

PERSONNEL/ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
January 8, 2002

A meeting of the Personnel/Administrative Affairs Committee was held on Tuesday, January 8, 2002 at 7:10 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Chair James R. Tollner presided.

Members of the Committee present: Alderman Stephen C. Lamos, Vice Chair
Alderman-at-Large Paula I. Johnson
Alderman Timothy B. Nickerson
Alderman Robert A. Dion

Members not in Attendance:

Also in Attendance: Mayor Bernard A. Streeter
Dolly Bellavance, Div. Dir., Health & Community Services

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ELECTION OF A COMMITTEE CLERK

Chairman Tollner called for nominations for a Committee Clerk for 2002/2003

Alderman Dion nominated Alderman Nickerson.

MOTION BY ALDERMAN TOLLNER THAT THE NOMINATIONS BE NOW CLOSED
MOTION CARRIED

VOTE ON ELECTION OF ALDERMAN NICKERSON TO THE POSITION OF CLERK
OF THE PERSONNEL/ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE FOR THE ENSUING
TWO YEARS
ALDERMAN NICKERSON ELECTED UNANIMOUSLY

INTERVIEWS REQUESTED BY THE MAYOR

Welfare Officer

Robert P. Mack (New Appointment)

Term to Expire: Indefinite

Chair Tollner

Mr. Mack could you come forward, state your name and address, and take a moment to explain to the committee why you have an interest in working in this position.

Robert P. Mack, 109 Bower Street, Nashua

I am a Nashua native. I've worked for Community Council and Human Services for approximately 10 years. I have been involved in human services pretty much my whole professional career. I feel that by taking the opportunity to work at the city welfare office I can give back to the community that I come from, and work with some of the citizens of Nashua that need some support and help – to continue working in the human services field helping people grow and helping the people of this city better themselves, which will in turn better the city.

Chair Tollner

During your interview process I am sure you were brought up to speed with the challenges that are facing you in this position as far as budget, programs, etc.

Robert Mack

Yes

Chair Tollner

How would you go about trying to address some of those challenges and work through them?

Robert Mack

That is a good question. There is not an easy answer. You have to look at the overall needs of the people that you are serving as well as the community that you are serving. You have to provide what the necessary services are and try to look for some other alternatives to help people meet their other needs. There are a lot of other services out there in the community that can help support people that would not be strictly taxing on the city. That is part of what I think needs to be done

Chair Tollner

Looking at your resume and background – your work as the Residential Service Director and some of the other positions that you have held will probably lend itself to that position right?

Robert Mack

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Yes.

Alderman Liamos

Mr. Mack we doubled the budget for the Welfare Department this year. I thought it was under funded. Given the current economic times you will be facing a number of challenges in the position. Why don't you give me a little bit of background on your approach to problem solving and your

approach to managing multiple tasks.

Robert Mack

As far as dealing with issues that are presented, I think first you have to gather all of the facts and find out what you have to start with and examine where your resources have been going out to, and then assessing the ultimate value in that expense to find out if you are getting your money's worth and whether the services and supports that you are purchasing in essence are meeting the needs of the people that you are serving. As far as dealing with various tasks, I think it is what we do everyday. I can speak from personal experience having a young family, a wife, and going in different directions – that is part of what we have to do everyday and helping other people do that when they are maybe working on trying to find a job, support their family – helping them work through those challenges. I think that is just a part of what we need to do. I know that there are different needs that they have. Some have employment needs, some have medication needs, some have housing needs, etc. We have to assess each individual need and work on each of those needs, sometimes all at the same time. You want to put your energies forth to fulfill what needs you can fulfill and meet.

Alderman Lamos

Your predecessor, Mr. Tamposi, did an outstanding job for the city, but one of the challenges that he faced was I would ask him at budget time if he could give me numbers of folks obtaining assistance through the city, and he said that was a hard number to come by because of the changes in the roles. There was really no one point in time when he could give me a general idea of the level of public assistance being rendered other than approximations. I would ask as we approach the next budget season in the next few months that if you choose to accept this position in the city that you try to give us a better picture to allow us in the budgeting process the planning and the ability to make sure that the resources are there to provide because it is ultimately the taxpayers who fund this and who we are accountable to. The more data that we can provide them with in terms of what they are getting for their tax dollar I think the better position you make coming forward, through your department chair, to ask for your funding that you feel will be required. I put that out as a challenge to you in the weeks and months to come to try to get a handle on that.

Alderman Dion

Mr. Mack, in speaking with the former welfare director, Mr. Tamposi, the early part of last year, he mentioned the fact that there are a lot of people on state welfare, that after a certain amount of time the state drops them and it becomes the responsibility of the city to take these people on welfare. Are you aware of that?

Robert Mack

Yes.

Alderman Dion

From what I understand, the budget is going to increase tremendously as far as the welfare

recipients that are now going to be in the program. Have you any magic formula as to how you plan to get the people on welfare back to work?

Robert Mack

A magic formula would be nice to come by, but I think it goes back to tapping into other community resources that could be available – vocational rehabilitation services, if there is a need for counseling services for some of these people to get them focused and back on track so that they can get a job.

Alderman Dion

Job training?

Robert Mack

Yes, job training types of services, maybe educational services – that sort of thing. I think the city welfare office can provide a bottom line essential cost of living support, but we do need to direct folks to other resources that are out there so that they can move on and better themselves – help them through the tough times and get them focused on goals and pointed in the right direction to receive some support to attain those goals.

Alderman Johnson

If you were given the appointment as welfare officer, where would you see your department in five years?

Robert Mack

I believe there will be a need to expand the department based on I think an increased need in citizens' utilization of the service particularly with the economy the way it has been going and the housing market the way it has been going. I think a lot of people have been seeking more support so trying to really get in there, and as has been brought up in some of the previous questions, to assess what has been going on, where the resources have been allocated, and what you have been getting for the money you have been spending. You will need to reconfigure and figure out if there is a better way to spend the money to get a bigger bang for your buck so to speak to meet the needs of more people. I think that is what we really need to focus on.

Chair Tollner

The Mayor would like to make a comment.

Mayor Streeter

As you know the position of the welfare officer is a charter position, and it is an important position in

any city administration. I thought I would give you a briefing as to what the selection process was, who took part, and the ultimate results. This position was advertised regionally and we received a number of applications. I asked Dolly to narrow them down to three, which she did, and there were three well qualified people, but one candidate stuck out because this candidate had roots in Nashua, and this candidate knew the Nashua system. That was Mr. Mack. We felt that even though other candidates – their careers perhaps were progressed further along than Bob's, it wouldn't take him too long to get established not only in his office, but starting to interrelate with the other agencies in the community that are involved in the welfare process. I wish Paula that we could answer your question as to what will the office be in five years from now. Frankly I don't think we know what it will be a year from now. As Dolly will tell you the number of clients that are being referred to us as a result of the tariff, which is really after your five-year commitment with the state you're on your own, and if you are not capable then the city is the backup. I will be asking the Chairman of the Budget Committee and myself as Chairman of the Finance Committee will be asking for a special meeting next week to address that subject. We are in a serious position relative to the budget. That is why I asked the President of the Board and the Chairman of your committee if you could consider hearing the nomination this evening, and hopefully making a recommendation so that the full Board could act on it because we need someone in that position tomorrow – not literally tomorrow, but within a two week period. As an interesting sidelight, when I visit Mrs. Bellavance in her office, usually early in the morning, and I walk in I see any number of people 10-12 people waiting to visit the case tech in this case, because there is only one person there now, and I'm sure that we're not doing the best job we can without a director in office. That is why I am requesting that you act on it this evening. Maybe Dolly can backup about the fiscal situation and how necessary it is to have someone on board as soon as possible.

Dolly Bellavance

I agree with everything that the Mayor has said. We are at a crisis situation in our welfare department. We have only really 3 ½ people working in that department right now, and I know when I went in to see them today they said can you get us a case tech? They have one there and he is really inundated. The Mayor is right. We are on overload with clients coming in. There are a lot of layoffs here in Nashua. There are a lot of needy people. We are the safety net. We are doing prescriptions, providing fuel assistance when it is not provided through Southern New Hampshire Services. We have to care for the people that are in our community, but at the same time they also have to prove to us that they have this need. It is not just an open door policy where we help everyone that comes through the door. There are people that are sanctioned. The finances are at a point where we need to address the situation where we will not have enough money to continue until June 30th so something has to be done at this point. This is why we will be coming to you next week to address the situation, and have you address it as well.

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Mayor Streeter

I might add one more incident that during the final interview process our City Treasurer was part of

the process, and he asked Mr. Mack if he knew how to spell and say the word no, and Mr. Mack learned first hand that we have a City Treasurer that knows how to say no, and that he in turn will have to learn that word also.

Chair Tollner

Mr. Mack, I would like to reiterate what Alderman Liamos said. You will be new to the position so I would like to convey to you what I convey to a number of people that I work with in my employment – push the envelope. Think outside the box. If you fall down that is okay. If people don't step outside the box and think about doing something different and innovative we're going to suffer. Think outside the box. Don't be afraid to fall down once in a while. If you need anything you have a good ally next to you there to your left. What I would also do is engage in conversation with different members of the Board of Aldermen to keep us informed as you move along. We may not always agree on everything, but at least if you have the conversation that is a really good start. I wish you a lot of luck

COMMUNICATIONS - None

APPLICATION TO LICENSE HAWKER'S, PEDDLER'S, ITINERANT VENDOR'S - None

APPOINTMENTS BY THE MAYOR

Welfare Officer

Robert P. Mack (New Appointment)
109 Bowers Street
Nashua, NH 03060

Term to Expire: Indefinite

MOTION BY ALDERMAN TOLLNER TO RECOMMEND THE CONFIRMATION OF THE APPOINTMENT OF ROBERT P. MACK TO THE OFFICE OF WELFARE OFFICER FOR AN INDEFINITE TERM
MOTION CARRIED

Chair Tollner

Just to give you an idea of what we will do – I don't know whether Dolly has conveyed this to you,
but as the Mayor stated, what I will do is make a motion under exception tonight at the full Board meeting for your approval and then the hard work really starts. Good luck.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None

NEW BUSINESS – None

NEW BUSINESS – ORDINANCES - None

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POSSIBLE NON-PUBLIC SESSION

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DISCUSSION - None

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ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY ALDERMAN NICKERSON THAT THE PERSONNEL/ADMINISTRATIVE
AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETING OF JANUARY 8, 2002 BE ADJOURNED
MOTION CARRIED

The meeting was declared closed at 7:25 p.m.

Alderman Timothy B. Nickerson
Committee Clerk