

LEGISLATIVE SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

July 12, 2021

- Present:** Anthony Suffriti - Chair
Rosemary Sandlin – Vice Chair
George Bitzas
Mario Tedeschi
- Absent:** Gina Letellier
- Also Present:** Councilors Cavallo and Mercadante
- Called to Order:** Meeting was called to order by Chairman Suffriti at 6:18pm at the Agawam Senior Center

AGENDA

1. Approval of Minutes dated June 7, 2021

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

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

2. TR-2021-46 - A Resolution to petition our State Legislators to oppose any amendments of Special Covid-19 legislation that make universal mail-in voting a permanent process (Sponsored by Councilors Bitzas, Calabrese, Mercadante, Suffriti and Tedeschi)

Councilor Bitzas mentioned this was similar to that previous legislation with Voter ID now it is interesting because the Republicans seem to be supporting universal mail-in voting. Councilor Cavallo chastised Councilor Bitzas saying that is not right and that is not the point. He said it doesn't matter how the vote was last time. We leave the meeting and go home and it is not right to bring things back up. Councilor Bitzas started talking about councilors said they would have voted for the last Resolution if it didn't have the Voter ID included. Councilor Sandlin asked for him to stop and said the way he talking he is making some councilors not want to vote for it. There were some back and forth arguments. Councilor Sandlin said to please discuss this item and not the last item. Councilor Bitzas believes it is necessary and the best thing for the town, the state and the country. Chairman Suffriti explained that this is trying to revert back to pre-Covid 19 election process. Councilor Mercadante stated that people could make arguments for each way – for or against – however with an eye to the taxpayer, we would eventually have to pay the brunt of the cost for this type of process. It is becoming increasingly difficult to pay our taxes and this would add in the postage on all of this for every election which is unnecessary. It worked before so why change it. Councilor Mercadante said you can also get an absentee ballot and no one is stopping anyone from their right to vote. Councilor Cavallo said the Senior Center was open for early voting for several weeks which was great. We never really had a problem here in Agawam. Councilor Sandlin asked Councilor Bitzas to stop interrupting every time someone was speaking. Councilor Cavallo said he doubted we have any complaints from our residents because things run fairly smoothly. Councilor Sandlin questioned where all the councilors were four years ago when poll workers were getting stipends and why not complain at that time. She understands this Resolution is just to send a message to the legislators but it is not a message she'd like to send at this time. Councilor Bitzas said now the Democrats are not supporting mail-in voting as much now as during Covid but now this is for potential fraud and said this is the right thing at this time to express our votes. It was fine during Covid but now it should go back to pre-Covid processes. Councilor Sandlin said she didn't think it was a Democrat versus Republican issue like Councilor Bitzas stated – she thinks it is an accessibility. We have not seen any legislation since the previous one expired and this piece of legislation we are speaking about is not necessary at this time. Councilor Bitzas told her not to vote for it then which Councilor Sandlin took offense to saying she was trying to be nice noting that as a member of this Committee, she believes it sends the wrong message and will be voting no. Councilor Mercadante reiterated that this is one more thing to pile on to the taxpayer. He disagreed with Councilor Sandlin and accessibility but noted that this is an unfunded mandate that is placed on the taxpayer. Councilor Sandlin agreed about mail-in and truly believes in early voting but said that is much more expensive than stamps. Councilor Mercadante was so sure about that and would like to see a study on that. Councilor Sandlin said you are paying the Senior Center to be open to have early voting along with workers versus the cost of postage. Councilor Mercadante said he was talking about not spending

any more of the taxpayers' money – last year's budget went from 3% unemployment to 9% unemployment. Councilor Sandlin said we should ask the Election Commission who is our City Clerk to give us a rundown on what it costs for early voting salaries etc., cost of mail-in voting what it was in the past and what it was during Covid, and if there were any monies that were reimbursed from the State from Bill Galvin's office. She'd like to see this information prior to a vote. Councilor Bitzas said this Resolution had nothing to do with early voting. Early voting is always here and that is comparing apples to oranges. He said it has absolutely nothing to do with early voting – this is universal voting by mail. Councilor Tedeschi will be supporting even though there is a cost factor – he just feels it is unnecessary. It was to help during the pandemic but unnecessary to continue this. We have early voting and absentee ballots and this is just one more thing to pile on that is not necessary.

Motion to send a positive recommendation to the Full Council made by Councilor Bitzas and seconded by Councilor Tedeschi. The vote was 3 Yes, 1 No (Councilor Sandlin), 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 Tedeschi. The meeting was adjourned at 6:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Councilor Anthony Suffriti, Chair
Legislative Committee