



## Programs & Services Committee Report

### City of Newton In City Council

**Tuesday, August 3, 2021**

**Present:** Councilors Krintzman (Chair), Noel, Albright, Humphrey, Wright, Baker, and Greenberg

**Absent:** Councilor Ryan

**Also Present:** Councilors Lipof and Grossman

**City Staff:** Michelle Pizzi O'Brien, Director of Human Resources; Alissa Ocasio Giuliani, City Solicitor; Mary O'Neill, Employee Relations Manager; Nathan Giacalone, Committee Clerk

**#268-21      Appointment of Despina Felis to the Biosafety Committee**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing DESPINA FELIS, 9 Hale Street, Newton, as a member of the BIOSAFETY COMMITTEE for a term to expire on September 30, 2024. (60 Days: 09/10/21)

**Action:**      Programs & Services Approved 6-0 (Councilor Greenberg not voting)

**Notes:**      The Committee invited Ms. Felis to speak and discuss her interest in joining the Biosafety Committee. She said that she has been a Newton resident since 1998 and her professional background is in the sciences, having worked in a lab with health and safety and biosafety. Ms. Felis said she was the Biosafety Officer at Children's Hospital and is now an associate director.

Ms. Felis was complimented on her resume and thanked for her willingness to serve.

Ms. Felis was asked if she was aware that the Biosafety Committee does not meet regularly, but rather only when there is an application to review and she answered that she was.

Councilor Humphrey made a motion to approve which carried 6-0 (Councilor Greenberg not voting).

**#269-21      Appointment of John Synnott to the Newton Commonwealth Foundation**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing JOHN SYNNOTT, 22 Winona Street, Auburndale, to the NEWTON COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION for a term to expire on August 31, 2024. (60 Days: 09/10/21)

**Action:**      Programs & Services Approved 6-0 (Councilor Greenberg not voting)

**Notes:**      The Committee invited Mr. Synnott to speak and discuss his interest in joining the Newton Commonwealth Foundation. He said that he has been familiar with the Foundation since

the 1980s and became good friends with one its members who encouraged him and other golfers to attend the meetings and express their opinions. He then described the Foundation's role, summarizing them as the body to oversee the Newton Commonwealth Golf course since it was established in the 1970s. The Foundation is to oversee the course in the best interests of the city, players, and the course. Mr. Synnott said that the Foundation puts out the contracts to run the course and continues to meet with these entities. It oversees the financial aspects such as capital expenditures as well.

Mr. Synnott was thanked for his willingness to serve.

Comments:

The Foundation has provided effective independent oversight of the Newton commonwealth Club for many years.

The Foundation will also review and decide on the renewal contract for the licensee who operates the course.

The Commonwealth Foundation hosts an annual event for a nonprofit and it is always a success thanks to their generosity.

Councilor Krintzman made a motion to approve which carried 6-0 (Councilor Greenberg not voting).

**#270-21      Reappointment of Marcela Merino to the Community Education Commission**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR reappointing MARCELA MERINO, 66 Cloverdale Road, Newton, as a member of the COMMUNITY EDUCATION COMMISSION for a term to expire on May 31, 2023. (60 Days: 09/10/21)

**Action:**      Programs & Services Approved 6-0 (Councilor Greenberg not voting)

**Notes:**      Councilor Noel made a motion to approve which carried 6-0 (Councilor Greenberg not voting).

**#137-21      Public Meeting with City Clerk/Clerk for the Council candidates**  
CITY CLERK PRELIMINARY SCREENING COMMITTEE submitting recommended candidates for the City Clerk/Clerk of the Council position for review by the Programs & Services Committee and recommendation to the City Council.

**Action:**      Programs & Services Held 7-0

**Notes:**      The Committee was joined by Ms. Pizzi O'Brien, Ms. O'Neil, and Ms. Giuliani to discuss the hiring process for the new City Clerk/Clerk of the Council.

Ms. Pizzi O'Brien presented to the Committee, reviewing the timeline of the Clerk search process as well as the work of the Preliminary Screening Committee (PowerPoint attached). She said that after Mr. Olson announced his retirement in late 2020, the Preliminary Screening Committee (PSC) was organized. Under Open Meeting Law, the PSC was able to interview and vet candidates

in Executive Session. It was able to hold multiple rounds of interviews, request writing and presentation samples, and to arrange questions with Ms. Giuliani and Mr. Yeo to ask more operational focused questions. The PSC was ready to recommend finalists in April, but two candidates withdrew from consideration and the decision was made to repost the job as the PSC is required to recommend no fewer than two candidates. Ms. Pizzi O'Brien said the process used to hire Mr. Olson in 2005 was researched and adapted for this search.

### **Schedule**

The Committee then discussed the structure of these meetings, deciding to schedule two separate meetings: one meeting at which the committee, and any other councilor choosing to participate, will interview all three finalists; and a second meeting at which the Committee will deliberate and select the single candidate to recommend to the full council. The schedule is as follows:

Tuesday, August 17 @ 5:15 pm

The Committee will begin at 5:15 pm in order to provide sufficient time for each of the three interviews with a short break in between. Each interview is scheduled to last about 75 minutes.

Wednesday, August 25 @ 7pm

The Committee will deliberate and select a single candidate to recommend to the full City Council.

### **Format**

The Committee decided to hold both meetings over Zoom. While advantages from an in-person meeting were noted, the Committee felt that Zoom would allow for greater and easier participation. Additionally, the hybrid meeting equipment from NewTV would likely not be fully installed and tested at that point. It was stated that space could be set up in City Hall for any Councilors concerned about their Zoom connectivity. The order of interviews will either be determined alphabetically by name or randomly.

### **Questions**

Ms. Pizzi O'Brien said that in 2005, interview questions were developed using a competency model. Now, she said questions are developed along a more behavioral focus. The PSC considered hard skills, soft skills, behavior, and managerial traits. She noted that HR would be on standby during the meetings to shutdown any questions the City is not permitted to ask.

The candidates will be asked a set of identical questions by members of the Programs and Services Committee, but additional time will be provided for additional questions. The Committee also decided that Chair Krintzman will work with Director of HR Michelle Pizzi-O'Brien and President Albright to develop the questions to be used in the interview. Since it will not be in a physical space, the Committee will determine ahead of time what order the questions will be asked in. It was said that questions should also address the City Clerk aspects and not only focus on the City Council role.

Other Questions and Comments

**How will the conversation be structured so that candidates are not influenced by each other?**

Ms. Pizzi O'Brien said that the City has been transparent with all candidates, though they have not yet seen all the details about each other. They may watch the other interviews as it is an open meeting, but Ms. Pizzi O'Brien said she discourages this for the benefit of the candidates.

**How are the reference checks handled?**

The city has a new background check process in place as of July 1, enacted at the end of FY'21. The details will not be shared, but all candidates passed with flying colors. Phone references were contacted as well, and the candidates also passed their social media checks. Councilors were encouraged to refrain from doing their own research on the candidates and to rely on the information provided by HR and their interviews.

Ms. Giuliani said that while many materials will be received and become part of the record, Councilors should not share these materials without checking with Law or HR first as they could contain confidential information that cannot be shared.

All PSC members and staff involved in this process were thanked for their work.

Councilor Baker made a motion to Hold which carried 7-0.

The meeting adjourned at 9:09pm.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Josh Krintzman, Chair**



# City Clerk/Clerk of the Council

*Programs and Services Committee  
August 3, 2021*

City of Newton  
Human Resources Department  
Michelle Pizzi O'Brien, M.P.A., Director  
*Pronouns she/hers/her*

# AGENDA

*City Clerk/Clerk of the Council and the City Council*

*Open Meeting Law and Hiring*

*Update on Recruitment Activity to date*

*Next Stages*



# City Clerk/Clerk of the Council

#137-21

## ***Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 City of Newton Ordinances***



### Chapter 4, Article II: Clerk of the City Council

City Council shall elect by ballot a Clerk of the City Council and shall set the compensation. Responsibilities of the Clerk of the Council are outlined in this ordinance. Ordinance allows that one person may hold both positions (Sec. 4-31).



### Chapter 6, City Clerk

When both positions are held by one person, the City Clerk/Clerk of the Council shall be appointed in the same manner. Responsibilities of the City Clerk are outlined in this ordinance.



# Open Meeting Law

## M.G.L. c. 30A

*Intent is to promote openness and transparency in government. Law outlines the methods in which public bodies conduct business and how to maintain, share and develop records.*

## How does this apply to hiring?



*Public Body must make appointment in Open Session*

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*Public Body may create a Preliminary Screening Committee.*

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*Preliminary Screening Committee may utilize Executive Session.*

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## Executive Session

### *Reason 8:*

*To consider or interview applicants for employment or appointment by a preliminary screening committee if the chair declares that an open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants.*

*Essentially can conduct preliminary interviews but can NOT recommend less than 2 candidates otherwise they are acting as the parent body. Hence the reason the Programs and Services Committee must interview in Open Session.*





# Timeline

## December 2020

- Former City Clerk notifies the Council of his pending retirement
- President and Vice President meet with HR
- HR conducts research from 2005 process
- HR consults with the Law Department
- President notified City Council of process December 24, 2020

## January 2021

- HR conducts compensation study and recommends posting range
- HR surveys the MMA city/town network for best practices
- HR updates the position description and finalized updated draft
- HR conducts feedback meetings with City Clerk staff
- HR processes internal paperwork to post position
- Position is posted locally, regionally and nationally on January 20, 2021



# Timeline

## February 2021

- PSC holds two working meetings to review resumes, select candidates for interview, plan interview questions and assessments tools.
- PSC conducts first round of interviews for late February over the course of two meetings.

## March 2021

- PSC holds two meetings in March to conduct second interviews where candidates are asked to produce a PowerPoint Presentation on Technology in Municipal Clerk Departments and provide three previously drafted writing samples.
- PSC recommends that semi-finalist candidates meet with two members of the City's administration/management team.

## April 2021

- PSC welcomes feedback from the managers and recommends that semi-finalists undergo the City's preliminary background process and be put on notice that that will move forward, pending the background check, to Programs and Services. HR notifies candidates.
- One candidate rescinds and the PSC reconvenes to be advised of this information formally. PSC decides to repost to widen the pool of candidates.



# Timeline

## **May 2021**

- HR reposts the position as recommended by the PSC.

## **June 2021**

- PSC meets in person in City Hall to review resumes. Five candidates are invited to preliminary interviews.
- PSC meets again in June to conduct interviews. PSC follows the same process for this second round.

## **July 2021**

- PSC meets two more additional times to conduct interviews, hear feedback, deliberate over final candidates.
- At their final meeting, votes to recommend three candidates to the Programs and Services Committee.

***PSC meets a total of 12 times from February through July 2021 to complete this process. Concludes their work on July 28, 2021.***

# *What is next?*

## Programs and Services Finalist Interviews



1.

### **When?**

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HR recommends two meetings no later than the end of the month of August.

2.

### **Timing?**

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Length of Interviews. HR recommends 1 hour and 15-minute intervals.

3.

### **Format?**

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ZOOM, hybrid, in-person?  
HR recommends via ZOOM, scripted questions for P&S and open period for other members of the Council.

4.

### **Interview Questions?**

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HR recommends that P&S designate a liaison to work with HR/President to develop scripted interview questions.

# Next Steps for the HR team

#137-21

## *Contingent upon conclusion of this meeting*



- President will notify P&S and the full council of the recommended finalists, with detail determined at today's meeting, and guidance from HR/Law on how to conduct professional and lawful employment interviews.



- HR will work with the City Clerk Office to post meeting(s) for interviews and develop the appropriate location/forum to conduct interviews. Coordinate tech needs, etc.



- HR will work with P&S liaison to develop interview questions and assign questions to members.
- HR will coordinate with candidates and begin to prepare for the final stages of the pre-employment process.





# Questions?

# Let's get to work!

Michelle Pizzi O'Brien. M.P.A., Director  
*City of Newton*  
*Human Resources Department*