



Joint Meeting of Committees on Legislative Matters and Community Resources and the Northampton City Council

Legislative Matters Committee Members:

*Councilor William H. Dwight, Chair
Councilor David A. Murphy, Vice Chair
Councilor Maureen Carney
Councilor Alisa F. Klein*

Community Resources Committee Members:

*Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra, Chair
Councilor Dennis Bidwell, Vice Chair
Councilor Alisa F. Klein
Councilor Jim Nash*

MEETING AGENDA

Date: November 13, 2018

Time: 7 p.m.

**Location: City Council Chambers
212 Main St., Northampton, Massachusetts**

- 1. Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call**
- 2. Public Comment**
- 3. Community Forum on Proposal to Expand Tenant Membership of the Northampton Housing Authority**
 - History:
 - City Council referred to Committees on Community Resources and Legislative Matters - 8/16/2018
 - Continued by Community Resources with Agreement to Hold Public Forums - 9/17/2018
 - Continued by Legislative Matters - 10/9/2018
 - Public Forum held by Community Resources - 10/24/2018
 - Joint Public Forum scheduled 11/13/2018 @ 7 p.m.

Documents:

[18.142 Memo from DHCD.pdf](#)

[18.142 An Order to Strengthen Democratic Representation in the Northampton Housing Authority.pdf](#)

[18.142 Legal Opinion re NHA Special Legislation.pdf](#)

[18.142 An Order to Strengthen Democratic Representation in the Northampton Housing Authority - AMENDED.pdf](#)

A. Brief Presentation by Council President Ryan R. O'Donnell

B. Community Comment

4. Community Resources Deliberation/Vote on 18.142

5. Legislative Matters Deliberation/Vote on 18.142

6. Adjourn Legislative Matters/Community Resources Continue Meeting to Take up New Business

7. New Business

A. Minutes of October 24, 2018 Community Resources Meeting

Documents:

[10-24-18_Community_Resources.pdf](#)

B. Discussion of Drafting Letter/Meeting Request to President of Columbia Gas

Documents:

[18.170 Letter to CG President.pdf](#)

8. Adjourn Community Resources

Contact B. Dwight or GL Sciarra at

bdwight@comcast.net or glsciarra@northamptonma.gov

From: Amy Stitely, DHCD
To: Councilor Ryan O'Donnell
Date: October 10, 2018
RE: DHCD comments on proposed Northampton City Council legislation – 10/10/18

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After reviewing the proposed language being considered by the City Council, DHCD offers the following comments:

- 1) The two-year term is very short. This would be counterproductive to the Board if it had to accommodate such a rotating group.
 - a. Other Board members are appointed for a five year term and the expiration years are staggered so that the Board has somewhat consistent membership.
 - b. Also, it takes a while to learn the duties of being a Board member. Because boards have a rather technical set of duties, DHCD has mandated online trainings for all Board members; there is also a voluntary, DHCD-funded, one-day in person session offered for tenant Board members; and MassNAHRO offers Board member trainings too.

- 2) Tenant elections can be time consuming, costly, and are difficult to administer/ monitor for fairness. For these reasons the housing authority and tenant advocacy groups are now jointly requesting that the state legislature amend Section 5A of MGL 121B to require an appointment process for town tenant board members, instead of an election (legislative amendment may be forthcoming in the next 6 months).
 - a. State election laws are protective of people's rights, so working outside of state election laws/ infrastructure could leave the process open to risk of disenfranchisement, accusations of fraud, etc. Please consider who/what agency would have dispute resolution powers if this moves forward.
 - b. The cost to administer elections is not trivial. DHCD would not provide any additional funding to the housing authority to conduct such elections. I'm not sure if HUD would. One reason mail seems like a better election system is that some residents have difficulty getting to an in-person election (dealing with transportation, translation, babysitting, etc). However, the Boston Housing Authority seems to have found a way to successfully administer in-person city-wide elections for their Resident Advisory Board. Talking to them would be a good idea if this moves forward.

- 3) Assuming that Section 5A of MGL 121B is amended in the coming months, DHCD will not be promulgating regulations on the administration of tenant elections. Housing authorities also do not have the legal authority to promulgate their own regulations, so I would consider saying elections shall be in accordance with the "Authority's policies" (not regulations).

**CITY OF NORTHAMPTON
MASSACHUSETTS**

In the Year Two Thousand and Eighteen

Upon the Recommendation of Councilor Ryan R. O'Donnell.

18.142 AN ORDER
TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION IN
THE NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

Ordered, that the Mayor is authorized and requested to seek state legislation as follows:

An Act Expanding the Membership of the
Housing Authority in the City of Northampton

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in the General Court assembled
as follows:*

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any other general or special law to the contrary, members of the housing authority of Northampton shall include, in addition to the five members provided by Chapter 121B Section 5, six additional members each of whom shall be a tenant in a building owned and operated by or on behalf of the housing authority. These six members shall be chosen in an election among all tenants of the buildings owned and operated by or on behalf of the housing authority for a term of two years. Such elections shall be held in accordance with regulations promulgated by the housing authority and/or the department. In the case of a vacancy, the Mayor shall appoint a tenant member, subject to City Council approval, to fill the remainder of the unexpired term. Six members shall constitute a quorum.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon its passage.



Office of City Solicitor
City of Northampton
210 Main Street, Room 12
Northampton, MA 01060

Alan Seewald, Esq.
City Solicitor

MEMORANDUM

Please reply to:

71 King Street
Northampton, MA 01060
(413) 584-4455

aseewald@northamptonma.gov

TO: William H. Dwight, Chair
Committee on Legislative Matters
Gina-Louise Sciarra, Chair
Committee on Community Resources

FROM: Alan Seewald, City Solicitor *AS*

RE: Home Rule Procedures

DATE: October 16, 2018

The City Council Committees on Legislative Matters and Community Resources will be holding public fora with regard to a proposal filed by Council President O'Donnell to seek state legislative approval of a special act increasing the membership on the Northampton Housing Authority ("NHA"). You have requested a memorandum on the legislative process for seeking that special act. With the caveat that the city may not have the standing to seek special legislation with regard to the NHA, discussed below, the following is the process for obtaining special legislation.

Prior to 1966 and the adoption of Amendment Article 89 to the Massachusetts Constitution, cities and towns could enact only that legislation that the state legislature specifically authorized them to enact. Article 89, also known as the Home Rule Amendment, expanded local power by authorizing local legislation to "exercise any power or function which the general court has power to confer upon it, which is not inconsistent with the constitution or laws enacted by the general court in conformity with powers reserved to the general court by section eight, and which is not denied, either expressly or by clear implication, to the city or town by its charter." Mass. Const. Amend. Art. 89, § 6.

The establishment of home rule authority of cities and towns was accompanied by a limitation on the ability of the state legislature to enact statutes relating to a single city or town. Section 8 of the Home Rule Amendment provides that "[t]he general court shall have the power to act in relation to cities and towns, but only by general laws which apply alike to all cities or to all towns, or to all cities and towns, or to a class of not fewer than two...." Section 8 allows for special acts that relate to a single city or town "(1) on petition filed or approved by the voters of a city or town, or the mayor and city council, or other legislative body, of a city, or the town meeting of a town, with respect to a law relating to that city or town; (2) by a two-thirds vote of each branch of the general court following a recommendation by the governor;...."

Thus, in order to initiate special legislation, the City Council must pass an order authorizing the Mayor to seek a special act, which Order must be signed by the Mayor. The request for a special act should specify the degree to which the legislation as filed may be altered in the legislative process. Typically, the Order allows the legislature to make clerical or editorial changes and, with the Mayor's approval, modifications so long as they are within the general objectives of the proposed act. The Order could require enactment exactly as drafted, but such a provision would significantly reduce the likelihood that the legislature will pass the special act. The proposed act is then filed by our state representative and proceeds through the usual legislative process.¹

Finally, as I stated above, there is a question as to whether the City would have standing to propose a special act with regard to the NHA. Section 8 (1), quoted above, requires that a proposed special act be "a law relating to that city or town..." While the NHA is a statutory body under M.G.L. c. 121B under the control of the authority members, its residents are all domiciled in the City, the Mayor appoints four of the five members of the authority, and the authority members and NHA employees are considered city employees for conflict of interests purposes. While I believe that the proposed legislation would be a law "relating" to Northampton, I must caution that this an open question.

Please let me know if you need anything further from me in this regard.

¹ You may note that there is a second method in Section 8(2) for obtaining special legislation by having the Governor file the bill followed by a two-thirds majority vote in each branch of the legislature. This process is rarely used (in my experience) and is most appropriate for non-controversial, routine matters.

AMENDMENT

In the Year Two Thousand and Eighteen

Upon the Recommendation of Councilor Ryan R. O'Donnell

18.142 AN ORDER

TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION IN RELATIVE TO THE NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

Ordered, that the Mayor is authorized and requested to seek state legislation as follows:

Ordered that the Mayor is hereby authorized and requested to petition the General Court to the end that the following legislation be adopted precisely as follows. The General Court may make clerical or editorial changes of form only to the bill, unless the Mayor approves amendments to the bill before enactment by the General Court. The Mayor is hereby authorized to approve amendments which shall be within the scope of the general public objectives of this petition

An Act Expanding the Membership of the
Housing Authority in the City of Northampton
An Act Relative to the Northampton Housing Authority

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in the General Court assembled as follows:

~~SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any other general or special law to the contrary, members of the housing authority of Northampton shall include, in addition to the five members provided by Chapter 121B Section 5, six additional members each of whom shall be a tenant in a building owned and operated by or on behalf of the housing authority. These six members shall be chosen in an election among all tenants of the buildings owned and operated by or on behalf of the housing authority for a term of two years. Such elections shall be held in accordance with regulations promulgated by the housing authority and/or the department. In the case of a vacancy, the Mayor shall appoint a tenant member, subject to City Council approval, to fill the remainder of the unexpired term. Six members shall constitute a quorum.~~

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any other general or special law to the contrary, members of the Northampton housing authority shall include two members in addition to the five members provided by Chapter 121B, Section 5. One member appointed pursuant to this act shall be a tenant in a building owned and operated by or on behalf of the housing authority or a resident of Northampton who is assisted by the housing authority through a rental subsidy program. The other member appointed pursuant to this act shall be a member of the Northampton Housing

Partnership or such successor municipal body charged with promoting fair and affordable housing in the city. The members appointed pursuant to this act shall be appointed by the Mayor, with City Council approval, for initial terms of one year and three years, respectively. Thereafter, as the terms of the members expire, their successors shall be appointed in the same manner for a term of three years. A majority of total members of the authority, as amended hereby, shall constitute a quorum.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon its passage.



Committee on Community Resources and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Gina Louise Sciarra

Vice-Chair: Councilor Dennis P. Bidwell

Councilor Alisa F. Klein

Councilor James Nash

Meeting Minutes

Date: October 24, 2018

Time: 7:00 pm

Location: City Council Office, 210 Main St., Northampton, Massachusetts

1. **Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call.** At 7:04 p.m. Councilor Sciarra called the meeting to order. Present on roll call were Councilors Gina-Louise Sciarra, Dennis Bidwell, Alisa F. Klein and James Nash. Also present was Northampton Housing Authority Executive Director Cara Clifford, Northampton Housing Authority Commissioner Gerald Budgar, Councilor Marianne LaBarge and Council President Ryan R. O'Donnell.
2. **Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**
Councilor Sciarra announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded for broadcast by Northampton Community Television (NCT).
3. **Public Comment**
Although people were present for the public forum, there was no general public comment.
4. **Minutes of September 17, 2018**
Councilor Klein moved to approve the minutes of September 17, 2018. Councilor Bidwell seconded. The motion carried 4:0.
5. **Community Forum on Proposal to Expand Tenant Membership of the Northampton Housing Authority**
 - A. **18.142 An Order to Strengthen Democratic Representation in the Northampton Housing Authority - referred to CR and LM, 8/16/2018**
Councilor Sciarra clarified that the City Council does not have the ability to change the structure of the housing authority but must petition the state legislature to pass special legislation to make any changes to the composition of the governing board.

Councilor Sciarra read the text of the order. She invited the proposal's sponsor, Council President Ryan R. O'Donnell, to make a presentation.

Councilor O'Donnell thanked the committee for holding the forum. It has been his hope that his proposal would be something they would work on as a community with input from all the different stakeholders, he shared.

The Northampton Housing Authority (NHA) provides housing to approximately 2,253 people, including 849 disabled, 594 children and 482 elderly residents. Services provided by the NHA include rental assistance as well as housing in the units owned and operated by the authority. Housing Authority units number 618, spread across the Walter Salvo House, McDonald House, Florence Heights, etc.

The responsibilities of housing authorities are set forth in state law so, as the chair mentioned, it is not something the City Council can unilaterally change. State law provides that housing authorities be "managed, controlled and governed" by a local board.

Councilor O'Donnell enumerated some of the responsibilities of the Housing Authority board, including:

- ❖ Setting and revising policy
- ❖ Setting an operating and capital budget
- ❖ Encouraging tenant participation in the administration of public housing

He thinks all those things would be very much strengthened if they had more tenants participating in the process, Councilor O'Donnell suggested. He wants to make very clear that his proposal is about the future; it is not about the Housing Authority Executive Director or current members, it is about Housing Authority policy going forward.

As far as the board, the governor appoints one member and the Mayor in consultation with the City Council appoints four, he advised. Of the four, one is required to be a tenant. The proposal before them adds more tenant members.

Councilor O'Donnell reviewed recent legislative history related to the agency. In 2014, the legislature passed An Act Relative to Local Housing Authorities - Chapter 235 of the Acts of 2014. The act changed the rules for towns. In towns, members are not appointed by the Mayor; town residents at large elect the members. Of the four, the law said one of the four is to be elected by tenants. Unfortunately, the regulations required to implement this law were never promulgated by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

His proposal is not to have appointed tenant members but to have elected members, he clarified. His perception is that DHCD does not want to be involved in tenant elections but does not object to Northampton holding elections.

One option is to look to the Boston Housing Authority as a model for elections, he suggested. The Boston Housing Authority has a Resident Advisory Board that sets its own bylaws and conducts elections itself.

Regarding concerns about conflict of interest and the question of whether it is a problem for tenants to serve on a board that takes actions that affect them, tenant members of housing authorities by law are special municipal employees which means that state ethic laws apply to them but with certain exceptions, Councilor O'Donnell advised. He read the stated exception.

Other jurisdictions in other states have larger housing authority boards and frequently elect more of their tenants, he continued. New York State is one; there, two tenants are elected by tenants of the Housing Authority.

Putting more tenants on the board strengthens the work of the Housing Authority, he reiterated.

Councilor O'Donnell expressed his understanding that a Democratic component is added by choosing members by election rather than appointment. Everyone who lives in public housing is entitled to equal representation, he asserted. He would very much like to see election be the method by which they get more tenants on the board rather than appointment, he concluded.

PUBLIC COMMENT.

Ella Smolenski of 41 Alamo Court told members her son is a tenant of the McDonald House. "I think it's vital that the tenants have a voice," she observed. Although not discrediting the work of the board, she feels "a much stronger voice from tenants" is missing. She understands that it would be difficult to select those tenants and agrees that it's imperative that they be elected.

Regarding the controversy over air-conditioners this summer, "it affected the health of the tenants down there," she insisted. Some folks are afraid to speak up; afraid to have a voice. People with a mental health condition are afraid to speak up; they're afraid to be disliked and afraid to be evicted.

Threatening and harassing people 'isn't a good method,' she continued. She expressed the hope that city councilors would go to Housing Authority properties and hear what tenants have to say. The people who live and reside there know their own needs, she pointed out. "They need a voice," she stressed. "I think we're going to have a strong voice representing our area," she concluded.

Councilor Sciarra informed those present that the committee tried to get a more central location but had trouble securing a venue.

Gerald Budgar of 127 Bridge Street identified himself as a member of the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners but stressed that he was speaking for himself as an individual. He thanked councilors for the opportunity to address the proposal to increase tenant representation.

The legislation seems deceptively simple but he wants to point out some areas that need fleshing out, Mr. Budgar said. Someone raised the question of whether holders of Section 8 vouchers would be considered tenants for the purpose of election, and that needs to be clarified. Holders of Section 8 vouchers outnumber the approximately 600 tenants who live in Housing Authority buildings. If voting is limited to tenants of the buildings, how would it be done? He asked. Salvo House has 192 tenants - more than any other property - so its residents could conceivably select all six members, he noted.

He is truly fearful this legislation will end up causing a lot of division and upset among tenants, he shared. Tenant board members will be wrestling with conflict of interest laws when it comes to voting on certain issues. The Housing Authority's attorney is currently researching this issue and there is a possibility tenants will not be able to vote on issues that affect the buildings they live in, he said.

He believes there are alternatives that would better represent the tenants, Mr. Budgar continued. It is his personal opinion that the board is not given enough information on the types of issues brought before it. Everyone should know that the director sent out the letter banning air conditioners without notifying them, he reported. If the letter had come before them as a board, he certainly would have voted against it. They are in the process of revising the agency's bylaws, and he thinks many of these issues will be addressed by that action.

Tenants can now speak at board meetings to address commissioners. Recently, tenants spoke at a meeting to inform members of a problem with mold. Enhancing the lines of communication between tenants and the board in his opinion is a much better way to proceed.

He suggested having tenants meet with board members on a regular basis. He also stated his belief that they need to provide more services to tenants. The Springfield Housing Authority has a robust program aimed at assisting tenants in improving their lives. After school and summer programming is also provided for youth in some developments. He named other services and programs offered by housing authorities in other areas. "We need to do much, much more in these areas," he stressed.

Administrators are in the final stages of developing a website that will allow tenants to access information about the Housing Authority, Mr. Budgar said. The board has taken the leadership in pressing for this website and hopes it will be up and running by the end of the year.

When asked to serve on the board, he told the Mayor he would consider himself a very tenant-friendly board member, and the Mayor said that was exactly what he was looking for, he related.

NHA Executive Director Cara Clifford said she spoke to DHCD and was asked to read a letter sent to Councilor O'Donnell on November 10, 2018, "because they are not in support of this."

She read the letter aloud.

She expressed her understanding that, in the past, tenant associations have not been prevalent in Northampton. She voiced the opinion that resident advisory boards along with tenant associations should be the voices of tenants working with the Housing Authority to come up with solutions to best operate the Housing Authority. Speaking to DHCD and HUD this afternoon, they are recommending moving toward tenant associations and resident advisory boards, she asserted.

Edgardo Cancel, Hampshire Heights resident and president of its tenant association, said he is in full support of the order and very appreciative that city councilors are taking the time to allow members of the community to come and talk about this.

He commented that, as the resident who complains the most and brings up the most concerns, he has overlooked something important; i.e. – that there has been considerable change since the new director came on board. He doesn't think he has taken enough time to credit her for what she has done right, he acknowledged.

Having lived in Florence Heights since the mid-80's, he has seen some of the changes and some of the changes have not been good. In the past, the director often stopped by. The director at the time was very motivated and very involved in the community in creating positive change. He was able as a kid to

enjoy many programs that were brought into Florence Heights; i.e. - the YMCA, an arts program and after-school programs coordinated by UMass students. Residents had a great deal of resources that no longer exist today. A lot of these resources disappeared and the director at the time did not seem as motivated and didn't seem to be doing as much. When the new director came, a lot of those things seemed to be changing.

There is a difference in the way Hampshire Heights is being maintained, particularly on the outside. The new director has made it her effort to bring in new and more equipment, and there have been many other changes since she came on board that have been very positive, he stressed. It is important to mention that the board of the Housing Authority has also been changing lately and some of the members coming on board are very interested in looking for ways to support residents.

Having said all that, it has been extremely difficult to operate as a tenant association in collaboration with the Housing Authority, he reported. In more recent years, [landlord/tenant] relationships have not been as strong as in the past. More tenant associations and more collaboration between the associations and the Housing Authority would be productive, he agreed. However, they have experienced a lot of resistance in working with the Housing Authority. It has been really frustrating and has meant having to wait for board meetings each month to bring things up and be heard.

In between meetings, they go to the Housing Authority and are often ignored, and that's not good. He appreciates the comment made earlier about folks not being heard and not having a voice because that's what his experience has been; that residents are afraid to speak up because of a fear of retaliation or fear of being ridiculed.

There have been times when he has felt attacked at meetings. Those types of experiences are why he feels they need more representation on the Housing Authority. They need more of a voice, he insisted.

Peter Cushing, president of Forsander Apartments tenant association, commented that the opportunity to expand the board with members from their community "will only help." The director is new and could use support. They need to let the director know their priorities and expand her knowledge, since better-informing her will make it easier on her and her office, he suggested. The tenant association will also get more knowledge out of this and help that they need. They live in a 50-year old complex and they have old, old things to take care of. "We need this voice on the board to help us," he observed.

He would appreciate anything the City Council could do to expand the board not only for one community but for the whole community.

Councilor Sciarra asked if there was any further public comment.

Councilor O'Donnell corrected an earlier statement that DHCD opposes his proposal. That has not been communicated to him and could not be surmised from the memo sent, he asserted. The memo is a list of helpful suggestions but, to his knowledge, DHCD representatives do not oppose the proposal, he stressed.

Councilor Sciarra referred to the city solicitor's memo; in particular, Attorney Seewald's comment that the more flexibility the town allows in its request for special legislation, the better.

Unless an order specifies that it be enacted exactly as drafted, his understanding is that a proposed act can be changed substantively by legislators, Councilor O'Donnell confirmed.

Councilor Klein referred to a question asked by a community member; i.e. -whether Councilor O'Donnell had explored leading a statewide initiative to change the structure of housing authorities on a statewide level.

He does not sense a lot of appetite for change on a state-wide scale, Councilor O'Donnell responded. The short answer is that he hasn't reached out to a lot of other communities; he just saw an opportunity in Northampton and looked into it.

Councilor Bidwell said he was intrigued by the comment from the DHCD representative to the effect that legislation may be pending to change the election requirement of the state law. He wondered if [other communities] might be receptive to joining in the momentum that appears to be building to change the enabling legislation.

To be clear, what is contemplated is undoing the election requirement for towns, Councilor O'Donnell clarified. There is certainly a need to correct the law since it has not been implemented in four years. He cannot answer the question of what would be more politically effective, a statewide petition or a home rule petition from Northampton. He is not sure the two are mutually exclusive. He would like to do what is under their control, which is the home rule petition. He said he hoped they would consider both.

His understanding is that DHCD, while not specifically objecting, did raise a lot of serious objections, Councilor Bidwell observed. It occurs to him that it might be better to work cooperatively with DHCD in a way that has DHCD's support.

There is no oppositional framework whatsoever because he is the one who reached out to DHCD, Councilor O'Donnell noted. He doesn't know if it is true that there is momentum for what he wants to accomplish - greater tenant representation via an election process. He is not aware that there is an actual movement toward that.

Councilor O'Donnell suggested the number six, Councilor Sciarra reminded. At the last meeting, she pointed out that the Housing Authority owns and operates seven properties. In addition, some buildings are significantly larger than others. She would like to see greater tenant representation but her concern is that they may see significantly more representation from Salvo House with 192 units whereas other properties should also have a voice.

By way of response, Councilor O'Donnell stressed that this would not replace or be to the exclusion of tenant associations. He agrees with others who talked about the importance of reviving those and also establishing a resident advisory board, he confirmed.

The Boston resident advisory board (RAB) is a good model, he indicated. Boston has had special legislation since 1989. The Boston RAB has bylaws and takes the lead in conducting elections. His take away is that DHCD does not want to be involved in setting election regulations.

Throughout this process, he wants to make sure that they are not making the perfect the enemy of the good, Councilor O'Donnell added. He would want to leave the decision-making and the flexibility to the local agency to figure out over time what is in the best interests of the tenants.

Councilor Nash asked whether a resident advisory board could be added now.

The way the law and regulations read now there should be a resident advisory board in addition to tenant associations, Ms. Clifford advised. Since her tenure, she does not believe tenant associations have been operating as they should. She really believes that if those were working properly they would accomplish what everyone is advocating. In her conversation with DHCD, the employee said a better way to address [tenant participation] is through tenant associations, she continued. McDonald House and Tobin Manor just dissolved their tenant associations although Hampshire Heights formed one.

We could wake up tomorrow and start working on that, Councilor Nash commented.

She has already been working on getting that going, Ms. Clifford responded. A resident advisory board wasn't properly set up when she started. She is in the process of getting one set up properly.

His thought is that there is work they could be doing right now toward giving tenants a voice, Councilor Nash volunteered. They have systems they've been neglecting and they could start addressing those, he elaborated. They could start on those right away while considering this proposal. Getting that in place will advise them on how to go about this, he suggested.

Distrust keeps coming and, in the case of the Salvo tenant association, it dissolved because of distrust, Mr. Cancel asserted. That's a big thing they need to look at; how they can rekindle that trust and that faith. It is a difficult discussion but it is a really good discussion that they're having, he maintained.

When he mentioned resident advisory boards (RAB's) to the Senior Public Housing Manager, he said RAB's are only designated for residents and properties that are federally funded, Mr. Cancel reported. He wondered aloud why that would be the case and why state funded properties such as Hampshire Heights would be excluded. He believes an RAB could go a long way while they wait to hear what happens with this great proposal.

She has been researching the subject, and a resident advisory board (RAB) could be done for the whole Housing Authority, including all the properties, Ms. Clifford said. The RAB would essentially get input from residents and then meet with administrators. There is so much more that could be happening through tenant associations, she concluded. Her recommendation is that the board have an RAB for the entire Housing Authority, not just the federally-funded properties.

When people stop talking, associations dissolve, Ms. Smolenski commented. When people feel they aren't listened to, they stop talking. She learned something important tonight; i.e. - that there is a social worker at the Housing Authority. This information should be posted on site. She made a call to the state housing authority and no one even returned her call. Her son waited for years for his housing and it's the most important thing in his life.

As a member of the board, Mr. Budgar said he would like to ask the executive director to put the subject of resident advisory boards on the next agenda to show good faith.

Currently, state properties have what's called a resident services coordinator, Ms. Clifford clarified. She could be looked at as a social worker, but it is not really the same thing. Federal properties do not have a resident services coordinator, although she has asked for one. She is in the process of trying to fill the position for the federal properties; i.e. - Florence Heights and McDonald House. At move-in, packets are given with that information and DHCD's phone number is given with paperwork that residents sign. The information will be posted to the website once it is operational, she assured.

Councilor Sciarra said it might be helpful to send this information to residents.

As it is a public forum, councilors are here primarily to hear from residents, Councilor Klein remarked. However, she referred to the saying, "Nothing about us without us." She agrees tenant associations and resident advisory boards are important mechanisms and need to be in place. However, when policy decisions are made, it is the voting members of the housing commission who have the final say. If tenants are not on the actual voting body that sets policy, those voices can get lost. She wanted to reflect that back after hearing from some tenants who want that kind of a voice in policy-making.

Mr. Cancel said he thought state properties do not have resident services coordinators and so wanted to correct the statement made by Ms. Clifford. He expressed his understanding that resident service coordinators are only for *federal* properties.

The confusion is that the current funding is through the state but the resident services coordinator is only able to help disabled and elderly residents, Ms. Clifford responded.

They have asked for her support in the past and been denied, Mr. Cancel reported. The resident services coordinator has not been allowed to work with the Hampshire Heights community, he said.

Getting back to the proposal, if there are more tenants on the Housing Authority, all these things will get worked out better, more inclusively, going forward, Councilor O'Donnell suggested. He said he understands this is a change and that Northampton would be the only city in the Commonwealth to do this. He thinks it is their job not to necessarily accept when people are opposed to something. He does not think DHCD is opposed but even, if they are, it is not necessarily their job to give in to what [DHCD administrators] want. He thinks they have a chance of success.

The next forum is Tuesday, November 13th at the Legislative Matters committee meeting, Councilor Sciarra announced. After that, the two committees will convene and vote on their recommendations for the proposal.

6. New Business

A. Discussion of Drafting Letter/Meeting Request to President of Columbia Gas

Councilor Nash proposed that members take the time to read and review the letter and that they entertain suggestions at the next meeting. They will put discussion on the agenda for next time, members agreed.

7. Adjourn. At 8:21 p.m., Councilor Nash moved to adjourn the meeting; Councilor Bidwell seconded. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Prepared By:
Laura Krutzler Administrative Assistant
(413) 587-1210

DRAFT

Mr. Steve Bryant
Columbia Gas of Massachusetts
?????
?????

October, ???????

Dear Mr. Bryant,

The Community Resources Committee, a body that reports to Northampton City Council concerning matters affecting our community (including economic development, local business, tourism, the environment, the arts, planning, zoning, sustainability, land use, housing and affordability etc.) are requesting that you or another representative of Columbia Gas of Massachusetts attend our December/January ?? meeting on ????? to speak to a range matters concerning our gas utility.

In 2015, Columbia Gas imposed a moratorium on all additional gas service based on projections that Columbia Gas could not adequately deliver fuel to customers during peak days of the year, especially frigid winter days. At that time our use of natural gas appeared to be trending upward and natural gas was often the fuel of choice for new development and heating system upgrades.

However, faced with CG's moratorium disallowing all new service, we as a community were forced to seek alternative sources of energy. By our reasoning, we expect that our use of natural gas has decreased as access to gas has been capped. We have also worked in partnership with Columbia Gas to address gas leaks throughout our community, reducing the escape of especially volatile greenhouse gasses while undoubtedly further restoring a measure of gas capacity. Three years into the moratorium, and despite numerous requests from city leaders, Columbia Gas has yet to provide the Northampton community the necessary data to assess the need for the Columbia Gas Reliability Project to build an addition gas line or to assess the success of our conservation efforts.

We are requesting that Columbia Gas meet with us to discuss our gas utility along with providing the following data.

- Peak demand consumption numbers for Northampton covering the years 2012-2017
- Information substantiating the claim that new infrastructure is the only method by which we can fulfill demand
- Data concerning leak repairs in Northampton since the start of the moratorium and how much gas has been retained annually

We look forward to the opportunity to engage in a productive discussion about our shared energy future.

Sincerely,

G-L Sciarra, Committee Chair, Ward 4 City Councilor
Dennis Bidwell, Committee Vice Chair, Ward 2 City Councilor
Alisa Klein, Ward 7 City Councilor
Jim Nash, Ward 3 City Councilor