

Legislative Committee Meeting Minutes August 24, 2021

The August 24, 2021 remote Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Pious Ali at 8:00 AM on Zoom.

Councilor Pious Ali (Chair), Mayor Kate Snyder, Councilor April Fournier, Dena Libner (Chief of Staff), Danielle West (Corporation Counsel), and Katherine Knox (Bernstein Shur) were present. Councilor Nick Mavodones was not in attendance.

Katherine Knox reported that new directives related to COVID-19 coming from the Governor's office are being monitored and the legislature is on break. Due to the recent release of U.S. Census data the legislature will likely return in mid-October to approve redistricting maps in time for candidates to register for districts. It does not appear that there will be significant redistricting changes in Cumberland County. The current expectation is that the legislature will only vote on redistricting, however since there is no limitation on items that can be brought up for consideration during a legislative session there is a possibility of the legislature bringing some carryover bills or COVID funding items to the floor.

Mayor Snyder asked for details on the Governor's COVID directives as the City Council has extended Portland's emergency order, and a City Council workshop has been scheduled to discuss issues around the potential of a local mask mandate. The Mayor specifically wanted to know if there was any reason to expect another statewide state of emergency declared by the Governor's office. Kate Knox's impression was that while the Governor does not forecast that kind of decision she likely does not plan to issue another statewide emergency declaration.

Councilor Ali asked that Danielle West speak to the role of the Legislative Committee, specifically whether the committee advocates on behalf of the public or the Council. Danielle West noted that, according to the City website, the Legislative Committee is charged with advancing Council policy initiatives before federal, state and regional governments, and oversees the hiring of board appointments. It is Danielle's understanding that the councilors are acting on behalf of the Council and putting the Council's interests forward. Those interests may or may not line up with staff recommendations regarding legislation to be placed before the State legislature, and can differ from the delegation, which may have separate policy initiatives that the Council may or may not agree with.

Mayor Snyder noted that State elected officials can and do act individually and can sponsor legislation based on their individual priorities. They are not necessarily obligated to coordinate with other members of the legislature unlike the City Council, which chooses to act as a body. The Mayor's impression is that the City's process is reactive as there is not currently an expectation that legislators communicate with cities about their legislative priorities, and asked Danielle West to comment. Danielle West pointed out that in previous years a pre-session meeting with the delegation was held to discuss the Council's legislative and policy priorities while giving legislators opportunity to discuss their priorities with the Council.

Councilor Ali concurred, and noted this was partially due to the pandemic. As there were prior attempts to streamline communication between the Council and the delegation, Councilor Ali expressed an interest in restarting those meetings.

Danielle West clarified that in prior years the City Manager would put out a call for ideas and legislative priorities to staff. Those ideas would be brought to the Legislative Committee for consideration. The Committee would then decide on and bring their selected legislative priorities to delegation, typically in the fall.

Councilor Fournier asked that a timeline and structured procedure be instituted for such meetings going forward and emphasized the importance of unifying and solidifying priorities coming from the City of Portland.

Councilor Ali asked if outside counsel's (Bernstein Shur) objective is to support the delegation or work on behalf of the City government. Danielle West said they have a contract that stipulates Bernstein Shur advance City Council policy initiatives and lobby on behalf of the city with the delegation and its members. This contract has been in place for the past eight or nine years.

Mayor Snyder asked that staff schedule an in person meeting in September or October to discuss legislative priorities with the delegation, and asked about a tracking document that was used in the past by a former Councilor and asked staff for assistance in locating the document.

Councilor Ali agreed to reach out to Representative Talbot Ross to begin scheduling, as he has a working relationship with her.

Councilor Fournier made a motion to approve the minutes for the last meeting, seconded by Mayor Snyder, vote 3-0.

Mayor Snyder made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Councilor Fournier, vote 3-0. Meeting was adjourned at 8:50 AM