



Memorandum

To: Town Council Members
From: Mandi Jo Hanneke, Chair, Community Resources Committee (CRC)
Date: August 27, 2020
Re: Report by the Chair of CRC to the Town Council

Summary:

Since the last report of July 29, 2020, CRC has met once, on August 4, 18, and 2 special meetings on the 26th. The focus of all of these meetings were the vacancies on the Planning Board. During the August 26, 2020 meetings, CRC interviewed applicants for appointment to the Planning Board and produced a recommendation to the Council.

Discussion: Vacancies on the Planning Board

On August 26, 2020, **CRC voted 3-1 with 1 absent (Hanneke, Ross, Schreiber – Yes; Swartz – No; Bahl-Milne – Absent) to recommend the Town Council appoint to the Planning Board, effective immediately:**

For terms expiring June 30, 2023, Johanna Neumann, Thom Long, and Andrew MacDougall.

For context, the Planning Board has 7 seats. On June 15, 2020, the Council extended to August 31, 2020 the terms of three members whose terms were expiring June 30. Of the members whose terms were extended, two did not seek reappointment, and one did. Therefore, at the time of the interviews on August 26, 2020, there were 2 vacancies and 1 potential vacancy from a member seeking reappointment.

To produce this recommendation, CRC implemented the process it adopted on June 30, 2020. The information below described CRC actions, deliberations, and decisions during each step of this process.

Sufficiency of the Pool

In accordance with Section 3 of its adopted process, on July 21, 2020 **voted 4-0 with 1 absent (Councilor Swartz) to declare the current applicant pool for Planning Board sufficient to proceed to interviews.**

A new vacancy notice was published on July 1, 2020. Section 3 of the adopted process states as follows:

In making a determination regarding the sufficiency of the applicant pool, CRC shall consider the following factors:

- *The number of applicants relative to the number of vacancies or impending vacancies. CRC strives for more applicants than vacancies.*

- *The demographic diversity of the applicant pool. CRC strives for a diverse applicant pool, including racial, economic, gender, and generational diversity.*
- *The current needs of the body-to-be-appointed, including any current burdens placed on the body by a vacancy.*

At the time of the vote, CRC recognized that the diversity of the pool was not what we had hoped for. At the same time, CRC recognized that the Planning Board was already operating with 1 vacancy and there will be two more by the end of August and that the pool was larger than the three vacancies that it is looking to fill. Because leaving three vacancies in a 7-member body would be an extreme burden on the body, CRC believed it necessary to move forward despite the lack of diversity in the pool. In order to fulfill our diversity goals for applicant pools, the entire Council must continue to work to recruit candidates that represent those goals.

Selection Guidance

On July 21, 2020, CRC **voted 4-0 with one absent (Councilor Swartz) to adopt the Selection Guidance for filling the vacancies on the Planning Board.**

The adopted Selection Guidance is attached to this report. Chair Hanneke explained that she sought input from the Planning Board chair and, per the process, placed that input received verbatim into the draft document. CRC then reviewed the first part of the draft guidance and reached consensus not to include any other criteria.

Statements of Interest

In compliance with the adopted process, Statements of Interest were solicited from all interested applicants after the adoption of selection guidance. Statements of Interest were due by close of business on August 17, 2020. Six Statements of Interest were received by the deadline. In accordance with the process, the Statements of Interest were posted on the meeting posting and in the packet at least seven days prior to the interviews.

Interview Questions

On August 18, 2020, CRC votes unanimously to adopt the Planning Board interview questions.

The adopted Planning Board questions are attached to this report. CRC used the interview questions for the last Planning Board vacancy and the most recent ZBA vacancies as a starting point. CRC also considered three questions submitted by non-CRC Councilors, and worked to incorporate their language and/or goals into the interview questions. Discussion of the purpose of the questions, whether they would provide Councilors with insight into the applicants' understanding of the Planning Board, and the appropriate wording was done over two meetings. Questions were added, deleted, and refined, until the CRC was satisfied with the number and content, to ensure their appropriateness for the number of applicants and in light of the Statements of Interest that had been submitted.

Interviews

At its August 18, 2020 meeting, CRC decided by consensus that interviewee answers shall not exceed two minutes in length. In accordance with the adopted process, the Chair designated each member of CRC to ask specific interview questions and distributed the plan to the members prior to the interviews.

Interviews of applicants to the Planning Board occurred on August 26, 2020 at a special CRC meeting. CRC interviewed five applicants, including one applicant for reappointment. One applicant withdrew their application prior to the interviews but after submission of the Statement of Interest. Every applicant that submitted a Statement of Interest and that did not withdraw prior to the interviews was interviewed. Over a week prior to the interviews, all applicants received the interview questions, selection guidance and committee handout. CRC also sent these materials, as well as the Statements of Interest from the applicants, to the full Town Council. Video of the interviews is available online on the Town's YouTube Channel.

CRC Recommendation

CRC met in a second meeting on August 26, 2020 following the conclusion of interviews to consider a recommendation to the Town Council. Councilor Bahl-Milne was absent from the interviews and deliberations. At the time the interviews were scheduled, it was believed that all CRC members were available. About 2 weeks prior to the interviews, it was learned that Councilor Bahl-Milne was unavailable. Efforts were made to change the time of the interviews, while keeping the same day. Unfortunately, there was not another time during the evening that all candidates and all committee members were available. After discussion at a CRC meeting, CRC reached consensus that committee members unable to attend the interviews should not participate in the deliberations regarding a recommendation to the Council.

All five candidates are qualified. The CRC considered recommendations for up to three vacancies and the deliberation did reveal some agreement between members of the CRC on two of the candidates. All members agreed that Johanna Neumann's experience and training regarding coalition building and outreach and her expertise in the fields of clean energy and sustainable communities would be an asset to the Planning Board in both its regulatory role and role in advising the Council on revisions to the zoning bylaw and Master Plan. All members also agreed that Thom Long brought needed and relevant experience and expertise as an architect and educator. Further, CRC members were impressed by his response that the areas of climate action, racial equity, housing affordability, and economic vitality are an ecosystem that exist within one community and affect each other in ways that can leverage one area to better address another area.

After consensus was reached on these two candidates, CRC focused its deliberation on the remaining three candidates for the remaining vacancy. It was during this discussion that CRC members were not in agreement. CRC acknowledged the qualifications of Bob Greeney, but believed the other two candidates, Michael Birtwistle (seeking reappointment) and Andrew MacDougall were stronger. The conversation, therefore, focused on Mr. Birtwistle and Mr. MacDougall.

CRC discussed the length of service of the current members of the Planning Board, as well as the Selection Guidance that seeks a healthy mix of a strong based of seasoned members and newer members who bring new energy, outlooks, and ideas to the body. As of the meeting, CRC identified Mr. Birtwistle as the 2nd-longest tenured member of the Planning Board. His historical knowledge and his service on the Board were highly valued by at least one member of CRC, who stated that such experience can't be replicated by new members who may have experience in areas relevant to the Planning Board but haven't sat on the Planning Board. Members also spoke highly of Mr. Birtwistle's knowledge of applying Amherst's zoning bylaw in regulatory settings to what revisions might be necessary to the bylaw itself.

Mr. MacDougall, according to CRC members, would bring expertise in landscape architecture and regional planning. CRC members believed his experience and background in real estate would be valuable, since this has been identified in the past as a missing area of expertise on the Planning Board. Specifically, members talked about his history of seeking land use permits from planning boards across the country, and his observations during that work on how balancing retail, employment, residential, civic, and cultural components of a community can be done well to create functional and vibrant places or done poorly to create non-functional and unattractive areas. One member also spoke to his comments in his Statement of Interest regarding his experience and observations regarding development and urban planning as it relates to social justice and inequality.

The 3-1 vote of the CRC to recommend the Town Council appoint to the Planning Board Johanna Neumann, Thom Long, and Andrew MacDougall reflects the disagreement of the CRC members as to which selection guidance to weigh more heavily. After extensive discussion, Councilor Swartz believed that Mr. Birtwistle's historical knowledge and experience as one of the longest-serving members of the Planning Board could not be replicated and was invaluable in a Board that has consistently been referred to as inexperienced and young. She reflected on the views of the Town Council in June 2019 when it was discussing these very issues and believed the Council, as a body, prioritizes just this type of experience on such a new body and therefore believe Mr. Birtwistle should be re-appointed to another term on the Planning Board.

On the other hand, after extensive discussion, Councilors Ross, Schreiber, and Hanneke believed the nationwide, real estate experience Mr. MacDougall would bring to the planning board was a needed background on the planning board that had been identified as missing for a number of years and therefore outweighed the re-appointment of Mr. Birtwistle and the experience and historical knowledge his re-appointment would bring.

During discussion, CRC members note that the discussion and recommendation would have benefitted if all 5 members of CRC had been able to join. The CRC chair will work to ensure that such a scheduling conflict is avoided moving forward.

Demographic Information of the Candidates who Interviewed and Submitted Statements of Interest

Gender: 20% Female; 40% Male; 20% Male non-binary; 20% Unknown (left blank)

Racial/ethnic background: 60% White; 20% North American-European-Native; 20% Unknown (left blank)

Age: 60% - Age 40-49; 20% - Age 70-79; 20% Unknown (left blank)

Committee Members:

Shalini Bahl-Milne, Vice Chair

Mandi Jo Hanneke, Chair

Evan Ross

Stephen Schreiber

Sarah Swartz

Attachments:

- Planning Board July 1, 2020 Bulletin Board Notice
- Planning Board Selection Guidance
- Planning Board Interview Questions

Town Council Accepting Applications for Planning Board

The Town Council will be filling vacancies on the Planning Board and is seeking residents interested in serving on the board.

The Town Council is currently accepting applications from Amherst residents interested in serving on the Planning Board. Applicants should have experience with aspects of planning, development, design, architecture, construction, zoning, and/or real estate. The Town Council is especially seeking individuals of diverse backgrounds, including those who have no prior municipal government experience.

For more information on the Planning Board read an information handout at:

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/48292/Planning-Board-Description-08-06-19-pdf>

If you are interested in volunteering to serve, please fill out a Community Activity Form at:

<https://www.amherstma.gov/FormCenter/Community-Activity-Form-14/Community-Activity-FormTown-Council-App-165>.

If you have questions, please reach out to Mandi Jo Hanneke, Chair of the Community Resources Committee of the Town Council, at hannekem@amherstma.gov or our Town Community Participation Officers at getinvolved@amherstma.gov.

Town Council appointment of Planning Board members in accordance with Charter Section 2.9(c). This notice fulfills the Town bulletin board requirement Charter Section 9.12(e).

The references cited above are from the Amherst Home Rule Charter:

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/41987/Amherst-Home-Rule-Charter?bidId=>



Planning Board Selection Guidance

Approved July 21, 2020

A. Criteria for a healthy and effective multiple-member body

CRC considers the following factors to be important for a multiple-member body to be healthy:

1. A strong base of seasoned members who have completed or nearly completed one term as member. These members bring an understanding of process, institutional knowledge, can mentor new members, and take on leadership roles.
2. Newer members who have served fewer than one term. These members bring new energy, outlooks, and ideas to the body, and ensure the body will continue to have a strong base of seasoned members in the future.
3. CRC believes a healthy and effective multiple-members body includes a mix of seasoned members and new members. CRC will treat every opening, whether a seat is held by a current member who seeks reappointment or not, as a vacant position. Residents seeking reappointment will have their current service and experience on the body considered as part of the process for making a recommendation to the Council. The Council has not adopted a fixed limit on length of service.

B. Input from the body's chair

The input below is inserted verbatim from an email received from Planning Board Chair Christine Gray-Mullen on July 16, 2020.

Gray-Mullen
Thu 7/16/2020 11:08 PM
To: Hanneke, Mandi Jo

Mandi Jo:

Thank you for asking me as Chair for input in regards to appointing or reappointing new members to the Planning Board. A cohesive knowledgeable membership is essential for comprehensive, quality and all-inclusive decision-making. I am providing feedback now as the Planning Board does not meet again until August 5th and I have been asked for this information a couple of times before by OCA. Below you will see my suggestions:

1) Skills and characteristics of a successful member of the Planning Board

(In no particular order)

- Knowledge of Community Issues and the Master Plan/Zoning Bylaw/related ordinances
- Understand the regulatory function of the Board
- Fair & Open-Minded



- Team-player with the ability to collaborate and compromise
- Being Prepared for all meetings
- Ability to Communicate Clearly and Concisely (while in a public setting being live recorded)
- Analytic Ability for decision-making
- Understand design/construction drawings
- Availability to dedicate 5 to 12 hours on weeks with a scheduled planning board meeting.
- Ability to attend nearly all of PB meeting (year round)
- Relevant Experience

2) Knowledge and/or expertise related to the work of the Planning Board:

A membership with a broad relevant work expertise is essential to provide comprehensive and quality decision making involving all aspects of Planning Board duties. Occupations or work sectors that provide expertise that would assist with Planning Board duties include:

Planners, Engineers, Architects, Lawyers, Real Estate, Construction, Business Owners, Land Developers, Scientists, related academic fields, previous experience on a planning board or zoning board of appeals, etc.

3) Preferred knowledge and/or expertise to meet the current needs of the Planning Board

Planning Board current status:

Losing a Civil Engineer and a Lawyer

Retired Performing Arts Professor is up for reappointment

Remaining members bring expertise as Architects (2), Hydrology Scientist, Lawyer

Obtain Planning Board members with relevant experience and skills/characteristics detailed above under 1. and 2. The Board functions at a higher level when all members have their own relevant specialization to contribute to the decision-making and makes the board more collaborative. Members who don't possess professional experience tend to come up to speed at a slower pace and are not as confident and beneficial to the Board's decision making. Members most importantly need to feel positive and committed to strengthening, stabilizing and eventually growing Amherst's economy through smart zoning changes, encouraging development and establishing design guidelines for Amherst.

As the remaining Planning Board members have all been on the Board for under five years, it is vital to reduce the learning curve of new members by selecting candidates who have relevant expertise and are committed to successful growth.

Thank you,
Christine Gray-Mullen
PB Chair



Community Resources Committee of the Town Council

Interview Questions for 8-26-2020 Planning Board Interviews

Approved August 18, 2020

1. What do you feel you bring to the Planning Board that can make it successful?
2. Tell us about an experience you have had collaborating with a group, particularly where opinions conflicted or the decision was controversial?
3. Describe how the Planning Board can help achieve the goals of the Master Plan?
4. What interconnections, if any, do you see between climate action, economic vitality, housing affordability, and racial equity?
5. Please describe the considerations and objectives you'll use for considering proposed revisions to the zoning bylaws.
6. What else would you like us to know about you that makes you a strong candidate for the Planning Board?