTES WERE APPROVED BY THE RETIREMENT BOARD ON
SEPTEMBER 28, 2021**

PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK