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MAR 22 2021

WESTFIELD CITY CLERK

Personnel Action Committee

Minutes for meeting date 03/18/2021 at 6:20pm via Zoom per the Governor due to Pandemic
Committee Members – Cindy Harris, chair (present), Ralph Figy (present), Richard Sullivan (present)
Attendance taken by individual vote

Agenda Item #1

Reappointment of Rene Laviolette, 7 Victoria Circle, as a member of the Board of Registrars, for a term to expire the first Monday of February, 2024

Discussion:

He has been on the Board since 2016. City Clerk Karen Fanion states he is a great Board member, very reliable, and highly recommends him. He is the President/Owner of MTI Systems in West Springfield which develops computer software for manufacturing companies worldwide. He was a past President of the Westfield Rotary Club and currently serves on their Board of Directors. He also served as Rotary District 2890 Assistant Governor and was Chairman of the Westfield Republican Party.

Chair stated – Councilors, any Comments or a Motion to Vote.

Councilor Sullivan stated Rene Laviolette does a great job and pointed out that this Board must have Republicans and Democrats.

Motion to reappoint Laviolette made by Councilor Figy. 2nd by Councilor Sullivan.

By Individual Vote – Chair/Councilor Harris – Yes

Councilor Figy – Yes

Councilor Sullivan – Yes

Recommend reappointment on a 3-0 Vote.

Agenda Item #2

Reappointment of Richard A. Sypek, 60 Cardinal Lane, as a member of the Police Commission for a term to expire the first Monday of February, 2024.

Discussion:

Attorney Sypek works very closely with our Police Chief and is looking forward to remaining on this Commission, continuing to solve upcoming issues and address appointments in the year ahead.

Attorney Sypek is now practicing solo here in Westfield after 30 years as a Principal in the Law Firm of Ross + Ross in Springfield.

He has worked with the Westfield Gas + Electric, has represented many clients in front of many Municipal Councils, Planning Boards, Zoning Boards and License Commissions, as his practice focuses on Business Development, Zoning and Real Estate.

Repeating his background information from his initial appointment November 2019, he served as Vice Chair of St. Mary's Council from 2001-2006, was on the Board of Westfield Youth Hockey Association and Amelia Park Children's Museum, and was a Coach for many Westfield Youth Sports.

Attorney Sypek is well-known throughout our City and is very well-respected. He states it's an honor to assist our Men and Women in blue.

Chair stated – Councilors, any Comments or a Motion to Vote.

Councilor Figy stated that he is a welcomed addition to the Police Commission – Fits right in and they will have many appointments in the coming year.

Motion to recommend reappointment made by Councilor Sullivan. 2nd by Councilor Figy.

By Individual Vote – Chair/Councilor Harris – Yes

Councilor Figy – Yes

Councilor Sullivan – Yes

Recommend reappointment on a 3-0 Vote.

Agenda Item #3

Reappointment of C. Lee Bennett, 57 Jaeger Drive, as a member of the Fire Commission for a term to expire the first Monday of February 2024.

Discussion:

Fire Commissioner Bennett is a Police Captain, retired from the Springfield Police Dept., a Westfield Citizen stepping up to serve our Community with her knowledge, time and sincerity of helping her neighbors. She is dedicated to supporting our Firefighters so Westfield will continue to be served and protected. As Chair of the Fire Commission, her life experience of being level-headed, analytical and experienced in crisis management as a Police Captain is very reassuring for all our Citizens.

With over 30 years of Law Enforcement Service her association with Fire Departments naturally led her to having a great rapport with that brother/sister group, as well as having a brother who is a fire fighter. She understands the important role of our Fire Dept. in our City.

Her education, professional background and community service is commendable. She attended the FBI National Academy and has a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice. She has been a Consultant Investigator for the Springfield Law Department and is an Investigator for the Office of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance for the Diocese of Springfield. She has taught College Level course in regards to Constitutional Law, Criminal Justice, Ethical Decision Making, and Internal Investigations. She taught at the Criminal Justice Training Academy and Springfield Police Academy and other police academies across the State. She had authored articles on Police Organization, Women and Criminal Justice and many other subjects. She has taught on all aspects of Police Activity.

For over 30 years Commissioner Bennett was part of the Springfield Police Department Honor Guard, is on the Hampden County Deputy Sheriff's Board, on Western MA Critical Incident Stress Management Team, is on the Sisters of St. Joseph's Justice and Peace Committee, was President of the YWCA, part of the Springfield College Search and Rescue Team, a School Mentor, and she developed a Leadership Course for Incarcerated Women, restructured the Domestic Violence Unit, and created partnerships area colleges to prevent underage drinking. Her compassion for others shines through all her endeavors.

Her Police work is involved many, many different assignments including Captain of Operations, Internal Investigation Unit Commander and Crime Prevention Bureau Commander.

On the Fire Commission she makes decisions after much thought on the situation and takes voting on situations very seriously.

At the 3/14/2021 City Council Meeting it was stated that Councilor Mello would send questions that she had on this reappointment to the Personnel Action Committee. She did send her questions to the 3 members but then also sent them to ALL Councilors. So since all Councilors already have the questions sent by Councilor Mello, I will relay the responses from Fire Commissioner Bennett.

#1. Regarding: Responsibilities of the Fire Commission

Commissioner Bennett's Response -> Please see the City of Westfield Charter Section 9, paragraph 3. It is my understanding from the Mayor who appointed me that the Fire Commission is the hiring, firing, and discipline authority for the department.

#2. Regarding: Philosophy/values that influence your decisions

Commissioner Bennett's Response -> As a sworn member of the Fire Commission my duty is to vote with a clear conscience for the best outcome for the members of the Fire Department and the Citizens of the City of Westfield.

#3. Regarding: Justify your Decisions

Commissioner Bennett's Response -> Same as directly above (#2 response). As a sworn member of the Fire Commission, my duty is to vote with a clear conscience for the best outcome for the members of the Fire Department and the citizens of the City of Westfield.

#4. Regarding: Internal Workings of Fire Department

Commissioner Bennett's Response -> The question refers to the internal workings of the department and as such are more suited for the administrative staff, but since there are cases that have not been settled in court, I do not believe anyone on the Fire Commission nor the Fire Command staff are in a position to discuss such matters in the public arena.

Chair stated – Councilors, any Comments or a Motion to Vote.

Motion to recommend reappointment made by Councilor Figy. 2nd by Councilor Sullivan.

By Individual Vote – Chair/Councilor Harris – Yes

Councilor Figy – Yes

Councilor Sullivan – Yes

Recommend reappointment on a 3-0 Vote.

Motion made by Councilor Figy to accept minutes for this meeting of 3/18/2021 - Second by Councilor Sullivan.

By Individual Vote – Chair/Councilor Harris – Yes

Councilor Figy – Yes

Councilor Sullivan – Yes

Motion to Adjourn at 6:45PM

Individual Vote – Chair/Councilor Harris – Yes

Councilor Figy – Yes

Councilor Sullivan – Yes

Minutes submitted by Cindy Harris, Chair 03/19/2021

FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 2021 A.M.

To - Councilor K. Mello
From - Councilor C. Harris, Chair Personnel Action Committee
Re - Thursday, March 4, 2021, City Council Meeting - Reappointment of
Fire Commissioner Lee Bennett

You stated that you had questions regarding the above which resulted in you not supporting Immediate Consideration of this reappointment which was then sent to the Personnel Action Committee. Please send those questions to the following list of six (6) people to their respective City email addresses by Monday 4:00 p.m. March 8, 2021. (That gives you Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday until 4:00 p.m. to email those questions you stated you had on Thursday March 4, 2021.) Personnel Action Committee meetings require many hours of preparations. Thank you, Councilor Mello.

1. Councilor Cindy Harris, Chair, Personnel Action Committee
2. Councilor Ralph Figy, Personnel Action Committee
3. Councilor Richard Sullivan, Personnel Action Committee
4. Fire Commissioner Lee Bennett
5. Attorney Shanna Reed, City of Westfield Law Dept. (as the Fire Dept. is involved in confidential matters - which the Council was informed at the Executive Session Meeting, and there will be consultation between Commissioner Bennett and the Law Dept, and C. Harris and the Law Dept. as to not violate any Confidential issues. Questions will not be discussed between PAC Members before PAC Meeting.
6. City Clerk Fenion (for Personnel Action Committee Minutes documents)

Karen Fanion

From: Kristen Mello <kristen.mello@cityofwestfield.org>
Sent: Monday, March 8, 2021 10:02 AM
To: Cindy Harris; Ralph Figy; Richard K. Sullivan Jr.; C. Lee Bennett; Shanna Reed; Karen Fanion
Subject: Re: reappointment of Fire Commissioner C. Lee Bennett
Attachments: DOC_03052021101912.PDF

Dear Councilor Harris,

Thank you so much for your thoughtful letter including the preferred protocol for my questions for the Personnel Action Committee regarding the reappointment of Fire Commissioner C. Lee Bennett. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to perform my due diligence in fulfilling the responsibility of Mayoral appointment confirmation.

My questions for Commissioner Bennett are as follows:

Commissioner Bennett, below are my questions for you. Please speak to what you can so that we may better understand you as a candidate for reappointment.

1. In your own words, what are the responsibilities of the Fire Commission?
2. Since your appointment in 2019, the Fire Commission has had to make important decisions about staffing and hiring. Information the public has about these decisions comes from news reports and published rulings, which offer limited context. Without going into details about the particulars of the case, what can you tell us about your philosophy and values that influenced your decisions in these matters?
3. Your decisions resulted in costs to the City. How would you justify that these costs are to the benefit of the City?
4. Since you joined the Westfield Fire Commission, what changes has the Commission suggested for the Fire Department that would prevent such an issue from happening again? Have these changes been implemented? If so, how?

Thank you so much for taking the time to answer these questions in the way that you are able.

Respectfully submitted as requested on Monday morning, March 8, 2021.

Very sincerely,

Kristen Mello
Councilor At-Large

March 4, 2021 Council minutes

Councilor Harris offered a motion, which was duly seconded, for immediate consideration of the reappointment of C. Lee Bennett, 57 Jaeger Drive, as a member of the Fire Commission, for a term to expire the first Monday of February, 2024. Councilor Harris informed the Council that the Fire Commission has an impending vote on March 9th relative to a new EMS Director position and that there is one current member on the board with an expired term and would not want to have another member with an expired term and requested support for the immediate consideration. Councilor Mello informed the Council that she appreciates Councilor Harris' request but after the recent executive session relative to the Fire Department she would feel more comfortable understanding more about the Commissioner. Councilor Harris informed the Council that Commissioner Bennett is an outstanding citizen with outstanding credentials that has stepped forward for this appointment and requested Councilor Mello to reconsider her vote for immediate consideration. Councilor Harris informed the Council that she has a decision from the Law Department that appointments do not need unanimous consent for immediate consideration. Councilor Flaherty agreed that Commissioner Bennett is well qualified and has a stellar record in her career, but it is appropriate to be able to ask her questions at a committee meeting and that he disagrees with the Law Department's decision that appointments do not need unanimous consent for immediate consideration because the Charter says that there needs to be unanimous consent for immediate consideration. Councilor Mello reiterated that she has respect for Commissioner Bennett but there were decisions made on the Commission that will cost the City millions of dollars and she would like to ask questions of her. Councilor Morganelli agreed with Councilors Mello and Flaherty and added that if there is not a strong reason for immediate consideration it should go to PAC. President Bean informed the Council that there needs to be a legal opinion from the Law Department relative to immediate consideration of appointments. Councilor Flaherty informed the Council that he will submit a motion for that on the next Council Agenda. Councilor Flaherty offered a motion to allow Councilor Mello to submit questions to PAC for Commissioner Bennett. Councilor Sullivan informed the Council that there does not need to be a motion for another Councilor to submit questions to a subcommittee. Councilor Flaherty informed the Council that some questions are ignored that are submitted. Councilor Mello informed the Council that all of her questions, whenever submitted to PAC have been answered. There was no action on Councilor Flaherty's motion. President Bean requested that the original motion be moved for a vote.

Upon motion of Councilor Harris, it was

VOTED: That immediate consideration be given on the reappointment of C. Lee Bennett, 57 Jaeger Drive, as a member of the Fire Commission, for a term to expire the first Monday of February, 2024.

The vote on the foregoing was as follows:

Michael Burns	Yes
Ralph Figy	Yes
Dave Flaherty	No
Cindy Harris	lost connection
Bridget Matthews-Kane	No
Kristen Mello	No
Nicholas Morganelli, Jr.	No
William Onyski	Yes
Richard Sullivan, Jr.	Yes
James Adams	Yes
Dan Allie	No
Brent Bean II	Yes
John Beltrandi III	Yes

The President declared the motion LOST. Immediate consideration need unanimous consent.

Upon motion of Councilor Figy, it was VOTED: That the reappointment of C. Lee Bennett, 57 Jaeger Drive, as a member of the Fire Commission, for a term to expire the first Monday of February, 2024 be REFERRED TO PERSONNEL ACTION COMMITTEE.

The vote on the foregoing was as follows:

Michael Burns	Yes
Ralph Figy	Yes
Dave Flaherty	Yes
Cindy Harris	Yes
Bridget Matthews-Kane	Yes
Kristen Mello	Yes
Nicholas Morganelli, Jr.	Yes
William Onyski	Yes
Richard Sullivan, Jr.	Yes
James Adams	Yes
Dan Allie	Yes
Brent Bean II	Yes
John Beltrandi III	Yes