



Watertown City Council

Administration Building
149 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472
Phone: 617-972-6470

Report of the Committee on Personnel and City Organization

Meeting Date: April 18, 2024

The Committee convened on Thursday, April 19, at 6 pm in the Richard E. Mastrangelo Council Chambers, with remote participation by Zoom.

Present were Councilors Caroline Bays, chair; John Gannon, vice chair; and Nicole Gardner, secretary. Staff present were City Manager George Proakis and HR Director Colleen Doyle. Also present were Councilor Vinnie Piccirilli in person and Council President Mark Sideris by zoom.

Chair Bays called the meeting to order at 6:05. pm. The purposes of the meeting were

1. To consider the proposed changes in hours of operation in City Hall, the Parker Annex, and the Senior Center, and
2. To discuss accessibility and accommodations for volunteer residents serving on City Boards, Commissions and Committees.

Discussion of proposed change in hours of operation

Chair Bays began by asking the Manager to discuss the proposed change of hours (Attachment A).

Mr Proakis and Ms. Doyle shared the following points over the course of the discussion:

The City is proposing that the Council approve a permanent change in hours for employees working in City Hall, the Parker Annex, and the Senior Center as follows:

- Monday, Wednesday and Thursday: 8:30am to 5pm
- Tuesday: an extended day, 8:30am to 7pm
- Fridays: a shortened day, 8:30am to 12:30pm

Note: all employees will continue to work the same number of hours each week, and the hours open to the community per week would change from 42.5 to 40 per week.

In evaluating this proposed change, the Administration conducted research on what neighboring and comparable municipalities are doing. 12 of the 18 already have year-round half Fridays. 10 of the 18 are open to the public 40 hours per week or less.

The City also tracked the number of visitors to the Treasurer/Collector and Assessors offices on Fridays between 12:30 pm and 5 pm for the last 5 weeks. These are the biggest “drop-in” customer service offices. For four weeks, the average number of visitors across both offices was 9. On one Friday, when Excise bills were due on the Friday and Water/Sewer bills were due the following Monday, there were a total of 70 visitors.

The Watertown Municipal Employees Union originally requested that the City move to a year round schedule of half day Fridays and extended Tuesdays, for reasons of employee work life balance, and because it gives employees the opportunity to run errands that must be done during the traditional work week without having to take time off.

The Administration and the Union are aligned on benefits that would come from this proposed change.

The Administration sees this as a powerful and needed recruitment and retention tool, at a time when it is increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff to municipal roles. In addition, the City has had a long and successful history of closing early on Friday afternoons and staying open late on Tuesday nights during the summer months. Residents who work during the traditional work week benefit from this kind of schedule, because they would be able to visit City offices on Tuesday evenings year round instead of only in the summer.

Regarding concerns around customer service during peak workload days, such as during elections or when tax bills are due, the Manager said that appropriate adjustments would be made in scheduling to be sure residents and businesses had the access they need.

If approved by the City Council, the next steps would be to

- Map out what this would mean for each affected employee,
- Formalize an agreement with the union,

- Develop and implement a robust communication plan, so that residents and businesses are aware of the change prior to implementation, and
- Implement, ideally by Memorial Day

The members of the PCO Committee and councilors in attendance expressed support for the proposal.

Discussion of accessibility and accommodations for volunteer residents serving on City Boards, Commissions and Committees.

The discussion began by reviewing suggestions from a resident on ways that the City could improve accessibility and accommodations. The potential barriers to participation fell into three broad categories:

- Reimbursing certain out of pocket costs such as child care or transportation, which could broaden the pool of candidates by enabling parents of young children, for example, to serve their community without having to pay to do so
- Ensuring access to written information and oral communications in meetings for persons who may need translation (including ASL), which could broaden the pool of candidates by enabling people who may not be fluent in English or who access information through ASL interpreters, to serve their community
- Supporting members with help, such training or mentoring, as needed

The Manager noted that the Charter Preamble names “equity and diversity” as a guiding principle. He commended the Resident Advisory Committee, created during the last Charter Review, for making steady progress at nominating more diverse candidates for the City’s 24 Boards, Commissions, and Committees.

During the discussion of how the City might reimburse certain expenses, it was recognized that there could be people with highly valuable skills and lived experiences who currently are unable to volunteer given the financial burden that serving would create. The costs of childcare per meeting are significantly higher than the costs of transportation, and so the Committee honed in on that idea. Councilor Gannon noted that the City of Brookline is also looking into this for childcare, and is now seeking legal counsel on how this might be implemented. Councilor Gardner noted that the earliest budget cycle for which new policy guidelines can be provided is FY2026, so we have time to research and carefully evaluate this.

After discussion the Committee agreed on the following:

1. It would like to see research by the Council Analyst into municipalities in the Commonwealth or elsewhere in the US that currently reimburse childcare. If any are found, the Committee would like to understand who is doing it, what was the reason it was put in place and when did that happen, how the program works operationally, what impacts positive or negative have been observed, and so on.
2. It will follow what Brookline learns and does in this area, before developing any proposal for the City Council to consider.
3. The Committee will reconvene on this idea over the course of the next year as information becomes available.

During the discussion of ensuring access to information, it was noted that all materials on the City website are accessible to persons using screen reader technology and, through online translation apps, to people not fluent in English. As for access during meetings, the Manager said that should the highest qualified person for an appointment require ASL or a language translator, the City would find a way to do that. It is worth noting that Watertown faces particular challenges here, given the number of languages spoken. It was agreed after Committee discussion that there is no further action needed in this area.

During the discussion of coaching, training, mentoring and so on, the Manager Proakis noted that board staff already do onboarding as new members are appointed. Experienced members will often spend time with new members, answering questions and helping them get familiar with how the Committee works. In addition, the City recently provided training on Ethics and Open Meeting Law to all members of Boards Commissions and Committees, for the first time. This training was recorded and is publicly available to anyone interested in learning more. The Administration will repeat the training every 2 years, to ensure all volunteers have the training they need. The Committee saw no further action needed in this area.

→ **Action Item:** Councilor Gardner made a motion, seconded by Councilor Gannon, that the PCO recommend the City Council approve the proposed change to a year round short Friday / extended Tuesday schedule for employees in City Hall, Parker Annex, and the Senior Center. The motion was approved unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:04pm.

Report prepared by Nicole Gardner

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Caroline Bays,
Chair

John G. Gannon,
Vice Chair

Nicole Gardner,
Secretary



George J. Proakis
City Manager

CITY OF
WATERTOWN
Office of the City Manager

Administration Building
149 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472
Phone: 617-972-6465
www.watertown-ma.gov
citymgr@watertown-ma.gov

To: Honorable City Council

From: George J. Proakis, City Manager

Date: May 6, 2024

RE: Agenda Item – Hours of Operation of City Buildings

As a follow up to an item that I introduced during the Communications from the City Manager at the March 12, 2024 City Council Meeting regarding City Hall, Parker Annex and Senior Center modified hours of operation, attached please find a draft ordinance for your review.

The Committee on Personnel and City Organization met on Thursday, April 18th regarding the above mentioned matter. At that meeting, the Committee voted to recommend the City Council approve the proposed change to a year round short Friday / extended Tuesday schedule for employees in City Hall, Parker Annex, and the Senior Center.

If the Honorable City Council adopts the Committee on Personnel and City Organization recommendation, I respectfully request a First Reading on Proposed Ordinance to Modify Hours of Operation of City Buildings be placed on the May 14, 2024 City Council Agenda.

Thank you for your consideration and favorable action on this matter.

ORDINANCE #

2024-O-

AN ORDINANCE TO MODIFY HOURS OF OPERATION OF CITY BUILDINGS

WHEREAS, the provisions of Chapter 30, § 30.03 of the City of Watertown Code of Ordinances addresses the hours of operation for all offices in the Administration Building; and,

WHEREAS, the City Council has regularly authorized temporary modified summer hours for the operation of the Administration Building; and

WHEREAS, the City Manager seeks to standardize operating hours for the Administration Building and as well as the City-owned Parker Annex and Senior Center buildings for the benefit of both City personnel and the public.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED by the City Council of the City of Watertown that Chapter 30, § 30.03 of the City of Watertown Code of Ordinances is amended by deleting the language contained in this section in its entirety and replacing it with the following language:

(A) The City buildings known as the City Hall Administration Building, the Parker Annex, and the Senior Center, including all offices contained therein, as used for City and public business, shall be open to the public for the transaction of business on the following schedule:

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM
Tuesday 8:30 AM to 7:00 PM
Friday 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM
Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays - closed

(B) The City Manager, after reasonable notice to the public, may by appropriate order direct that the listed City-owned buildings be closed on any day preceding or following a legal holiday or on any other day when, in their judgement, it is deemed expedient, necessary, or advisable.

(C) The Building Inspector's Office located within the Administration Building shall continue to be open for the transaction of business beginning at 7:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m., when all offices in the Administration Building are open. This Subsection (C) can be rescinded at the discretion of the City Manager.

Council Member

I hereby certify that at a regular meeting of the City Council for which a quorum was present, the above Ordinance was adopted by a vote of ___ for, ___ against, and ___ present on May __, 2024.

Brendan McCarthy, Council Clerk

Mark S. Sideris, Council President