

City of Cambridge

The Civil and Human Rights Committee held a public meeting on November 6, 1996, beginning at the Cambridge Community Center, 5 Callendar Street, for the purpose of continued discussion of the Residency Ordinance of the City of Cambridge.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Katherine Triantafillou, Chair of the Committee, Vice Mayor Kathleen L. Born, Councillor Henrietta Davis, Councillor Kenneth E. Reeves, Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Councillor Timothy J. Toomey, Jr. and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury. Also present were Robert W. Healy, City Manager; Michael Gardner, Director of Personnel, and William Gomes, Director of Affirmative Action.

Councillor Triantafillou convened the hearing and explained the purpose. She welcomed those present and stated that the Committee is very interested hearing from members of the community. She noted that a memo from Mr. Healy has indicated that the Residency Ordinance will present some problems for affirmative action, and in light of this issue, the Committee is looking at the Residency Ordinance.

Councillor Reeves noted that the City has several separate personnel offices. The school has its own personnel department. The department of Human Services does its own personnel work.

Councillor Reeves gave the example of a recent hiring process for a health trainer. The hiring happened completely in the Human Services department. A person of color applied based on an ad and then got back a job description with many more requirements, which seems illegal. Then his resume did not get considered due to a mistake in the hiring process.

Councillor Triantafillou asked about the method for applying for jobs. Mr. Healy stated that there is one central personnel office and function. A department with a vacancy must fill out a vacancy form, which both Mr. Healy and Michael Gardner must sign. The advertising is done centrally. Interviews are done at the department level. All hiring requires the approval of the City Manager.

Councillor Triantafillou asked whether there was a central repository for resumes of people who are interested in working for the City. Mr. Healy stated that resumes are kept on file; however, it is always better to apply for a particular job.

Patricia English Pierce, Cambridge, asked what happens to resumes that are submitted. She has submitted resumes to the City several times and has never heard another word.

Councillor Triantafillou asked if she ever received a response saying "thank you for your resume" Ms. Pierce stated that she never had. She said that her expectation was that once her resume was on file, she would be considered for other positions that suited her qualifications. Ms. Pierce stated that she is very qualified.

Councillor Triantafillou asked Mr. Healy for a response. Mr. Healy said that resumes are retained for approximately three months. It is necessary to apply for other specific jobs. If applicants are not being notified of the status of their application, this should be rectified.

In response to a question from Councillor Triantafillou, Ms. Pierce said that she works in the financial area of bookkeeping and accounting. The State personnel office sends out cards on a regular basis. She works full-time and cannot check job bulletin boards at City Hall regularly.

Councillor Triantafillou asked how she heard about the jobs she applied for. Ms. Pierce stated that she had heard about them from friends employed by the City of Cambridge.

Councillor Triantafillou asked for a suggestion for better ways to notify Cambridge residents. Mrs. Pierce suggested sending a list of available jobs out with tax bills.

Councillor Davis stated that the School Department has a system of holding onto resumes, particularly those of people of color. Especially since the City has an affirmative action office, these resumes should be retained.

Councillor Davis asked what is done for affirmative action. William Gomes, Director of Affirmative Action, said that affirmative action is really part-time in Cambridge because he doesn't have the resources he would need to actually do a complete job. He does maintain a pool of minority candidates and he sends out a mailing list to various agencies. From this he gets a list of minority candidates. He noted that union contracts call for a bidding process which makes it difficult to do affirmative action.

Councillor Davis asked Mr. Gomes whether he has a file of previous minority applicants. Mr. Gomes said that he does. Councillor Davis asked why Ms. Pierce did not get notice; there must have been jobs open that she could apply for. She asked Mr. Healy for further explanation. Mr. Healy said that the positions would be civil service or union. If it was an account clerk position, it would be a promotional position. This would be subject to union contract bidding requirements. There are not a lot of other positions that are not covered by civil service or unions.

Councillor Triantafillou asked where the information regarding applicants for other jobs goes. Mr. Gardner said that resumes of unsuccessful applicants are kept on file for three months. Files from minority candidates are reviewed during hiring processes. Many if not most referral lists that go from the Personnel office include a person or persons from these files. He cited an example of a hiring interview process in which he interviewed a candidate who was not right for that particular job but whose resume was sent on for another upcoming opening. However, it is always preferable that people apply for each particular job that comes up.

Councillor Triantafillou asked how they will know about the job.

Mr. Gardner said that jobs are posted internally in City Hall. As soon as the job is posted, it is public information. If the job is going to be externally advertised, that outreach takes place at the same time. The information goes to Cable T.V., to the Cambridge web page, the Workforce Development Office, the Cambridge Employment Program, the branch libraries, the Affirmative Action Director. The Personnel Department is currently making arrangements to send job listings to the community schools. He then listed the newspapers where the job will be advertised if it is decided that the job will be advertised.

Councillor Triantafillou asked whether resumes for minorities and Cambridge residents are kept longer than three months.

Mr. Gardner said that Cambridge residents are kept in a separate file; minorities are not. There are typically between 100 and 500 resumes on file.

Councillor Triantafillou asked why information cannot be sent out to interested persons of color and Cambridge residents. Mr. Gardner said that this could be done in terms of categories, and the Personnel Office would do so.

Councillor Triantafillou said that she has heard repeatedly from City Administrators that a big reason for not hiring minorities is that "they don't apply." She suggested using the people who do apply as a resource to begin a network. They may be qualified for other jobs or they may know minorities who would be qualified.

Mr. Gardner said that he would be happy to do this, to try it and see how successful it is. The City routinely does this for civil service public safety exams. A letter is sent to all minorities in the City telling them about the exam and encouraging them to apply or to pass on the information. Over the years the City of Cambridge has had a significantly higher percentage of Cambridge residents taking the test than the percentage of minority residents in the community. He thanked Councillor Triantafillou for the suggestion.

Councillor Davis stated that it is shocking that minority applicants' resumes are thrown out after three months. She asked whether this is standard practice in the affirmative action industry.

Mr. Gardner said that he believes that three months is a general standard. To the extent that the City can identify minorities, special attention to them is paid and should continue to be paid.

Councillor Sullivan stated that if someone applies for a position, the City should notify them of where their application stands. He asked what happened to the applicants forwarded from the Deputy City Clerk hiring process.

Councillor Sullivan described the Post Office outreach and mentioned the School Department outreach and asked whether the City could do something similar in terms of targeting. Mr. Gardner said that he is familiar with the School Department outreach, but in many cases, those jobs are going to be filled by internal posting because they are union promotion positions. If listings of jobs which really are not available are routinely distributed, the receiver organizations may be discouraged from actually distributing the lists to potential candidates and encouraging applicants.

Councillor Triantafillou suggested reconsidering that policy because there are many people in the community who would like to get these notices even if it is unlikely that the job will be available due to union and civil service requirements.

Councillor Sullivan asked how internal employees know about promotion opportunities. Mr. Gardner explained the posting process. He also stated that the Personnel Department is currently revising its outreach list for external notification and invited suggestions.

Charles Walker, Cambridge, former Affirmative Action Advisory Committee, reviewed the Affirmative Action Committee recommendations. One recommendation was for a school of instruction for Cambridge employees so they could know about upward mobility. He stated that he worked for the Post Office and commended the Post Office's system for informing employees of promotional opportunities. He submitted a copy for the record. He suggested making sure that all Black churches are informed of job opportunities.

Vice Mayor Born asked what number of City jobs are civil service and/or union jobs. Mr. Gardner said that eighty percent of current city positions are unionized and between 65 and 75 percent are subject to civil service. The total number of employees is 1980, not including the School Department.

Vice Mayor Born asked how often civil service exams are given. Mr. Gardner responded that exams for police occur every other year, and for fire personnel occur every other year. The exams for clerical jobs occur sporadically. The only civil service exam other than public safety this year will be a social workers series.

Vice Mayor Born asked how union positions are hired.

Mr. Healy explained the laborer list, the list for entry level hires at DPW. The list goes chronologically from the time of sign-up, with no preference for affirmative action. There are veteran preferences.

Vice Mayor Born asked what would happen with people who signed up this week, Mr. Healy said the list is ten years long; it would take ten years to reach someone who signed up today, whether the person was a minority candidate, a resident or both.

Councillor Reeves said that there is also a 47 A list, that provides a "leg up" for minorities, women, disadvantaged or disabled persons. It helps some, but there are many fewer laborer jobs these days.

Councillor Triantafillou asked who can get on the 47 A list. Mr. Gardner said it assists applicants under 18 or over 45, applicants who are not high school graduates, minorities, and disabled persons. They must also be low-income. Mr. Gardner said that while it is an advantage to be on this list, it is also a very long list.

Vice Mayor Born related an experience with trying to assist a person who was seeking employment with the City and who speaks and types Spanish and Portuguese very well.

Councillor Sullivan requested a clarification that City Councillors are not all there to get people jobs.

Vice Mayor Born asked how many jobs turn over each year. Mr. Gardner estimated that approximately 100 full time jobs turned over last year.

Vice Mayor Born said that Harvard has a fairly lengthy list of available jobs, but it is consolidated. Is there any place that the City list is consolidated? Mr. Gardner said that externally advertised jobs are on the internet; internal postings are on the VAX. Job postings go to all branch libraries. They are all on single sheets because that is how many lines it takes for job postings.

Vice Mayor Born suggested looking at how Harvard does its consolidated posting. There is a public perception that to get a job in the City of Cambridge, it helps to know someone.

Patricia English Pierce, Cambridge resident, said that the Civil Service Administrator 2,3 and 4 list was thrown out and there has not been another list generated.

Darlene Nigorski, Cambridge resident, Chair of Human Rights Commission, stated that the bottom line is a concern about affirmative action. There are some people who are moving here specifically because of some of the protections offered by the City. It should not be one or the other, affirmative action or residency, but affirmative action principles should come first. Someone who has chosen to live here will bring more commitment in her line of work. She has also had problems because Boston and Somerville have residency requirements, and she has been excluded from their hiring processes.

Councillor Toomey stated that he introduced the Residency Ordinance in order to increase protection for Cambridge residents. He noted that seventeen percent of the Cambridge work force live in Somerville, four percent live in Boston.

Councillor Toomey asked what percentage of jobs posted internally are filled internally.

Mr. Gardner said that 90-95 percent of the jobs they identify as jobs likely to be filled internally are filled internally.

Councillor Triantafyllou asked why. Mr. Gardner said that internal candidates within the same union as the job vacancy have the first opportunity. Under union contract, the City has to have really good reasons to not hire the union person. The Civil Service jobs give a statutory preference to Civil Service candidates.

Councillor Toomey asked what happens to the current position of a person promoted internally. Mr. Healy said it depends on the category. For example, if it were laborer to skilled laborer promotion that caused the vacancy, the laborer position would be filled from the list. If it were skilled labor to working foremen, the skilled labor position would be a promotional position, filled internally in accordance with the union contract.

Councillor Reeves said that he does not agree that the City does well with affirmative action. It is a pyramid with minorities at the bottom. In addition, minority retention is horrible. He could show a department with a nonminority employee who works another job during the time when he is supposed to be working for the City; he still has his job, whereas there has been a recent discharge of a minority employee in that department.

In the health trainer position at Human Services that he discussed earlier, the ad said to submit the resume to Human Service directly. It did not go to the Personnel Office. He suggested that City Councillors take a particular person through the system and watch what happens to the application.

Councillor Reeves emphasized that applicants absolutely do not get notification of what has happened to the position. He noted that there are many provisional clerk typists who have never taken the Civil Service exam.

Councillor Reeves said he could give supporting examples. The Human Services health trainer position has already been discussed. In addition, he can point to hiring for the Senior Center. In the middle of the application process in which a minority candidate was involved, someone said "I know something about that person," and the person was out of the competition. The problem with the applicant was that on a very cold night he took a homeless person who had nowhere else to go home to sleep on his couch which he, Councillor Reeves, does not see as necessarily unreasonable. The hiring for the Deputy Director of Personnel is another example. For that position, he sent twenty minority candidates. The City has many department heads who have had no previous experience in the field. There are also positions that do not exist until they are restructured to be there for particular persons who are already there. The churches should get postings. There should be job fairs. You cannot hire working class people via the internet. There are many qualified minority persons who can work here.

Councillor Triantafillou asked what happens to someone who is just generally interested in working for the City. Mr. Gardner stated that such persons are spoken to by a Personnel Department employee who has the responsibility to inquire into the person's interests and to have them fill out either a general or specific job application.

Councillor Triantafillou asked if there are persons of color who work in that office. Mr. Gardner answered in the affirmative.

Councillor Triantafillou asked if a packet of information is available for potential job applicants. Mr. Gardner said there are two separate information sheets. Councillor Triantafillou requested a copy of this information.

Councillor Triantafillou encouraged citizens to contact the Committee with their experiences. Councillor Triantafillou stated that she knew that a Cambridge resident who applied for the job of workforce developer never heard anything. Now the rumor is that a nonresident is about to get the job. She heard from another Cambridge resident who applied for a 911 emergency communication job and she had good experience. Mr. Healy said that position requires one year experience as a dispatcher.

Councillor Triantafillou said that she is not sure that she agrees with these qualifications. If the person lives in the City of Cambridge, perhaps these qualifications are not necessary.

Mr. Healy said that the City always has and always will pay special attention to Cambridge residents who apply for jobs.

Councillor Triantafillou said that she wants to see the data for the Emergency Communications hires.

Councillor Triantafillou said that the perception is there that Cambridge does not give Cambridge people a fair chance at jobs. Mr. Healy said that is your opinion. Councillor Triantafillou said that in her experience as a lawyer for twenty years, when you start hearing the same information from more and more people, there may be some basis for it.

Councillor Reeves asked if there is or was previously a director of personnel in Human Resources. Mr. Gardner said not in his memory. Councillor Reeves asked who deals with personnel matters at the Department of Human Service. Mr. Gardner said that there is an Administrative Division Head for Personnel.

Councillor Reeves stated that tonight he has given five examples. He would like the Personnel Office to look back over these situations and find out why this happened.

Councillor Triantafillou thanked those present for their attendance.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

For the Committee,

Councillor Katherine Triantafillou, Chair

A communication was received from D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk, transmitting a report from Councillor Triantafillou, Chair of the Civil and Human Rights Committee, for a meeting held on November 6, 1996 for the purpose of continued discussion of the Residency Ordinance of the City of Cambridge.

In City Council November 18, 1996

Report Accepted.

Placed on file.