



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

APPROVED JULY 2023 Minutes

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met via “Zoom” on Monday, July 17, 2023 at 5:30 P.M.

Chairperson Carney called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.

Upon Roll Call, those present and absent were as follows:

PRESENT: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Cancel; Commissioner Brooks; Commissioner Jones; & Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield. Commissioner Richards joined the meeting at 5:44 p.m.

ALSO PRESENT: Cara Leiper; Sharon Kimble; Jack Redman; Attorney Tom O'Connor; Keith Walsh; Amanda Huertas; Danielle McColgan; Mia Weibel; Jose Cruz; Angel Sadlowski; Angela Santaniello; Candace Franchere; Gwen Nabad; Edwin Velez; Mary Chapman; Shannon Scott; Alfred Chagnon; Ricky Peterson; Lisa Sargent; Roy Martin; Helen Fitzgerald; Felicia Lundquist.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Cara read the report and gave updates.

APPROVAL OF THE JUNE 2023 MINUTES

Commissioner Brooks put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Jones.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Commissioner Richards; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Jones.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSTAIN: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield

ABSENT: Commissioner Cancel.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the June minutes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

MOTION

Approval of the May 2023 Minutes

Commissioner Brooks put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Richards.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Commissioner Richards; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Jones.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSTAIN: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield

ABSENT: Commissioner Cancel.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the motion.

MOTION

Accept Low Bidder for Legal Services for 3 Years.

Commissioner Brooks put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Richards.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Commissioner Richards; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Jones.

VOTING NAY: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

ABSENT: Commissioner Cancel.

NEW BUSINESS

Board Response – Chair Updates/Remarks.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield put forth a Motion to table this discussion until the next meeting, there was no second. Therefore, the motion did not pass.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield stated she would no longer participate and left the meeting at.

Commissioner Richards was recognized by the chairperson and read a statement she had prepared. She asked that it be made part of the record.

Commissioner Jones was recognized by the chairperson and read a statement he had prepared. He asked that it be made part of the record.

Commissioner Richards put forth the motion to adjourn the July meeting at 7:30 P.M., seconded by Commissioner Brooks.

Attachments to these minutes:

Commissioner Jones Statement & Article

Commissioner Richards Statement

Response to Letter from Chairperson Carney to Edgardo Cancel Vice Chair-July 17, 2023

Marilyn Richards Commissioner

I want to thank Chairperson Carney for bringing these issues to our attention. I have listened to her responses to your query and applaud her for spending time answering your questions referring to the law, the regulations, our bylaws, and committee protocol. I am satisfied with the answers that she provided you.

My remarks will center about my sadness to see these questions, and how they were presented in such an accusatory way. Saddened because we are all her for the same reason, but clearly, we are not on the same page.

I am tired of hearing about rigged appointments and fixed elections, and how being new and/or a person of color has been ignored, in your not being appointed to ad hoc committees, and hearing constant criticism of our Executive Director. I have heard the words, rigged, fixed, shut off and shut down many times at this table and frankly, I am getting tired of it.

Your recent dissatisfaction centers around how you have not been given a chance to take part in a meaningful way. Please let me share examples that were afforded to you but dismissed.

As part of board on-boarding to the commission, Executive Director Leiper and I met with you to discuss issues that might be helpful to you as a new commissioner. One of those issues involved discussing "Conflict of Interest" and relationships with residents either when initiated by the resident, or by you. You clearly said that you had no intention of separating or limiting yourself from residents (especially at Hampshire Heights where you have been previously involved) and that you would continue relationships. This set a beautiful stage for a conflict of interest

When you were first appointed to the Board, I expressed my enthusiasm that there was an appointment from the Housing Partnership. I contacted you requesting that you report at a NHA Board meetings on issues and projects that were happening at the Partnership level. You stated that you did not want to do so. I cannot remember you talking at any meetings about the partnership and how we could better work together.

Regarding the election of officers, I knew you wanted to become more involved as a commissioner. I thought working with Chairperson Carney in NHA Board leadership role would be a wonderful opportunity for you to learn from her about the difficult job of leading the Commission.

I called you to see if you would accept the nomination of Vice Chair as you had complained about Commissioner Jim Brooks holding numerous positions. You said thank you, and that yes you would accept the nomination. When we got to the elections however, you nominated someone else. After complaining about lack of advancement-I was baffled. You were voted Vice Chair despite your nomination of someone else.

Recently when Chairperson Carney was absent for medical reasons, as Vice Chair, you were to lead the meeting. It was reported at the meeting that you said that you would be returning from Florida and would call in remotely. We waited but you did not call, or text-

I ask that in the future, please do not use derogatory statements and accusations that have been unsubstantiated, and please, let us all find a way on behalf of our residents to work together amicably.

Respectfully submitted to be included in the record,

Marilyn Richards

Commissioner Northampton Housing Authority

July 17, 2023

NHA Draft Statement on Board Disfunction

I wish to comment on the remarks by the Chair during the June Board meeting concerning questions and allegations made by Commissioner Cancel.

In short, they seem to have been made with little to no background or context. I base my remarks having read the written exchange between the Chair and the Commissioner.

In general, I do not support the change of responsibilities just for the sake of change. In an ideal world this might work but we do not exist in such a world. When I joined the board, I was a regular commissioner and over time was appointed to several subcommittees. I was a single parent and brought my daughter to meetings for freeze pops from the ED at the time. More to the point, being a board member is like learning a language. One does not hit the ground running from the outset. In time I learned the language serving on the personnel sub-committee, being vice Chair and then Chair. When the Board felt there was the need for a change, I did not object to the process and feel proud to serve wherever the Chair sees fit (Bylaws).

Another part of this process is seniority. Seniority is a crucial element in ANY Union contract. Not only does it recognize experience it acknowledges expertise. I am a Union Representative and President of my Union. I have almost 40 years of service in one capacity or another to UFCW Local 1459 and the labor movement as a whole. I am more than qualified to sit on personnel sub-committee if appointed by the Chair. I take my responsibilities serious as a CPC member and we deal with affordable housing every session.

The notion that change should happen for the sake of change is laughable. If its not broke, don't fix it.

In his questions to the Chair, Mr. Cancel assumed that I was appointed simply by being a labor union representative and claimed to also be a representative implying he, also should have been considered.

To date, I have not been able to confirm that Mr. Cancel is a labor Union representative. I have reached out to actual representatives of SEIU Local 263. To be clear, there is a difference between being a staff representative of a particular Union and a member in good standing. I for example, hold an elected position and have been on staff of my Local for 12 years in various capacities. Before that, I was a shop steward for 21 years and served on several bargaining committees. Mr. Cancel appears to be a member in good standing and I congratulate him on this but this is not the same as being a staff representative of a particular Union. This is a mis-representation in my eyes.

In addition, one does not have to be, contrary to Mr. Cancel's assertions, a labor representative to serve on the CPC. It has nothing to do with it. But it doesn't stop there. Regarding Dr. Bossie, the third person on the Grievance Committee, I support the Chair's statement that we are lucky to have her. Why? Because she came before the CPC with a housing proposal in a recent session that was an example of thinking outside the box and she won the CPC over through her demonstrated commitment to affordable housing. Indeed, we are fortunate to have her in our community. To suggest that Dr. Bossie should be replaced for the sake of change demonstrates a lack of attention to the mission of the NHA.

Concerning the Grievance Committee, which I do not serve on, there needs to be an understanding of conflict of interest. The Chair has outlined this clearly in writing. The NHA cannot have members of a subcommittee who have been compromised before a grievance is heard. Board members recusing themselves is a normal process. What is the public perception of a board member voting to approve legal counsel after being in litigation against said counsel?

In sum, I have worked hard to ensure the mission of the NHA continues to be attained. It was disconcerting to read these backhanded attacks questioning my role as a commissioner. None of them were ever said to me in person. This is cowardly.

There is nothing wrong with disagreement within a representative body. In my board history, we had an appointee from the then Republican Governor who did not agree with some of the things we did. The discussions were healthy to the process. We all shared a common goal. We did not disagree to the point of character assassination. This board needs to return to the mission statement for which we are appointed to strive.

Finally, I include two recent articles in the Boston Globe about the dysfunction on the Council. It reminds me of what is currently going on in NHA meetings. I quote from one of them:

"People all over the city tell him they tune into council meetings, 'not to watch the substance,' he said. 'They're tuning in to watch the antics and the disgraceful behavior,' "

Without a doubt the last NHA meeting in June was a total embarrassment.

Jeff Jones

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OPINION

The Boston City Council is the talk of the town for all the wrong reasons

The promise of collaboration has dissolved into ugliness and infighting.

By **Joan Vennochi** Globe Columnist, Updated July 12, 2023, 1:11 p.m.



Boston city councilors Michael Flaherty and Kendra Lara discuss redistricting on May 24. When a crop of political newcomers and veterans took the oath of office in January 2022, their diversity was celebrated and there was great hope for what they could accomplish. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

It's "The Gong Show," a "chaotic and vitriolic" place, where meetings always start late, the rules of order no longer apply, where F-bombs are dropped, and some members blithely ignore ethics and laws. That's today's Boston City Council — and that's why longtime councilor Michael Flaherty has decided to leave it.

"I've had a great run. I've met some amazing people and made some lasting relationships I will always treasure. I took a lot of pride in my work," Flaherty told me in an interview, following his announcement that he would not seek reelection after a career that stretches back over 20 years. "But I'd be remiss if I didn't mention this last term has been challenging, extremely disappointing, and at times embarrassing." People all over the city tell him they tune into council meetings, "not to watch the substance," he said. "They're tuning in to watch the antics and the disgraceful behavior."

When a crop of political newcomers and veterans including Flaherty took the oath of office in January 2022, their diversity was celebrated and there was great hope for what they could accomplish. Now — because of overall dysfunction, constant charges about racism, and the troubling misbehavior of individual members — this council is the talk of the town for all the wrong reasons. The promise of collaboration has dissolved into ugliness and infighting. Council members have fought bitterly over the city's budget and redistricting efforts, with votes divided largely along racial lines. But must every policy disagreement be cast as the difference between being racist or not? On this council, it seems that way.

A series of controversies is adding to the tension. The most recent involves councilor Kendra Lara, who was involved in a car crash in which a redacted police report states she was driving an unregistered vehicle with a revoked license and an expired inspection sticker. Her son, who was injured in the crash, was not in a booster seat as required, according to the report. On Wednesday, the Globe reported that Lara was driving at least 53 miles per hour on Centre Street in Jamaica Plain when she crashed the car into the front of a house. The report also revealed that Lara has not had a valid driver's

license since 2013, when it was suspended after she failed to pay a fine for not wearing a seatbelt.

Before that, councilor Ricardo Arroyo was fined \$3,000 for violating state conflict of interest laws after he provided legal representation to his brother. During his losing race to become Suffolk district attorney, Arroyo also faced accusations of sexual assault going back to his high school years — which he denied — that led to acrimonious exchanges between council members. Asked about those controversies during a recent appearance on GBH radio, Mayor Michelle Wu, a former city council member, said, “To be honest, I think it hurts the credibility [of the Council] on every issue.” Wu is right about that.

As reported by GBH, Wu also said she was sad to see Flaherty go and described him as a confidant and adviser. “He is someone who loves this community and is deeply loyal to the city,” she said.

Flaherty, a South Boston native, was first elected to the council in 1999 when he unseated incumbent councilor Albert “Dapper” O’Neil. Over the course of a political career that included an unsuccessful run for mayor, Flaherty accrued a progressive record on many issues and has a long history of getting along with all councilors.

With his reputation for sexist, racist, and homophobic comments, O’Neil — the man Flaherty beat — is a prime example of the council’s past drama and dysfunction. “People always point to Dapper. You can single him out as a clown,” said Michael McCormack, who served on the council from 1982 to 1991. Still, council members, including O’Neil, took their job seriously, McCormack said. There were policy disagreements, but “once the vote was over, there was never any real bad blood.” He attributes some of today’s problems to the switch that occurred in the 1980s to a council comprised of four at-large seats, plus nine district seats. The district councilors, he said, only know and care about what their constituents care about, not about what’s best for the entire city. With that, today’s council “has deteriorated into what a lot of people feared,” McCormack said.

Is there a way to defuse current tensions? In 2021, during Matt O'Malley's stint as acting president of the Boston City Council, he asked every councilor to cite one thing they liked or admired about a fellow councilor and share it in a group text. "We had four councilors who were running for mayor and I knew politics can be rough and tumble," said O'Malley, who left the council that year after serving six two-year terms. "I wanted to make sure we could elevate the debate. It was a way of putting the body ahead of our own personalities and finding that desire to work together."

If only current council members could rally around such a simple and positive mission. But things are "way too far gone for that," said state Senator Lydia Edwards, who served with O'Malley but left the council to become the first woman and person of color to represent her district.

There's a theme here. Besides Flaherty, [longtime councilor Frank Baker of Dorchester said he's not seeking reelection](#) and [Kenzie Bok left her spot on the council to head the Boston Housing Authority](#).

With the Boston City Council, staying, not leaving, is the hardest thing to do.

Joan Vennoch is a Globe columnist. She can be reached at joan.vennoch@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@joan_vennoch](https://twitter.com/joan_vennoch).

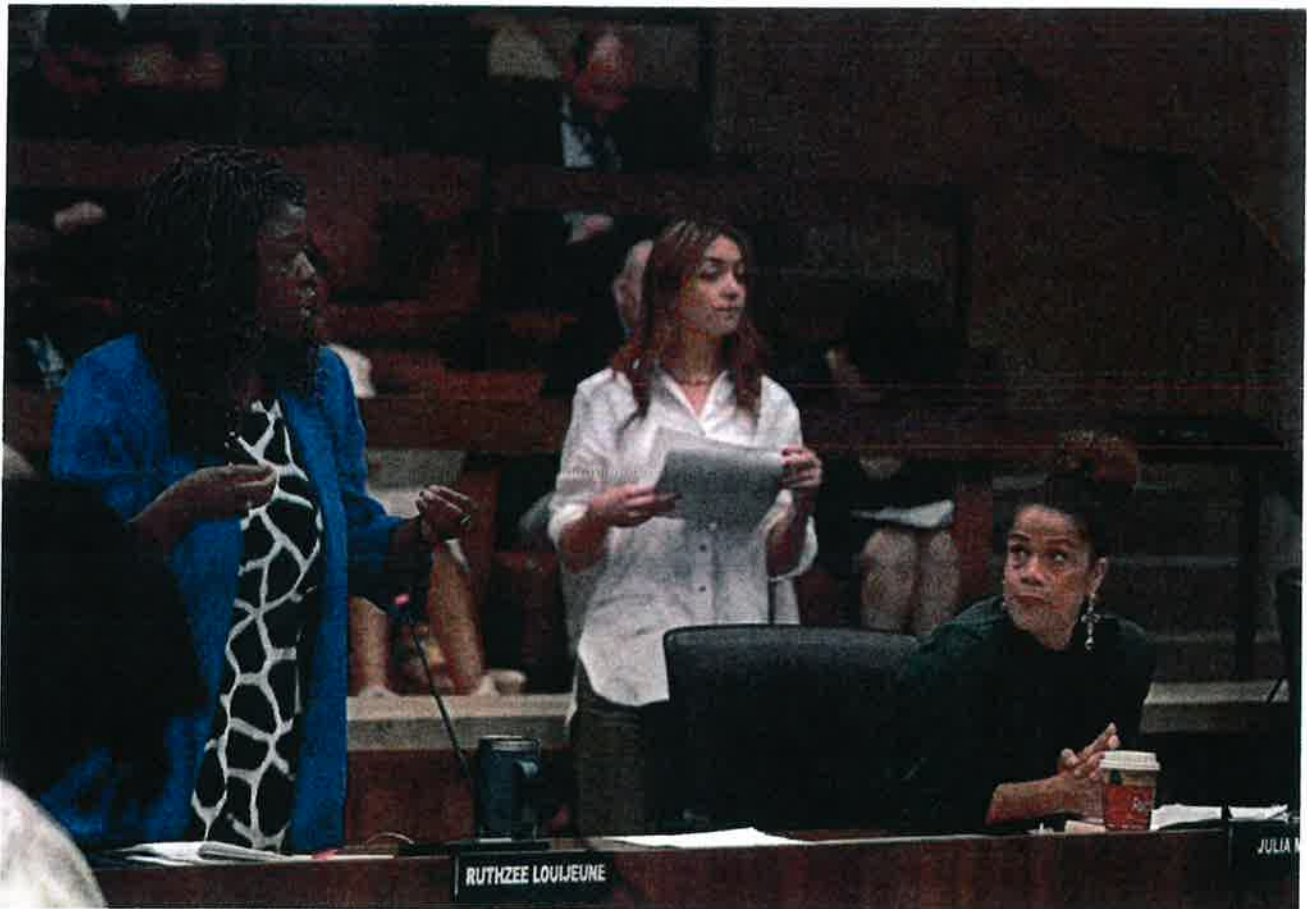
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The Boston City Council is a clown show

At the Boston City Council, a return to poor form.

By **Yvonne Abraham** Globe Columnist, Updated July 15, 2023, 3:22 p.m.



Councilor Julia Mejia (right), one of the two No votes, focuses on Boston City Councilor At-Large Ruthzee Louijeune May 24, 2023. At the meeting, the Boston City Council votes on a revised redistricting map. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

“Today’s City Council is dominated by smart, ambitious people who mirror a city transformed over the past decade or so. They have big ideas, they propel public conversation ... and push the city forward.”

How utterly ludicrous those words seem now! [I wrote them in the summer of 2019](#), when the Boston City Council was packed with superstars who had high aspirations, and

the talent to achieve them.

Four years later, the leaders who transformed the council have moved up or out. These days, the body is a clown show — beset by scandal, bitter infighting, wild allegations, and antics that would be laughable if they didn't mean so many in Boston are without the representation they deserve.

“Things have got to get better,” said former councilor Lydia Edwards, now a state senator, “because people don't trust the city council anymore, and that is not good for democracy.”

This week's scandal centers on Councilor Kendra Lara. Police say Lara was speeding down Centre Street in Jamaica Plain on June 30 when she lost control of an unregistered, uninsured car and crashed into a house, injuring her 7-year-old, who was not in a booster seat as the law requires. It has since emerged that Lara, on her first term on the council, [has been driving without a license for 10 years.](#)

It's hard to understand why anyone would take such risks, but it's unfathomable that an elected official — somebody who is supposed to set an example — would behave with such apparent disregard for laws ordinary people must obey.

A few days before Lara's accident, the State Ethics Commission announced that [Councilor Ricardo Arroyo paid a \\$3,000 penalty](#) for a conflict-of-interest violation because he represented his brother in a sexual harassment lawsuit.

The revelations come in a council term marked by belligerence and bullying, [in and out of the council chamber](#), where tempers flare with alarming regularity, fissures often open along racial lines, and the F-bomb has been dropped.

“What the [expletive] do I have to do in this [expletive] council in order to get respect as a Black woman?” [demanded District 7 Councilor Tania Fernandes Anderson in the](#)

[chamber](#), after Arroyo was removed from leadership because he had faced never-prosecuted allegations of assault 17 years ago.

The body's deliberations over redistricting — the decennial redrawing of the city's electoral boundaries — were especially ugly, again revealing racial and ethnic fissures. Hothead District 3 Councilor Frank Baker [called new voting maps an anti-Catholic conspiracy](#) driven by his colleague Liz Breadon, a Protestant immigrant from Northern Ireland.

“The person that's leading the charge is a Protestant from Fermanagh,” Baker spat. He and council president Ed Flynn, both white, [helped fund a successful lawsuit against their own colleagues over the new boundaries. In an affidavit supporting their challenge](#), Councilor Erin Murphy argued that the new maps — designed to improve representation for communities of color — violated the rights of white people under the Voting Rights Act. Blech.

It has gotten so hostile on the fifth floor that in May, [Flynn proposed an anti-bullying ordinance](#) that would require councilors and their staffers to sign a policy prohibiting harassment and retaliation — against each other!

That Flynn — never considered one of the body's leading lights — now seems its sage statesman is a testament to just how far the council has sunk. So many who were grown-ups are now former councilors: Michelle Wu is now mayor, Ayanna Pressley is in Congress, Andrea Campbell is attorney general, Kim Janey was interim mayor and now leads an anti-poverty nonprofit, Edwards is a state senator, and Kenzie Bok is the incoming head of the Boston Housing Authority.

All of them were impressive on the council, able to put aside their differences and work together. The current council [does not appear to have achieved much of anything](#), unless you count giving themselves a hefty pay raise.

There are some grown-ups left, but they have trouble being heard above the fray. That's the Boston City Council we knew so well for decades, a platform for divisive blowhards, a body that had little power and deserved even less.

Four years ago, I wrote that those days were over. It turns out we were enjoying a glorious, all-too-brief respite. Now we return to our regularly scheduled mayhem.

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