




Melissa Desroches
Executive Assistant to the City Manager

MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager 

FROM: Melissa Desroches, Executive Assistant to the City Manager

CC: Conor Baldwin, CFO; Shawn Machado, Assistant City Manager

DATE: June 13, 2023

SUBJECT: 02/21/2023: Councilors Yem and Robinson—Req. City Manager Have The Appropriate Department Update The City Council On The Status Of The Youth Commission

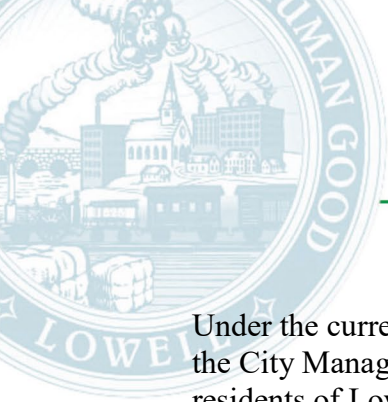
Information in this response based on meetings between the Manager's Office and Meghan Murtagh, Facilitator of the Newton Youth Commission.

On August 9, 2022, a proposed ordinance establishing a Lowell Youth Commission was sent to the City Council on behalf of the City Solicitor. The Lowell Youth Commission was added to Chapter 9, "Boards Commissions and Committees" and was designed to meet the opportunities, challenges and problems of youth and to give a voice to the youth of Lowell to participate in the City. According to Title VII, Chapter 40, Section 8E, as Lowell operates under a plan E government, the appointments to the Youth Commission would fall to the City Manager.

The City Manager's office reached out to various municipalities to discuss tools and best practices utilized in creating a Youth Commission, particularly Northampton and Newton. The facilitator in Newton was particularly helpful. She met with representation from the Manager's office on two separate occasions, and also shared useful documents used by the Commission in Newton such as an example of a meeting agenda, a sample application and the newsletter. Because the Commission would be comprised of students, Newton also shared that they use an emergency contact and phone release form for student information. There was also a Google Slides presentation shared, which is used in meetings to guide discussions (similar to the way in which a classroom presentation would be given by an educator).

Composition of the Commission

It is generally considered best practice to have an adult facilitator as there is a teaching component to the Commission. A facilitator would generate topics, facilitate conversations, help plan meetings, and oversee the Commission's monthly operations. Consideration would be taken as to who would be in the best position to facilitate (i.e.: teacher, youth organization leader, etc.).



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Under the current ordinance, members of the Lowell Youth Commission would be appointed by the City Manager and consist of a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 21 members, all should be residents of Lowell. When the Commission is first established, the terms of the members would be for one-three years, dependent on the Commission. Another thing to consider would be the age-range or grade-level of the Commission members (i.e.: high school students only or a mentor-style situation in which the commission is composed of high school students with a few 8th graders).

Outreach is conducted throughout the school year, but also during summer months. Subcommittees create flyers, post messages and meeting times on Instagram, host peer led events (bring a friend), and a student-created web page. In Newton, they also created a QR code linked to the city website.

Structure of the Meetings

The meetings are structured based on a 90-minute slide presentation and are generally conducted by the Youth Commission members (students) and overseen by the adult facilitator. During the meeting, various things may occur: guest speakers, subcommittee updates, and a work-shop style activity. The meetings are mirrored after city council meetings. The members of the Commission would be assigned to various sub-committees (social media, community engagement, newsletter, etc.). This would be determined by the members of the Commission. The work-shop style activity could range from discussion of initiatives, discussion of what projects the Commission should choose to work on, and creation of materials (agenda, newsletter, etc.). Some of the initiatives worked on in Newton are “Destigmatizing Mental Health,” and a “Stress Survival Guide.”

Timeline

Meetings are scheduled to mirror the school calendar. The timeline includes outreach activities in June—usually through school counselors and school groups. Youth Commission members are encouraged to bring their friends to meetings as part of the outreach as well. Meetings run from September through June. There are no meetings in July or August. The summer can be used as a time for outreach activities, or for choosing and appointing new members of the Commission. For the first meeting in September, it was recommended that a member of legal present a workshop on how to conduct an open meeting and to discuss the laws surrounding open meetings, as this is part of the teaching-component of the meetings. A large part of the Commission is familiarizing youth with the channels of government and providing opportunity to have a voice in the community.

Considerations

In Lowell, we would want to consider the age-range of student Commission members. Would we want to include middle school students, or only high school? Would we want the Commission to be largely composed of high school students with a few 8th graders as part of a potential mentor-program within the Commission, in order to keep a consistent group of students as part of the Commission (taking into consideration graduations or resignations). Who would facilitate?