

LEGISLATIVE SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

April 4, 2022

- Present:** Anthony Suffriti - Chair
Rosemary Sandlin – Vice Chair
George Bitzas
Anthony Russo
- Absent:** Gina Letellier
- Also Present:** Councilors Cavallo, Mercadante, and Smith, Mayor Sapelli, Solicitor Buoniconti and Sharon Sedik
- Called to Order:** Meeting was called to order by Chairman Suffriti at 6:00pm at the Teachers’ Conference Room at the Agawam Junior High School

AGENDA

1. Approval of Minutes dated April 4, 2022

Motion to approve the minutes was moved by Councilor Sandlin and seconded by Councilor Russo.

The vote was 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Councilor Letellier) approving the minutes.

2. TOR-2022-7 - An Ordinance to amend Sections 7(A)(1) and 7(A)(2) of Chapter 49 of the Code of the Town of Agawam (Two Readings Required) (Sponsored by Mayor Sapelli)

Solicitor Buoniconti explained that this was an ordinance proposal to delete the Executive Assistant to the Mayor and replace that position with a Chief of Staff to the Mayor. He provided the job description. It is proposed to remain a non-Union, full time, not part of any bargaining unit position and remain in the same salary composition as the Executive Assistant. The job description shows what the Mayor is trying to accomplish here. He spoke about this position overseeing grants to ensure we are on top of things and to promote new businesses within the town. This person should be the eyes and ears of the Mayor and coordinate with other Department Heads. It’s a comprehensive job description that mirrors other communities. It mirrors Chicopee and Springfield Chief of Staff. This person would represent the Mayor if necessary whether that be ceremonial or administrative in nature. It has a negligible impact to the budget but allows the town to be more proactive to the community and maintain quality service in town. There were no questions by board members. Councilor Mercadante was concerned with the impact on the budget. What is the current salary of the Executive Assistant at this time? Solicitor Buoniconti noted it is a Tier 3 and the range is between \$80,000 to \$95,000 or high 70s to low 90s but that position had received a stipend and that position’s compensation was approximately \$85,000. Councilor Mercadante commented that the Mayor has to have some latitude and help to be more effective in the job. By bringing this position on, it gives the Mayor more latitude to be more aggressive in obtaining grants in town and frankly, that office needs a position like this. Councilor Bitzas said the office has been running very well over these last six months. Someone has been doing an excellent job these last few months. If the Mayor is busy, then we have a Planner. This should be the Mayor’s job. Regarding grant writing, why not use Mike Squindo of Senior Center who is an excellent grant writer? Nadine is already doing a great job. Why not keep the \$86,000 and give Nadine more money. If she needs more help, hire a secretary for less money. The Solicitor has an extra person that they could work together. He said he thinks it’s unwise to eliminate a job and create another job. Why create a job that the next Mayor can hire or fire? Councilor Russo said other communities do this and the reason they are non-union is like anything else, a new Mayor can bring in their own staff, their own administration. The role of the Mayor now is changing and more demanding, we have to evolve with the times. He stated you don’t want to make this position union because the next mayor may want to put someone else in there. Councilor Russo thinks this is a great idea and the way Agawam and technology is growing, this is an asset. Councilor Bitzas said that the person doing the job for the last six months has been doing a great job. Councilor Sandlin noted this was not a debate and we need to raise our hand to speak. Councilor Sandlin has served as a role of Chief of Staff to a State Senator and Majority leader and knows how much help this provides. The job description brings a great deal of credentials to this position and it is not just a secretarial position. She said she would support this because it is a step in the right direction. Councilor Rossi agreed with most of the comments and thinks it is an excellent idea noting the Mayor needs all the help he can get. Sometimes he is in a position where he needs to

be in multiple places at once and this position is a liaison to the community and Mayor. He also said it is non-unionized mainly because it is at will and for security and confidentiality purposes. Councilor Rossi said it is a great idea and Councilor Bitzas should be more supportive of the needs of our Mayor. Councilor Smith said there is no increase in the budget by eliminating one position and creating this position. Councilor Mercadante said that office is spread too thin. He also noted that over the last six months we didn't save any money but rather only exhausted the administrative staff. Councilor Sandlin asked if this would now eliminate the stipends in that office and the Solicitor confirmed there would no longer be any stipends in the Mayor's Office. Councilor Bitzas clarified that he said we would save money by eliminating this position. He again said Nadine is doing a great job for that last six months and our Mayor has gone to all the functions and asked why this is necessary. If the Mayor cannot attend a function, then the Council President or Vice President can attend – these are elected positions as it is their responsibility. He would not support this but would support giving Nadine extra money and hire an extra secretary for one third of the money to do the job. Councilor Cavallo is in support. Many mayors have liaisons. The person who was in this position was making about \$80,000 and this would just replace that salary with no increase. It's not going to cost any more money. Councilor Bitzas said current personnel can do these other qualifications that are in the job description and this is merely political. Councilor Cavallo said the government has changed over the years. Councilor Sandlin noted we must look at the qualification that will be required. Mayor Sapelli is doing a great job and this would definitely be helpful to him and represent the Mayor when needed. Councilor Rossi thinks Councilor Bitzas doesn't fully understand what this position will be in that this person would be the eyes and ears of the Mayor when he cannot be in certain places. This person would be assigned to represent the Mayor's Office. Councilor Mercadante stated this position is not the same job as the previous job but would broaden the scope of responsibilities more than what the current staff can do. Councilor Smith simply stated that Mayor Sapelli has asked us to create this position because he needs a little bit of help.

Motion to send a positive recommendation to the Full Council made by Councilor Sandlin and seconded by Councilor Russo. The vote was 3 Yes, 1 No (Councilor Bitzas), 1 Absent (Councilor Letellier)

3. Any other business that may legally come before the Committee.

None.

4. Adjournment.

Motion to adjourn was moved by Councilor Sandlin and seconded by Councilor Russo. The meeting was adjourned at 6:38pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Councilor Anthony Suffriti, Chair
Legislative Committee