



Committee on Rules and Ordinances Meeting
Monday, January 27, 2025 at 6:00 PM
Richard E. Mastrangelo Council Chamber – Second Floor

M I N U T E S

Committee Members Present: Councilor John Airasian, Vice Chair (Zoom); Councilor Lisa Feltner, Secretary; Councilor John Gannon, Chair

1. Call to Order

Councilor Gannon called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m., and announced that the meeting was a hybrid format and that questions from Zoom participants should be directed to Councilor Airasian at jairasian@watertown-mass.gov.

Present at meeting:

Councilor Nicole Gardner; Doug Newton, Watertown Municipal Policy Analyst

Zoom participants: Councilor Caroline Bays; Brian Hebeisen, Watertown Environment and Energy Efficiency Committee (WE3C); City Manager George Proakis

2. Meeting Discussion

- A. Continuation of Proposed Ordinance Establishing Memorialization Committee
 - City Manager Proakis said that there was a meeting regarding the memorialization committee in December 2024. The item in committee was sent back to full council, however it is not on tomorrow night's city council agenda in order to sort out the minutes and make sure that the right sections are added to the right sections. He is awaiting feedback and expects that it will be discharged to committee at the next meeting.
 - City Manager Proakis added a summary of the proposed Memorialization Committee. Because of the many requests made by residents to name buildings, etc., in memory of people (excluding the process of name intersections after veterans), the committee would establish parameters, standards, and appropriate circumstances for recognition.
 - City Manager Proakis concluded by saying that there was a good draft, he appreciated that it was on the agenda and hoped that the full council is supportive.
 - Councilor Feltner stated that she had reviewed the draft minutes and ordinance, and forward to KP Law.

-Councilor Airasian said he had no further comments and looked forward to it being presented to the full council.

B. Proposed Food and Beverage Single Use Items Ordinance

-Councilor Gannon recognized Councilor Gardner to discuss the proposed food and single use ordinance.

-Councilor Gardner stated that the proposed ordinance would ban restaurants from putting utensils and condiments in takeout bags unless requested, which would lead to a reduction in waste, and save restaurants money. She indicated that the restaurant owners she has spoken to appreciate this proposal, and added that Newton has passed a much broader ordinance, and Needham and Wellesley are considering a similar ordinance.

-Councilor Gannon asked Councilor Gardner if this ordinance is in line with the climate action plan, and she responded yes.

-Councilor Feltner asked Councilor Gannon for his thoughts before opening the discussion to the public.

-Councilor Gannon responded that he had spoken with City Manager Proakis who offered staff help, in addition to Doug Newton. He added that the next step would be to defer to City Manager Proakis and Doug Newton, and there would be a robust discussion once the ordinance was drafted.

-Councilor Airasian thanked Councilor Gardner for her work on the issue and said he believes it is an important issue. He added that it would be nice to know if restaurant owners have offered input.

-Councilor Feltner stated that she would like to learn more about Newton's policy, beyond restaurant containers, before a draft is created.

-Councilor Gardner responded to Councilor Airasian that she has spoken with a few restaurants; was talking with businesses and getting buy-in from the public. She stated that the goal is less plastic, less plastic in the ocean. She then responded to Councilor Felton that it has been a while since she read Newton's ordinance, but that it did include black plastic, Polystyrene (thick Styrofoam), and helium balloons.

-City Manager Proakis introduced the topic of ordinance language and consistency and streamlining of ordinance process, noting that it is relevant to this agenda item as well as the next. To that end, he would like to train five people in city government to be the best ordinance writers, with a common understanding of how new Watertown laws should be written. He would like Watertown's Sustainability Manager, Laurel Schwab, and Doug Newton to be two of these people.

-City Manager Proakis left the meeting at 6:28 p.m.

-Both Councilor Gannon and Councilor Airasian agreed with City Manager Proakis' approach in making the ordinance process consistent and with direction coming from the council.

-Brian Hebeisen (via Zoom) said he had participated in the drafting of the climate plan and believed the ordinance would fit with climate change and W3C. He supported reaching out to restaurants since ordinances can put them at a competitive

disadvantage. He suggested reaching out to surrounding cities and towns working on a similar ordinance.

-Councilor Gannon suggested making a motion to recommend to the full council that Doug Newton be assigned to research policy direction and ordinances and bylaws of other communities.

-Councilor Feltner suggests that a motion is not necessary because it's regular business.

-After discussion of whether or not a motion is needed, Councilor Gannon instructs that the minutes should reflect that the committee is seeking direction on how to move forward before discussion. In addition, it is the consensus of the committee that Doug Newton is directed/authorized to proceed in recommending and researching policy areas of regulation, and analysis of other communities' attempts. There were no further comments.

C. Proposal to Amend Noise Ordinance

- Councilor Gannon provided a quick introduction to the noise ordinance, that from September 2017 through March 2021 the committee discussed a noise ordinance, with the result a 7-1 vote opposing the draft, with one abstention. The full council has referred to the committee to begin again and create a straightforward, easy-to-understand draft ordinance.
- Councilor Feltner said she is glad to be revisiting the subject. She considered one of the biggest frustrations to be a lack of understanding about how humans are affected by sound.
- Councilor Gannon added that there are four new councilors since the last iteration of the draft.
- Councilor Airasian noted that he is one of the new councilors and that he considers it an opportunity for improvement. He would like to see work on transitional neighborhoods, and he thanked Doug Newton for the research information.
- Councilor Gannon recognizes Doug Newton. He introduced three broad issues: use of decibel limits, science of sound, level of comprehensiveness.
- Councilor Fetner asked Doug Newton if he had discovered any criminal violations in his research. He responded that police don't want to "go there."
- Other issues discussed included leaf blowers being separated from noise ordinances, baseline sound (health department), lack of clarity at public parks (police), continuity of sound, regulation inside apartment complexes, and that the last ordinance was seen as unclear and unenforceable.
- Doug Newton stressed that the goal is to achieve compliance; not be punitive. He added that the main news complaint is construction noise, followed by apartments in Arsenal Yards neighborhood. Focus should be on construction noise, and he gave caution on the issue of landscaping because it will require a lot of time, energy, and public input.
- Councilor Feltner suggested that based on the last go around, leaf blowers should have a separate ordinance. She said she was interested in background noise and how it's measured, repetitive noises, and tonal noise.

- Councilor Gardner agreed that persistent noise from labs is a big issue, and leaf blowers should have their own ordinance. She used the example of Newlywed Foods, in her district, that is working with sound engineers for their issues.
- Councilor Bays (Zoom) countered that from her experience working on the last iteration of the ordinance, many people complained about leaf blowers, and she believes they should be covered by the noise ordinance.
- Responding to Councilor Bays question about how other communities deal with leaf blowers, Doug Newton said that Newton has a separate ordinance for landscaping equipment. Councilor Gannon added that Somerville also has a separate ordinance.
- Councilor Gardner asked if leaf blowers will be included in this ordinance. Councilor Feltner responded that the consensus, without official vote, was to keep them separate.
- Councilor Gannon opened time for public comment. Cedar Pruitt (Zoom) introduced herself as a Newton resident, behind Russo's, who has been dealing with industrial sound being carried by the water of the Charles River, as well as the callousness of the businesses causing noise. She asked the committee to consider the issue of continuous noise.
- Ellen Rotham (Zoom) voiced her concern about leaf blowers as a public health threat.
- Rita Colafella, 56 Cuba Street, said she liked the noise ordinance "as is," and she liked Doug Newton's recommendations for tonal effects and decibel levels. She agreed that law enforcement shouldn't have to deal with nuisance laws. She stated that she believes that over enforcement is classist; limiting landscapers' ability to make a living.
- Linda Scott, 55 Olcott Street, said that focus should be on tonal noise first, citing the Charles River and Walker Pond as bodies of water carrying sound, and its effects on birds.
- Councilor Gannon asked for any other comments or recommendations for the next meeting.
- Councilor Feltner said her understanding is that Doug Newton and City Manager Proakis may attend the next meeting with staff. She suggested looking at a separate leaf blower ordinance. She added that she would like to hear input from Laurel Schwab.
- Councilor Airasian would like to see the ordinance be as comprehensive as possible, and simple and enforceable.
- Councilor Gannon agreed with Councilors Airasian and Feltner, and that Doug Newton should continue focusing on the common, consensus issues addressed this evening. He suggested requesting City Manager Proakis bring his staff to the next meeting. He would also like to hear from the police, health, and building departments.
- Councilor Feltner made a motion to continue, which was seconded by Councilor Airasian. All were in favor (8:26 p.m.).

3. Adjournment

Councilor Feltner made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councilor Airasian. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m.