

Legislative and Nominating Committee Minutes
September 21, 2021

The September 21, 2021 Legislative Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Pious Ali at 8:00 AM on Zoom.

Councilor Pious Ali (Chair), Mayor Kate Snyder, Councilor Nick Mavodones, Councilor April Fournier, Dena Libner (Chief of Staff), Danielle West (City Attorney) Anne McGuire (Assistant City Manager), Representative Rachel Talbot Ross, Representative Barb Wood, Representative Ed Crockett, Representative Grayson Lookner, Representative Michael Brennan, Representative Sam Zager, Senator Heather Sanborn, Senator Ben Chipman, Kate Knox (Bernstein Shur), Alysia Melnick (Bernstein Shur), and Chris Feeney (Bernstein Shur) were present.

Councilor Ali explained that the purpose of the meeting was to share the City's legislative priorities and receive feedback and recommendations from the Delegation.

Dena Libner noted that City staff on the call would be able to answer any technical questions regarding the legislative priorities to be presented by Kate Knox.

Rep. Talbot Ross asked that the City highlight priorities that would be considered an emergency item, and that potential funding needs be identified. Dena Libner clarified that some priorities may straddle both emergency and long term priority management

Mayor Syder asked for clarification rules and process for recently appropriated American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Councilor Mavodones echoed Mayor Snyder's request, and also asked for feedback from the Delegation on what priorities may have already been funded.

Rep. Brennan noted that approximately half of the City's priorities have been addressed in the State budget or through ARPA funding, and asked if the items were timely given recent developments at the State level, with \$82 million allocated for affordable housing, a \$10 million set aside for homelessness services programming and a \$1.5 million set aside for housing navigators and noted that the City will be well positioned to take advantage of these funds. Rep. Brennan also noted that tens of millions were put into the University and Community College systems to address labor shortage issues through workforce development and training programs, revenue sharing increased 4.5 percent, and the Maine tax credit program was funded, and millions of dollars were in the supplemental budget for mental health and substance misuse programming across state, among other gains. Rep. Brennan also introduced a General Assistance bill that would have increased reimbursement up to 90 percent, which was carried

over and may move forward next session. Rep. Brennan offered to share a presentation with a comprehensive breakdown of the recent budget with the group.

Councilor Ali noted that these priorities were proposed by City staff and shared with the Legislative Committee within a very short time frame, and Mayor Snyder asked that the Delegation potentially present information to the City Council at a future date to ensure the City is aware of all the information about recent legislative changes.

Kate Knox noted that Housing and Economic Development priorities and shelter funding might not receive additional allocation due to the large amounts that have already been allocated in the State budget. Funding for Rep. Brennan's GA bill could become a City priority as it is in line with the priorities outlined by Housing and Economic Development interests. Knox highlighted the recently passed LB 1300, which would mandate county coordination on shelters but has not yet been funded and may be a good focus for the City's priorities. Mandated statewide shelters - not necessarily an emergency.

Sen Chipman, Local option sales tax for canna may not be relevant for short session. May need to wait for now because of all the ARPA funding. Bill was carried over. Cap to a couple years in terms of recouping upfront costs. May come back around. Grayson Lookner municipal zoning re: density etc.

Councilor Ali asked the group what priorities should be shelved until the next session. Rep. Zager pointed out the racial academic achievement gap was concerning, noted that Superintendent of Schools Xavier Botana's team is looking closely at the problem, and asked how bilingual social workers would address this issue.

Rep. Brennan noted that bills carried over from the last session that already address this could be reworded and considered for funding in the budget, and noted that a supplemental budget session could be a vehicle for this. Regarding the academic achievement equity issue, Rep. Brennan brought a bill forward in the last session instructing the Department of Education to develop a program to close both the racial and income achievement gap by tapping into school budgets, and that the bilingual social worker idea could be funded if this were passed and funded. He also highlighted that the 35 million in school funding the city received this session could also be funneled toward this type of program.

Mayor Snyder noted the importance of deferring to the school board on policy decisions for school districts in regards to programmatic changes.

Kate Knox highlighted using 211 for GA applicants if it would create efficiencies, and expressed an interest in Mayor Snyder's proposal on remote meetings.

Sen. Chipman noted that he is proposing a new bill at the request of Chris Huff (Assessor) regarding property tax and tax assessments and relief for people with revaluations. Mayor Snyder pointed out that the City will be voting on a potential bridge program for seniors on October 4.

Mayor Snyder explained that the City Council used a continuation of the City's emergency order to continue to meet remotely, and proposed council/staff meeting in person while allowing remote participation from the public. Reluctance due to potential issues with having large numbers of the public in the building. Sen. Sanborn: Based on judiciary decisions/discussion, reopening may result in even more restrictive legislation as the Legislature did not support the idea of meetings where the council met in person with remote participation from the public. Councilor Ali noted that the School District has been conducting hybrid meetings with the board in person and the public participating remotely.

Rep. Brennan expressed that the Delegation and City need to have a better process to meet and discuss local issues, highlighting dredging and off-track betting on Exchange Street as examples of areas where there appeared to be a disconnect between the City and the Legislature.

Councilor Ali noted that there is another meeting scheduled for next week and echoed an interest in furthering discussions with the Delegation on improving their working relationship, as did Councilor Mavodones and Sen. Chipman.

Mayor Snyder invited the delegation to tour oxford street shelter and to continue discussions around homelessness.

Councilor Ali adjourned the meeting at 9:00 AM.