

# MINUTES OF THE GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

City Council Chambers

January 24, 2022 – 6:00 p.m.

Committee Members present:      Councilor Richard Michaud, Chairman  
   Councilor Nancie Cameron, Vice-Chair  
   Councilor Don Austin  
   Councilor Matt Gerding

Administration/Staff present:      Mayor Dana Hilliard  
   City Manager Bob Belmore  
   Finance Director Scott Smith  
   City Clerk Jonathan Slaven

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Chairman Michaud called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

## MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

***Councilor Gerding made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 28, 2021 meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Austin and passed 4-0.***

Mayor Hilliard asked the Chair if he could address the Committee before they start their Agenda. Chairman Michaud responded in the affirmative absent any objection. Seeing no objection, Mayor Hilliard was given the floor.

Mayor Hillard informed the Committee he would like to read a portion of his Mayor's report for this evening's Council meeting that he is assigning to the Committee.

On Saturday September 17th, 1796 Washington delivered his farewell address from his Presidency. During that address our 1st President, founding father warn us against the following;  
"However [political parties] may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion".

While the role of political parties at the national and state level will continue to be a widely examine discussion as our democracy matures, in the Hilltop city we have made a clear choice of our wishes for their involvement in local politics. Our charter was amended to remove the influence of what Washington warn us against, the creation of stagnation and polarization of democratic functions. Washington was also able to foresee how individuals within a republic would become more loyal to the party banner, as opposed to weighing the value that individual citizens to contribute in elected position.

Out of the 13 cities in NH, only two have partisan races at the local level; Manchester, and Nashua. The other 10 cities are able to safely witness for a distance how partisanship has led to further divisiveness at the local level and added an unnecessary layer to governing.

The political officiation of locally elected officials should hold no bearing upon their abilities to make decisions based upon what is good for Somersworth. Nor, should it become a factor in recruitment or support of citizens seeking office. This is now the second time that I have witnessed and warned our community about how local and some state partisan organizations continue to move their hand into our non-partisan races. This evening I am calling upon the government operations committee to again review the foundation of our non-partisan structure and examine how an official piece of legislation could be crafted to reinforce the values of our local elections and what level of limitations and restraint should be requested upon partisan organizations to exhibit. I will again warn that our eyes should be open to the direction that some within our community are trying to take us, unless we wish to mirror how Washington and Concord are functioning then it is now time to protect the local system we have created.

#### PERSONNEL RULES & REGULATIONS, CH. 4 – HOLIDAYS: JUNETEENTH

Manager Belmore provided the Committee a section of Chapter 4, Personnel Rules and Regulations dealing with Holidays. Manager Belmore informed the Committee June 19<sup>th</sup>, known as Juneteenth was declared a federal holiday last year. He said there has been some discussions if the City should consider recognizing this federal holiday. Councilor Austin asked how this would affect union personnel. Manager Belmore stated that it would not automatically carry over to Union Contracts. Councilor Gerding asked if this would add a holiday or if one needed to be removed in its place. Councilor Michaud said this is in line with the Federal holidays and he is okay with adding it to the list of holidays.

*Councilor Cameron made a motion to sponsor an Ordinance to amend Chapter 4 adding Juneteenth to the list of holidays for non-union personnel. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding and passed 4-0.*

#### COMCAST CABLE FRANCHISE RENEWAL

Manager Belmore asked the Committee to consider an extension of the Comcast Franchise Agreement in order to align the renewal period with that of Breezeline (formerly Atlantic Broadband). Currently the Atlantic Broadband/Breezeline agreement expires in 2031, and the extension with Comcast would be proposed to expire in 2032. He added that it would be nice to sync both agreements as close as possible so negotiations could take place simultaneously.

*Councilor Cameron made a motion to support the extension. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding and passed 4-0.*

#### FUTURE REVIEWS

Manager Belmore introduced a few suggested amendments to Ordinance Chapters to consider for future meetings.

- a. Licenses & Permits, City Ordinance Ch.14

A few proposed changes include removing section 14.7, allowing the Planning or Zoning Board to temporarily waive the City Ordinances. The amendments also give the City more time for processing the application while also requesting additional information not currently requested on the application form.

b. Traffic Safety Committee, City Ordinance Ch. 29 – Administrative Code

The proposed changes focus mainly on the membership make-up and reporting. The amendments for this Chapter will be polished up and reviewed at a later meeting.

c. Sewer Ordinance, Ch. 8A

Manager Belmore said he will collaborate with Director Bobinsky and Director Smith to clean up a few items regarding the makeup of the Sewerage Committee section. Councilor Gerding asked if this Committee was necessary. Manager Belmore said that would be reviewed as we look at amending the language. Currently the Ordinance requires arbitration and that may not be the best process to follow. Manager Belmore said final recommendations will be provided to the Committee at another meeting.

## LOCAL ELECTIONS

The Committee reached consensus to have staff draft language for a Resolution requesting the removal of partisanship in local elections.

## MISCELLANEOUS

Manager Belmore gave the Committee a breakdown of City staffing and explained a few vacancies and new hires currently in the background process.

## ADJOURNMENT

*Councilor Austin made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron and passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,

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Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk