



Established

1996

SPRINGFIELD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION

POST OFFICE BOX 995
SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS 01101-0995
413-452-1300

Minutes of Meeting

October 10, 2024

The Springfield Water and Sewer Commission held a public meeting on October 10, 2024, in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023.

Chairman Rodriguez called the meeting to order at 9:09 AM and announced the Commissioners that are participating. Secretary for the Commission Jaimye Bartak called the attendance roll:

Daniel Rodriguez, Present
Vanessa Otero, Present
Matthew Donnellan, Present

Also Present
Joshua Schimmel, Executive Director
Norm Guz, Commission Counsel
Anthony Basile, Comptroller
Domenic Pellegrino, Director of Finance
Jennifer Boulais, Director of Human Resources
Jaimye Bartak, Communications Manager/Secretary to the Commission
Patrick Burns, Candidate for Comptroller

New Business

1. Interview with Patrick Burns, Candidate for Comptroller Position.

Director of Human Resources Jennifer Boulais provided a background on how the Comptroller position was posted on Indeed, the Commission's website, and with professional organizations. Ms. Boulais introduced Patrick Burns on behalf of the screening committee and provided a summary of his background.

Commissioner Rodriguez welcomed Mr. Burns and asked about his experience handling politics.

Mr. Burns responded that as acting CAFO of the City of Springfield, he had the duty to present the annual tax rate to City Council. Mr. Burns described a past debate with City Council and how he brokered a compromise, with 10 out of 13 Councilors voting in favor.

Commissioner Otero asked about how Mr. Burns would handle the impact of one financial element of the budget having a ripple effect on other financial circumstances.

Mr. Burns responded that a healthy reserve fund is necessary to buffer against unintended or unexpected consequences. Mr. Burns provided an example of when state funding was cut from the school department, and that the \$20 million cut had a \$50 million impact.

Commissioner Otero asked if Mr. Burns had experience speaking with the public about financial models.

Mr. Burns responded that that he is part of a tax-rate setting committee that is comprised of residents and councilors. The committee has two meetings with the public each year. The challenge is in explaining the cause and effect between cutting taxes and maintaining services.

Executive Director Josh Schimmel asked how Mr. Burns would address mid-year discrepancies in the operations budget, noting that the Commission is vulnerable to weather.

Mr. Burns responded that he would review what could be delayed or cut, or if necessary, access reserves. Mr. Burns noted that he is usually the one resisting accessing reserves.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked for an example of Mr. Burns's experience of having difficult conversations with powerful people or entities.

Mr. Burns responded that he has many examples from his experience. Mr. Burns explained that he would often have to explain how certain funding was earmarked for something else, and hold firm so the department head could re-adjust their request.

Commissioner Otero asked what ideas or experience Mr. Burns had for expanding revenue streams.

Mr. Burns responded with an explanation of his experience on a PILOT committee, which Holyoke then replicated. His work on the committee has had some success (\$400,000), but state law is not supportive.

Commission Counsel Norm Guz asked if Mr. Burns had the opportunity to review the difference between the financial operations of the City and the Commission, noting the Commission has one primary source of revenue.

Mr. Burns responded that he had an idea that it was similar to the City in that the Commission is pushing for a conservative revenue budget with provisions for contingencies.

Atty. Guz asked if Mr. Burns had experience receiving criticism or specific questions from citizens during public hearings.

Mr. Burns responded that he has had one-on-ones with Councilors during public hearings, such as why surplus funds are not returned to the taxpayer.

Atty. Guz asked what experience he had with presentations to rating agencies.

Mr. Burns responded that he has experience preparing information and answering questions from S&P every two years.

Commissioner Otero asked why this position was attractive to Mr. Burns.

Mr. Burns responded that he has been wanting to work for the Commission for the past 10 years based on what he has heard from his former colleagues. Mr. Burns stated that he believed he would fit in well and hit the ground running, and would appreciate the free parking.

Commissioner Donnellan asked what features Mr. Burns would include in building an accounting department.

Mr. Burns responded that he would want a paperless department with strong accounting software, and to set vendors' expectations on when they would be paid. Timely payments help in the procurement area.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked if there were any audit findings Mr. Burns has had to confront in the past.

Mr. Burns responded that he has experienced a few challenges in the areas of precarious retirement funding and smaller misappropriations, and has taken corrective actions.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked if Mr. Burns had questions for the Board.

Mr. Burns responded that most of his questions were answered during the screening process, so his only question was concerning next steps.

Mr. Schimmel asked if Mr. Burns had experience changing enterprise software, and if so, what did he learn and what would his approach be?

Mr. Burns responded that he was involved in the transition to Munis in 2006. Based on his experience he would put in modules one at a time, and he would be aware of billing pitfalls.

Comptroller Tony Basile asked if Mr. Burns had any experience establishing financial policies.

Mr. Burns responded that he did in 2011, and those policies are now codified in City ordinance.

Mr. Burns thanked the Board and exited. The Board discussed their next steps.

UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER OTERO AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN

**VOTED YES –
COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:**

to authorize the Executive Director to offer the position of Comptroller to Patrick Burns and work out terms and conditions of employment and report back to the Board.

At 10:12 AM, UPON MOTION DULY MADE BY COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER OTERO

**VOTED YES –
COMMISSIONER DONNELLAN
COMMISSIONER OTERO
COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ:**

to adjourn.

Submitted By:



Jaimye Bartak, Secretary