

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL – JUNE 25, 2018

A Special Meeting of the City Council was held in City Council Chambers on Monday, June 25, 2018 at 6:00 P.M. for the purpose of filling the vacancy of the City Clerk's position by interviewing the three final candidates in the order of the drawing and at the conclusion of the interviews that the final vote be taken to elect the next City Clerk. Notice of this meeting was posted on June 21, 2018 at 4:17 P.M. Council President Beth Gerard presided.

Absent Councilors: Dominguez (arrived late)

Councilor Gerard stated the rules of the City Council provide that in case of the absence of both the City Clerk and the Assistant City Clerk from any meeting of the City Council, the Council shall select a clerk pro tempore for such meeting.

Councilor Turiel made a motion to appoint City Solicitor Elizabeth Rennard as clerk pro tempore. All members present voted in favor. Motion carried.

Councilor Gerard stated that the Council will interview three candidates for the position of City Clerk. The candidates were recommended by an Ad-hoc committee that interviewed 6 of 21 candidates for the job. The candidates were asked questions based on the education, experience and technical skills needed to perform the job and as set forth in the job description. She stated that the questions asked tonight of the Councilors who did not participate in the Ad-hoc committee will be based on the same criteria. She requested Councilors and the public to not text, email, or tweet the questions to other candidates or to anyone inside/outside the Council Chambers. SATV was present to record the meeting.

Councilor Gerard stated that the following order of the interviews for the position of City Clerk were drawn on Thursday, June 21, 2018 at 6:00 P.M.:

1. Eda Jane Matchak
2. Amy S. Akell
3. Ilene Simons

Candidate 1: Eda Jane Matchak introduced herself. She resides in Salem.

The first question was posed by Councilor Dibble on management. He asked, "Can you explain how many FT and PT employees you supervise, your management style and why you would make an effective city clerk?"

Ms. Matchak stated she is the Director of Elections in the city of Lowell, supervises 2 FT election clerks, is a Municipal Hearing Officer and supervises 250 PT poll workers. Her management style is to lead by example and to have higher expectations of people and herself. She makes sure everything is done in compliance with election laws and regulations. She is passionate about the city and embraces the opportunity to participate in the city as resident and clerk.

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Councilor Flynn asked, “If hired as the City Clerk, do you feel any current advances of technology could be used to increase the efficiency of the office. If so, what types of technology would you propose?”

Ms. Matchak said she would embrace equipment used in early voting, as allowed for in the Municipal Modernization Bill. Technology such as poll pads are key as well as working collaboratively with the state on new technology.

Councilor Madore asked, “Can you tell me a time when you challenge the status quo and tradition and why did you do it and what was the result?”

Ms. Matchak responded that in her current role, people were dissatisfied with the voting process and voting locations. She worked on a full assessment, city wide, to look at all 33 precincts. Some locations were not voting handicapped accessible so she worked collaboratively with the state, neighborhood groups, and active residents and downsized to 14 precincts. This increased accessibility and improved the voting process.

Councilor Milo asked, “If you are elected to the City Clerk position by this Council, in addition to your office serving 42,000 residents of Salem, you personally will be reporting directly to this body, in essence, we will be your supervisors. We elect the city clerk, we set the clerk’s salary, we’re a body of 11 people, each with our own personality, our own skill set and our own work style. We also conduct a lot of business that the clerk has to prepare, advertise agendas, full council meetings, committee meetings, special meetings such as this, all the while keeping all the balls in the air. You must also make sure the other departments that you are supervising are running smoothly. Can you tell us about your experience with working with a large legislative body such as ours and how you will balance our needs, the agendas, etc. on a weekly or sometimes daily basis with the needs of the other offices that you’ll be supervising?”

Ms. Matchak said she works with the Solicitor, works closely with nine members of Council organizing listening sessions with an ad hoc session on elections and worked with the chairman to ensure that agendas were posted timely. She follows models of City of Boston, getting out to the neighborhoods hearing what people have to say and able to bring back and implement change if needed.

She added that she is supervised by four election commissioners, but day to day operations are supervised by the City Solicitor.

Councilor Peterson questioned, “I have heard from many that there is a feeling of mistrust and not enough is being done to encourage the disenfranchised to vote. How would you address this and how would you establish relationship in the community to develop a sense of trust in voting and remove obstacles?”

Ms. Matchak responded that she currently works in a department with three special language ballots. She said it is important to have language support for everyone. She added that the state legislation does not require translators, but they are key. She makes sure staff are well trained in elections and as such they better meet the needs of the voters

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Council Sargent asked, “How many years’ experience do you have working with a city council, preparing city council meeting agendas and backup information for a council that meets at least twice a month.

Ms. Matchak stated she does not have any experience creating agenda or minutes but has 5+ years’ experience creating election commission agendas and minutes. She is very comfortable with the open meeting law and has extensive knowledge with the election committee.

In closing, Ms. Matchas said she has a Master’s degree in public affairs, implemented bilingual ballots and an extensive background in elections.

Candidate 2: Amy Akell introduced herself. She lives in Medford and is Town Clerk of Stoneham.

The first question was posed by Councilor Dibble on management. He asked, “Can you explain how many FT and PT employees you supervise, your management style and why you would make an effective city clerk?”

Ms. Akell stated that she supervises two people now, but when elections occur, the staff increases to seven or eight people. She works independently and does not micro manage her staff. She treats them as adults and assists as necessary. She has seven years of experience and is always open to new ideas.

Councilor Flynn asked, “If hired as the City Clerk, do you feel any current advances of technology could be used to increase the efficiency of the office. If so, what types of technology would you propose?”

Ms. Akell said that she doesn’t know what’s in office currently, but will explore available systems, particularly for public record requests.

Councilor Madore asked, “Can you tell me a time when you challenge the status quo and tradition and why did you do it and what was the result?”

Ms. Akell said she had to change one practice in her current role that she didn’t really have control over. She said that there was a practice of giving employees copies of a birth certificate for free. Others were charged \$10 and giving the records for free was a conflict of interest. It was difficult, but she was successful in changing the rules.

Councilor Milo asked, “If you are elected to the City Clerk position by this Council, in addition to your office serving 42,000 residents of Salem, you personally will be reporting directly to this body, in essence, we will be your supervisors. We elect the city clerk, we set the clerk’s salary, we’re a body of 11 people, each with our own personality, our own skill set and our own work style. We also conduct a lot of business that the clerk has to prepare, advertise agendas, full council meetings, committee meetings, special meetings such as this, all the while keeping all the balls in the air. You must also make sure the other departments that you are supervising are running smoothly. Can you tell us about your experience with working with a large legislative body such as ours and how you will balance our needs, the agendas, etc. on a weekly or sometimes daily basis with the needs of the other offices that you’ll be supervising?”

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Ms. Akell said the way I look at it, the council meetings are mini town meetings, I have a lot of experience with town meeting. There is always preparation to be done and it is a bit of a juggling act. It is all about time management and learning exactly what's needed. If you have to stay a little late to get things done, you stay a little late to get everything done.

Councilor Milo asked, "Have you had experience working with a legislative body like this?"

Ms. Akell stated, "Not specifically like this. I work with the Board of Selectman, a group of five. I do not report directly to them, but work with them. Somewhat similar but obviously different in some ways.

Councilor Peterson questioned, "I have heard from many that there is a feeling of mistrust and not enough is being done to encourage the disenfranchised to vote. How would you address this and how would you establish relationship in the community to develop a sense of trust in voting and remove obstacles?"

Ms. Akell stated that she would make information as public and widely available as possible. She would put information online or Facebook pages to keep residents informed of when board of registers deadline are, where to go, or call. Customer service is very important.

Council Sargent asked, "How many years' experience do you have working with a city council, preparing city council meeting agendas and backup information for a council that meets at least twice a month.

Ms. Akell replied that specifically, with city council, she does not have much experience because she has been working with selectman. She has worked with the warrant in town meetings, done postings, worked with selectman to get all the information they need to get out to the public. She also has other experience that would help her in city council business.

Closing Remarks:

Ms. Akell stated that she welcomes the opportunity, has a number of years' experience, open to learning new things, follows the law, open to working with everyone and doing the best job she can in working for the people and council.

Candidate 3: Ilene Simons introduced herself. She resides in Salem. During her 18 years in City Clerk's office, she has performed most if not all the duties outlined in the job description. She said she has the institutional knowledge, positive working relationship with the other city departments as well as the tangible and intangible skills Council is seeking.

The first question was posed by Councilor Dibble on management. He asked, "Can you explain how many FT and PT employees you supervise, your management style and why you would make an effective city clerk?"

Councilor Gerard stated. "Let the record reflect that Councilor Dominguez has just arrived."

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Ms. Simons said she leads by example. She added that if they see me working hard, I expect them to work hard, which they are. She treats employees with respect, so she can earn their respect. She is not afraid of rolling up her sleeves and doing the same things as staff. She tries to determine their strengths, keep communications open, and hold staff meetings. She set goals and deadlines, cross trains the department, and makes sure they work as a team.

Councilor Flynn asked, “If hired as the City Clerk, do you feel any current advances of technology could be used to increase the efficiency of the office. If so, what types of technology would you propose?”

Ms. Simons responded that since March she has been working with an outside vendor to allow people to buy vital records online. It has been taking a lot of coordination with staff, IT, treasury, and finance departments. Her department will be one of the first to take credit cards over the counter. In Elections, she just purchased two poll pads and an electronic mini voting registration system. Couple of years ago for early voting, check in process was manual, but now it’s electronic.

Councilor Madore asked, “Can you tell me a time when you challenge the status quo and tradition and why did you do it and what was the result?”

She responded that, “Everything we do is by MGL and a small example is when a person came in for proof of residency, but he wasn’t in the system. By law, I could not give him a certified resident certificate. I did some research and found he did live in Salem, but was deleted from system because he was not voting and did not answer the census. I had him do a blank census form to register him as a current resident. Then, I was able to give him a letter. I try to find ways in working with the laws that are given to us, like having bilingual workers translate material in Spanish.

Councilor Milo asked, “If you are elected to the City Clerk position by this Council, in addition to your office serving 42,000 residents of Salem, you personally will be reporting directly to this body, in essence, we will be your supervisors. We elect the city clerk, we set the clerk’s salary, we’re a body of 11 people, each with our own personality, our own skill set and our own work style. We also conduct a lot of business that the clerk has to prepare, advertise agendas, full council meetings, committee meetings, special meetings such as this, all the while keeping all the balls in the air. You must also make sure the other departments that you are supervising are running smoothly. Can you tell us about your experience with working with a large legislative body such as ours and how you will balance our needs, the agendas, etc. on a weekly or sometimes daily basis with the needs of the other offices that you’ll be supervising?”

Ms. Simons responded, “Being here for 18 years and the past 14 years as the assistant city clerk, I’ve worked for over 30 different Councillors. You have to learn to prioritize.” She added that things get hectic during election time. Agenda day has fallen on election day, so I come in early and start the election, then do agenda, then put back on election hat. She uses website to post agenda and meeting notices. Sets up for sub-committee meetings and advertises all hearings and ordinances. After meetings, she processes every single piece of paper. She also keeps track of all licenses that come in and maintains logs of appointments.

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Councilor Peterson questioned, “I have heard from many that there is a feeling of mistrust and not enough is being done to encourage the disenfranchised to vote. How would you address this and how would you establish relationship in the community to develop a sense of trust in voting and remove obstacles?”

Ms. Simons said she has to do things within the parameters of the local and state laws. She said she would like to make the Board of Registrars a more active board. She is interested in going to neighborhood meetings and working with Salem State University to have voter sessions at the college.

Council Sargent asked, “How many years’ experience do you have working with a city council, preparing city council meeting agendas and backup information for a council that meets at least twice a month.

Ms. Simons said she has been with clerk’s office for 18 years, 14 with the council. During that time, she has prepared agendas and all the necessary paperwork for each meeting.

Closing Remarks:

Ms. Simons stated that she loves working for the city. She said the city is in her blood, sole and heart and the city clerk’s office is the heart of the city government and. I want it so bad. 18 years’ experience working FT in the clerk’s office can give it back to the community. I love Salem.

I know I’m the best qualified candidate for this position due to my institutional knowledge, past work experience and my tangible and intangible skills that I can immediate apply to the city clerk’s position. Being a part of the clerk’s office for 18 years will be a tremendous benefit to council, clerk’s office and most importantly to the residence of Salem. While still bringing a fresh prospective to the position. Therefore, I ask that your consideration in electing me as your next city clerk not only for you but for the people of Salem.

Deliberation

Councilor Gerard asked the Council if they wanted to vote this evening or consider the three candidates and vote on Thursday.

Councilor Turiel stated he was comfortable with the will of the body, but he was fine with proceeding.

Councilor Sargent said the Council should move it along and see a vote go forward tonight.

Councilors Fury, Dominguez and McCarthy expressed their interest in voting this evening.

Councilor Dibble asked Elizabeth Rennard to explain the process used by the ad hoc committee and whether there was a ranking for the three of the candidates. Ms. Rennard responded that the committee interview six candidates, scored each based on a set of criteria and then selected the top three, unranked.

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Councilor Turiel moved adoption by roll call vote; each councilor stating the name of the candidate he or she elects as City Clerk. Motion was seconded by Councilor Dominguez.

All Councilors elected Ilene Simons as City Clerk.

Councilor Turiel made the following motion: Having selected Ilene Simons as the City Clerk, I hereby move to appoint her to a term of three years commencing June 28, 2018. Also, to rescind the prior vote of the Council appointing her to fill the unexpired term of Cheryl LaPointe. The motion was seconded by Councilor Fury. All in favor.

Councilor Turiel moved for immediate reconsideration in the hopes it does not prevail. The motion failed.

Councilor McCarthy moved to adjourn. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Rennard