

CITY OF LACONIA - CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall - Armand A. Bolduc City Council Chamber
7:00 P.M.

12/22/2025 - Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor St. Clair called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM

2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

Councilor Felch led the salute to the flag.

3. RECORDING SECRETARY

Katie Gargano, City Clerk

4. ROLL CALL

Clerk Gargano called the roll of the following city councilors: Councilor Cheney, Councilor Soucy, Councilor Hoffman, Councilor Haynes, Councilor Bogert and Councilor Felch.

Mayor St. Clair noted that all 6 councilors were in attendance and a quorum was established.

5. STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Kirk Beattie, City Manager; Glenn Smith, Finance Director

6. COUNCIL PROCLAMATION

7. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

7.A. City Council regular meeting minutes of December 8, 2025

Minutes of the Laconia City Council meeting of December 8, 2025, were distributed to members of the City Council on December 15, 2025.

With no corrections or changes submitted to the Clerk, the minutes were accepted as distributed.

8. CONSENT & ACTION ITEMS

9. CITIZEN COMMENTS FOR MATTERS NOT ON THE AGENDA

Patrick Wood, Ward 1 wanted to say thank you to the city for the Christmas luncheon on Friday. He also noted that we had one employee who works at the Water Department and he received a 40-year longevity award.

Greg Hough, Ward 2 wanted to say thank you to the city council. For the dedication to all the city council, wishing the outgoing councilors luck in their future endeavors.

Dough Lambert, Gilford wanted to say thank you to the mayor for filling in and doing a good job. He also wanted to remind the council that the number one issue that people are buzzing about is the homeless

issue. The homeless forum notated a police officer who gets invited all around the state and he'd like to see how it is affecting the police work he should be doing for the taxpayers. Manager Beattie stated that the city gets reimbursed his salary from the State of NH and they are able to back fill his position with another officer.

Matt Soza, Ward 4 wanted to say thank you to the council and hope they have a great holiday season.

10. INTERVIEWS

11. NOMINATIONS, APPOINTMENTS & ELECTIONS

12. COMMUNICATIONS

13. PUBLIC HEARINGS

13.A. **Public Hearing - Ordinance 2025-5-20, 5-32, 5-33 - Amending Chapter 5, Administration of Government, Article III - Boards and Commissions - Human Relations Committee - establishing the Human Relations Committee as a City committee**

Notice of this Public Hearing was made available in the December 17 and December 20, 2025 editions of the Laconia Daily Sun and posted at Laconia City Hall, Laconia Community Center, Laconia Public Library and the offices of the SAU.

Action on this item may be taken up under unfinished business.

Comments are limited to 3 minutes, try not to duplicate comments.

Mayor St. Clair opened the Public Hearing at 7:13 PM.

Doug Robertson, Ward 5 Cotton Hill Rd. spoke in opposition to the committee, he feels the process is being done backwards. He'd like to see a mission and values done ahead of the vote to make it. There is no foundation for this committee. He'd like to see the council postpone the vote.

Patrick Wood, Chairman of the Human Relations Committee. Stated that the HRC has been working all year on the Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the event. This year it is being held at the Congregational Church downtown, but it is not sponsored by the church. It is run by volunteers of the committee.

David Osmond, member of the HRC. Stated that it has been a privilege to serve on the committee over the years. He had some suggestions for the council: he doesn't feel they have been a burden to the taxpayers; they have received some grant money. He'd like to see the council add the ability to call for an emergency meeting. One question he had is if a member of the council will be a member of the committee. He wondered if the councilor couldn't make it, will there be an alternate council member appointed as well to fill their seat. What level of detail is required if the HRC wants to do something, like having the homeless forum. Say if they wanted to have more forums, to hold multiple forums by ward.

Ronnie Abbott, Gilford. He has had the pleasure of meeting the human relations committee and he has a really good rapport with a lot of them. He wants to make sure his comments are not seen as bagging on any of them, but he feels that making this a permanent committee based off of a retaliatory act is not something we should be doing. It has been spoken about on social media about this being a retaliatory act towards our next mayor, and he doesn't feel like this should be the group making that decision.

Mike Conant, Ward 6- Stated that he wanted to acknowledge all of the work the Human Relations Committee has done to this point, they volunteer their time and efforts and it is appreciated. The

reality is that the Human Relations Committee as it is currently comprised is broken and inefficient. There is no definitive purpose. He'd like to know why we would make a permanent committee, when there is no clear purpose, no policies, no values, no mission statement, it just doesn't make sense to him. There are many complex issues that need to be defined and resolved before this becomes a permanent committee. He feels that the people who spoke before him, made that clear. He respectfully asked the City Council to keep this on the table as it is and lets fix what is broken before we make something permanent. He feels that the residents of Laconia deserve that and he appreciates the Council listening and being given the chance to speak.

Mike Bordes, Ward 6- stated to the City Council that he has a few concerns about the Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration that the Human Relations Committee is putting on. He'd like to know why is it being held at a Church, he asked if we are saying that Jewish people cannot attend this event? Is the human relations committee apart of local government? Should we be holding local city events in a church? He stated that he knows that Chairman Pat Wood had reached out to our City Manager Kirk Beattie, and he was told it was OK to move ahead with the Martin Luther King celebration for January 18, 2026. Another issue he has is in their meeting minutes it is stating a subcommittee would like to coordinate a service project as part of their volunteer week, perhaps baking or making food for the homeless. He'd like to know what that has to do with Martin Luther King Day? This is showing how the committee goes off on its own path, with no guidance. He really feels this matter needs to be tabled, so the new mayor and the new city council can take a further look at this and decide where they want to go with it.

Archie Keltz, Ward 3 wanted to bring up the point that the nature of the committee's work in its best light is the subtlety giving voice to the marginalized, touchy feely issues, that he feels that the next iteration which is very similar by the way on the city council is going to feel about wanting to approve every statement that comes out of the mouths of the Human Relations Committee, because the nature of their speech is going to be somewhat controversial, no matter what they say because they are subtle issues, they are complex issues. He thinks the City Council should consider them very carefully because making them a permanent committee.

Patrick Wood, Chair of the Human Relations Committee. He stated he wanted to correct a few things that had been said this evening. He is not sure what this bake sale is that was spoken of? He doesn't believe this was spoken of at the Human Relations Committee meeting. The Martin Luther King Celebration is being held in the church hall which is in the basement of the congregational church, in the past they have been held at the Belknap mill, at the Laconia Middle School, and other various places. They are going to have food apart of this event. The church has a kitchen, the church is accessible, there is an elevator available and it is convenient, centrally located and appropriately sized. It was a decision that was made by the committee that this was a good place to try this. In regard to sharing the space with people of different religions, the Yom HaShoah event that is a holocaust remembrance event which they have held for 3 years, they have all been held at the Congregational church because it is accessible, convenient and its appropriately sized. It is a community event; it is not limited to anyone because of their religious beliefs.

Sue Higgins, Ward 2 started by thanking Pat Wood for meeting with her for over 2 hours yesterday. The main message that she tried to give to Pat, that as Chair to the committee that would be best served, was to ask the City Council to table it and to wait until the issues that people talked about are resolved. He felt that how this moves forward was the City Council's decision, and he didn't feel he should make a position statement. During their meeting Mr. Wood stated that one of the reasons why he couldn't make a statement tonight was because he had no time to speak to the committee and get the committee to approve the statement. She asked him if he did that at the last meeting when he made a statement, he stated that he did not but at the last meeting he was speaking as Patrick Wood, a resident and not on behalf of the committee. But she went back and listened to the video of the meeting and right at the beginning he introduced himself as Patrick Wood, Ward 1, Chair of the Human Relations Committee. He then spoke to him about the event, she grew up on Strafford Street and that was one of the potential locations for the God Pods were spoken of and somebody who she is close with called her and told her about the homelessness subcommittee went out to that location and searched around the area that he got in a verbal argument with the subcommittee where members of the committee did not act professional and used bad language. Mr. Wood said

that it had nothing to do with the Human Relations Committee, that it was the homeless subcommittee. She asked him about at the last Human Relations Committee meeting he mentioned being urged not to write some stuff down, so she asked him if what he was trying to do was to subvert 91-A requests and he said that was not what he was talking about in the committee, he said that he didn't remember saying that but what he was talk about that he remembers is that they were making a position statement on the Brown shooting and they wanted to go to a subcommittee and he did not want to go to a subcommittee and then have to go back to the committee as a whole before the position statement was written. He wanted them to write it there at the meeting so that is why it was being done at that time. The public had raised questions at the meeting about meeting minutes and agendas being properly posted in the past. There was a lady at a meeting who identified herself as Carol Pierce, she talked about since they were a mayor's committee they have not had to follow guidance along the lines of regular committee work. And if things didn't work, they would just keep trying different things until it did work. She has asked the city for the list of the members of this committee, most of the members of this committee have been on there since 2017, which is indicated on the records she received from the city. In closing she stated there are a lot of things that this committee has done inappropriately, and she thinks that they need to be addressed, they need to have some committee training. If the City Council approved this committee as a city committee tonight, is the city council prepared to take the heat for all the things that are going on that are wrong, while they try to correct this committee and make it work properly. Wouldn't the best thing to do would be to correct the committee, then make it a city committee.

Doug Lambert, Belknap County, Gilford NH. He read some remarks from Neil Young, a former City Councilor. Mr. Young was concerned about the committee since its inception. He did some research and it seemed to look like there was a different mission statement depending on who was chair of the committee. For a while they focused on film screenings and educational events, to educate on social issues. Mr. Lambert recalls at the last City Council Meeting Councilor Bogert expressed concern about this committee being in the job of educating people. They got involved in flag and banner policies, collaborated with the City Council. To him he feels that should be the City Council's job. The committee also organizes vigils, signage campaigns and subcommittees for specific efforts such as anti-discrimination awareness, which certainly isn't a bad thing. In 2013 the Human Relations Committee stated they support the expansion of Medicaid. They wrote a letter to our state senators and state representatives asking them to vote for Medicaid expansion. Through many claims and documents, they have claimed they are nonpartisan and they are not political. He asked how could you not be more political than to ask as a committee to state senators and representatives to take a stand on a topic that is a very political matter. They had their community aspirations petition that goes back to 2012 which did cause some controversy, they have held world aids events, and more recently getting involved with the homeless events, as stated earlier by other speakers there is no mission stated and to create a committee then create the mission after the fact. He'd like to see it stay on the table.

Fran Caroselli, Ward 6 stated the Human Relations Committee has been very welcoming. Over the past 13 years she has been a part of a small group that has helped children in other countries attend school. She attended the November 12th meeting at the High School; she stated there wasn't one person on the stage that could state one thing that had been done to help with the situation. She doesn't want to see this committee made a permanent committee. She would like to see the community work in small groups.

Doug Robinson, Ward 5 read the minutes from the Human Relations Committee to prove that comment about the Martin Luther King Celebration and providing baked goods for the homeless was mentioned as part of the official record.

Mayor St. Clair closed the Public Hearing at 7:43 PM.

14. PRESENTATIONS

14.A. City Council presentation

The Mayor and City Council presented the Debra Bieniarz award to: Jennifer Conley, a 1st grade teacher at Woodland Heights Elementary School.

15. MAYOR'S REPORT

Charlie St. Clair wanted to cover a few things because this is going to be his last City Council meeting as the mayor. Over the past 4 months since he's been appointed the mayor, he wanted to go over some things that have been in the news, and what has happened at public hearings in his time as Mayor. There have been a lot of questions about people not doing anything, about our present city council not making decisions because there is a new council and mayor coming in. He wanted to remind everybody if they are not aware of it, the council and the mayor are elected to a two-year position, it starts on one day and ends two years later. So he doesn't think that it is right to expect any councilor that are here now, or a previous council to expect that in their last few months, they should not act on items or do the job they were elected to do. The new mayor and council will start in January, and they will be here for a full two years, that is how it is written and that is how it is supposed to be.

He also wanted to say how great it is to not have a partisan type of council. When he looks at his fellow councilors or when he is sitting in the audience, he looks at the councilors as the people who represent the people of their wards and the city, not a democratic party, not a republican party or whatever type of party you want to associate with and he thinks that is a great thing. When people start throwing that around, he knows they are doing a disservice to the citizens of Laconia and to the members who sit at the council table. He urges people to keep that in mind over the next couple of years and for the next 10 years.

He also addressed protocol at the meetings, he knows that there is a citizen who likes to come in a wear his hat while addressing the council but there has to be rules, they have to draw the line somewhere and the rules need to be followed, the council has a right to set rules for this chamber, just like any business who puts a sign on the door that states no shirt, no shoes, no service. That is the right of this council, he doesn't know what the new council is going to do, maybe nothing. But he doesn't think it is unreasonable to have protocol.

He'd also like to encourage our local newspaper, the editors or whoever is in charge of what goes into the paper, especially in the letters to the editor. They should have some verification by the editors, to verify some of the information that people write about like stuff that this council has done, or they say has been done. Buzz works like the midnight meeting, the 2am meetings, secret meetings, etc. He thinks when letters like that get submitted, the paper should say upon further investigation, we can find that nothing like that has happened. He feels they would be providing a service to the readers.

He also wanted to talk about the committees that they do have like the planning board, the historic district committee. He hopes that the incoming council and mayor pay attention to what some of the developers want to do in our city. Laconia is known for what we have here, it's a great tourist destination, it's a great water destination, we have so much to offer, so he encourages our incoming council and mayor to pay attention. We have some big plans coming forward for the state school, but he does not want to see the waterfront of our area turn into Salisbury Beach, not that it's bad but you can barely see the ocean. He does not want to lose what we have. He loves Laconia and he knows that most of our citizens do too.

He gave a shoutout to the city departments, the police department, the fire department, the public works department, all the departments that keep the city function and move along. They do a great job, we all have our gripes, He gripes about traffic lights not working as they should. There is gripe about the condition of the roads, but those are things that will come along in time. If people are not happy about it, they should come to the city council meetings and voice their complaints or go to the city manager's office or reach out to your ward councilor. He hopes that a lot of the members who are here tonight will continue to come to the meetings and not just watch on youtube and write letters to the editor.

It has been an honor and a pleasure as he's sat in this seat. He hopes he's done a good job, he hopes he hasn't irritated too many people. He isn't going anywhere and he will still be involved with the council and city government.

He wanted to encourage our council and new mayor to look hard at forming an independent events department created in the city. To take on the events like the pumpkin festival, the sled dog races, 4th of July and Motorcycle Week because as much as he hates to admit, he will not be here forever. We've lost events of the years like the coffee festival.

Thank you to everyone and to his fellow councilors, and the city clerk for putting up with him.

16. COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilor Cheney thanked the residents of Ward 1 for allowing him the privilege to serve as their ward councilor for the past 8 years. He thanked this council and previous councils he served with for their nonpartisan willingness to work through issues to arrive at what we felt was the best for our constituents. Over 8 years he has never once seen any councilor vote for anything for their own personal gain, out of autonomous, or to allow a petty criticism to affect their decision on any matter. He'd like to thank our city manager Kirk Beattie for everything he has done to ensure this council did things right. He's told the story many times about how he hesitated to vote for Fire Chief Beattie to be our next City Manager, probably because as a former police chief, he wasn't sure a fireman could do much beyond being able to make good spaghetti dinners. It was the single biggest mistake of his professional career and since then he has learned that fire fighters are a hard-working first-class group of men and women. As it turns out, out of all the city managers he has worked with throughout his career here in Laconia and the managers across the state he worked with while he was the director of 911, Kirk Beattie is one of the best managers in the state of NH. The people of Laconia are lucky and should rest easier knowing that Kirk has their back. He has a few more comments about the suggestions of non-transparency, poor road maintenance, budget handling and questions about the human relations committee and of course homelessness. He assures every resident of the city that the councils he has worked with have been more transparent than most public bodies he has worked with in his 50 plus year career in public service. Every council meeting he attended was open to the public. Televised on YouTube during the meeting, and available at any later date on YouTube, written minutes are kept and copied and are available to the public. Meetings closed to the public are held under state statute because a state statute requires it, minutes are kept and those minutes will be available to the public based off the time set they are to be sealed for which is usually until the privacy of the matter can no longer hurt someone or give them an unfair economic advantage on any issue. Poor road conditions: the roads in Laconia are made to be passable, within the budget constraints that we have. It helps if you notify Public Works of problems so they can be fixed as soon as possible, keeping in mind that the total repairs can be very costly. Budget handling and taxes: Laconia has maintained its budget within the tax cap constraints. Laconia has done that every year that he has been on the council. He has had several folks contact him about their tax bills going up substantially, but that has to do with their properties being reassessed to the current market value which must be done every 5 years by state statute. The level of service that our departments are able to give by staying within the tax cap is superb compared to other cities in this state. As it pertains to voting for the human relations committee by city ordinance, he suggests that the folks who have expressed concern about how the mayor appointed in the past, that a committee created by ordinance has all the controls they want to see, including council appointment of the committee members and council approval of the mission statement and specific areas of activity. If for any reason the new council doesn't like the committee that may be created, they can remove it. Finally, homelessness: if any of the folks who have expressed such significant concern over the homelessness problem, he'd be forced to ask them where have they been over these past 8 years? And what are their suggestions on how to fix the problem. Downtown has substantially reduced issues related to the homeless. Rotary Park is now a park for all of us. Every report of camping on private property has been dealt with by the police department. Encampments on public property are addressed as soon as possible and he'd like to note there is a difference between camping on public property and state property in terms of enforcement. The city cannot address homelessness issues on state land. He'd like to remind people that he was elected for 2 years, not 1 year and 11 months. Tonight, he will review issues, and vote on them in the manner he believes the majority of his constituents would prefer. He wishes the next council and especially the incoming mayor his very best and he hopes that they can improve all the things they see needing improvement. Good Luck!

Councilor Bogert commented that when he was first appointed 2.5 years ago Bruce Cheney took him under his wing. He taught him things about the city. He has shown his public service, he is a marine, he has served the city and the council forever in his terms, been a police officer, a police chief and in Laconia for 13

years. He helped created and gave personal direction on what the city has taken for granted for NH. Which is the creation of the 911 system, he feels he has done nothing but been honorable in all the decisions he has made to make this the best city and he personally wanted to thank him for the work he has done. He also had a few words for Councilor Felch, they may not have always seen eye to eye, but he feels he has served this city with the best, most honorable intentions. They have always been able to count on Tony for parades, the children's auction, anything that had to do with the social aspects of our city, he has given his time and has been an honorable person to fulfil the needs of the city. He is honored to have served with him. He also thanked Mayor St. Clair in the 2.5 years he has been on the Council; he is the first mayor who has addressed him appropriately and has allowed him freely to have a conversation even if they didn't agree on every point being made. He has treated him fairly as a member of the council. Thank you for making him feel equal, it has been an honor to serve with him.

Councilor Felch stated it has been his honor to serve the citizens of ward 6 and the rest of the city, it has been an honor to work with the members of the council, to work with the City Manager, he couldn't ask for a better city manager. He's enjoyed working with the Finance Director, the City Clerk and the entire city staff in the city. We have a great group of city employees. He agrees with everything Councilor Cheney stated 100%.

17. COMMITTEE REPORTS

17.A. FINANCE (Soucy, Cheney and Hoffman)

17.A.i. WOW Trail Funding

17.A.ii. Downtown TIF Financing

17.B. PUBLIC SAFETY (Cheney (Chair), Soucy and Felch)

17.C. GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ORDINANCES (Haynes, Felch, Cheney)

Chairman Haynes stated they had a meeting last Thursday about the human relations committee, they did meet with legal counsel and they did take advisement, what legal counsel had to say and that will be presented this evening.

17.C.i. Regulation of Short Term Residential Rental Businesses

17.C.ii. Proposed Historic Overlay District

17.C.iii. Performance Zoning

17.C.iv. Time frame for demolition permits

17.D. LAND & BUILDINGS (Bogert, Haynes, Felch)

17.D.i. Downtown parking garage

17.D.ii. Repair & maintenance of City buildings

17.D.iii. Plan for the DPW Compound

17.E. PUBLIC WORKS (Haynes (Chair), Hoffman, Soucy)

17.E.i. Retaining Wall Policy

17.E.ii. Discussion for converting from a manual to an automated solid waste

curbside collection service

17.F. APPOINTMENTS (Councilors Soucy (Chair), Cheney and Haynes)

18. LIAISON REPORTS

None.

19. CITIZENS REQUESTS TO COMMENT ON CURRENT AGENDA ITEMS

None.

20. CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Manager Beattie thanked Councilor Cheney and Councilor Felch for all the work they have done together in the last 3 years, the council has always taken advantage of his open-door policy, and they talk about concerns, questions and suggestions. And he has enjoyed working with the mayor over these past few months, he also hasn't been afraid to come in and ask questions.

Mayor St. Clair noted a special thank you to the City Manager's secretary Nancy Brown, she is a huge help in making the office run smoothly and making the city manager look good. Manager Beattie couldn't agree more.

20.A. Project Updates Report

Manager Beattie presented the projects updates report to the City Council.

Manager Beattie mentioned on the 3rd page of the report, under the Winnipesaukee River Basin Project. Under the advisement the city signed a letter with 9 other communities. The LSR has now become a House Bill. That letter has gotten the attention of the DES Director, he is looking to hold a meeting with our representative Director Anderson. They are looking for it to be sometime in mid-January.

21. NEW BUSINESS

21.A. Authorization for boat dealers to act as agents for the City of Laconia

Discussion: The boat dealers listed below have been operating as agents for the City in the collection of boat fees. For the last several years, the State has required these dealers to show evidence of a surety bond in order to authorize them to collect fees for the City and State. The City can cover these dealers under our current bonding insurance, at no additional cost, provided they are authorized annually by the City Council to act as agents.

Fiscal Impact: In Fiscal Year 2025 the City received approximately \$101,000.00 in boat registration fees collected between these dealers and the City Clerk's Office.

Staff Recommendation: I am asking the Council to authorize the following boat dealers to act as agents for the City: Flightcraft General North Water Marine Watermark Marine Paugus Bay Marine Lakeport Landing Irwin Marine Winnisquam Marine

Councilor Felch made a motion to approve the renewal of the Boat Agent Agreement between the State of NH – DMV, the City of Laconia and boat dealers, as presented. Seconded by Councilor Cheney. **Discussion:** None.

The motion **passed with all in favor.** 6-0

Councilor Hoffman made a motion to authorize the City Clerk to sign the Boat Agent Agreement on behalf of the City of Laconia. Seconded by Councilor Bogert. **Discussion:** None.

The motion **passed with all in favor.** 6-0

21.B. Request to schedule two public hearings for the Community Development Block Grant - Belknap House Emergency Sewer Project

Request to schedule two (2) public hearings on January 12, 2026, during the regular City Council Meeting regarding:

1. A proposed application to the Community Development Finance Authority for up to \$100,000 in CDBG Emergency Funds. Of the grant funds, up to \$15,000 will be retained by the City for administrative/labor compliance costs associated with the project, up to \$85,000 of the funds will be subgranted to Belknap House, a family shelter located at 200 Court Street for emergency repairs/replacement of the sewer line servicing the building. The shelter serves low and moderate income persons.
2. The Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan for the Belknap House Emergency Sewer Project.

Discussion: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds are available to municipalities through the NH Community Development Finance Authority. Up to \$500,000 annually is available for Economic Development Projects, up \$500,000 for Housing Projects, up to \$500,000 for Public Facility Projects, up to \$350,000 in Emergency Funds, and up to \$25,000 per Planning Study grant. All projects must directly benefit a majority of low- and moderate-income persons.

Councilor Soucy made a motion to schedule a Public Hearing on January 12, 2026, during the regular City Council meeting regarding a proposed application to the Community Development Finance Authority for up to \$100,000 in CDBG Public Facility Funds. Of the grant funds, up to \$15,000 will be retained by the City for administrative/labor compliance costs associated with the project, up to \$100,000 of the funds will be subgranted to Belknap House, a family shelter located at 200 Court Street for emergency repairs/replacement of the sewer line servicing the building. The shelter serves low and moderate income persons. Seconded by Councilor Felch. **Discussion:** None.

The motion **passed with all in favor.** 6-0

Councilor Felch made a motion to schedule a Public Hearing on January 12, 2026, during the regular City Council meeting regarding the Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan for the Belknap House Emergency Sewer Project. Seconded by Councilor Hoffman. **Discussion:** None.

The motion **passed with all in favor.** 6-0

22. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

22.A. Ordinance 2025-20, 5-32, 5-33 - Amending Chapter 5, Administration of Government, Article III - Boards and Commissions - Human Relations Committee

This proposed amendment to Chapter 5, Article III – Boards and Commissions will add a section for establishing the Human Relations Committee as a city committee and outline the procedures for appointment of its members.

A Notice of Public Hearing was included in the Laconia Daily Sun on December 17 and December 20, 2025, and at Laconia City Hall, the Community Center, Laconia Public Library and the offices of the SAU. A Public Hearing was held earlier this evening.

Discussion on this agenda item will include questions raised during the December 18, 2025 Government Operations and Ordinances Subcommittee meeting.

Councilor Felch made a motion to take this agenda item off the table. Seconded by Councilor Haynes. **Discussion:** None.

The motion **passed with 5 in favor. Councilor Bogert was opposed.**

Discussion: Councilor Soucy has a number of items to discuss concerning this agenda item. Some of the comments that have come before the council tonight have been made by people who are not even from the city and they are talking about how this vote or the direction the Council is going to take is retaliatory, and he finds that comment off the wall. He listens to the people who are citizens of Laconia, and the taxpayers of Laconia. He feels that if everyone wants to believe the garbage being put on social media, or the letters that are being published in The Sun that have no truth to them whatsoever, but that is not how he bases his facts. He feels if the Council does not move ahead with something like this, he feels they will go off on their own, create their own 501C-3 and do whatever they want with the city having no say in their actions at all. This group was put together by Mayor Lahey in 2000, there is a today in history section in the Daily Sun that hopefully is correct about the Human Relations Committee being formed. The committee was created because of a request from our Police Chief Baker at the time to help assist with a group of people who came here from a foreign country. He understands why they created the committee. He thinks that we should have a Human Relations Committee, but he also thinks it should go through the government operations subcommittee to set the mission statement and all the guidelines for the committee. In the proposed ordinance it states the committee will be made up of 1 member appointed by the City Manager, 2 members appointed by the Mayor, 9 members by the City Council, but it also says members can be people who own property or reside in Laconia or they own, manage or represent a business in the city. He does not agree that members should be from other towns, they should be Laconia residents. He is tired of hearing from people who are not taxpayers or residents of the city. He gave an example of Belknap County has a number of properties in this city that the City supports as taxpayers, all the taxpayers in the City of Laconia pay the taxes for those buildings, and those buildings support all the other communities that are apart of Belknap County and we do not get compensated for it. Mayor St. Clair asked a clarifying question about a person who owns a business here in Laconia, pays property taxes in Laconia, but do not reside here. Councilor Soucy stated since they don't reside here they should not be able to be a member of the committee, they may reside in Massachusetts or North Carolina or anywhere in the world. The last thing he'd like to mention is when the Government Operations and Ordinances committee reviews this and works on the mission statement, this could take months, we don't even know who is going to make up that committee. Councilor Soucy didn't think there were any taxpayer funds going to this committee, but Manager Beattie corrected him that they have \$2,000 in their budget annually. Manager Beattie is unsure at this moment what those funds are spent on or if they have been spent in previous years.

Councilor Haynes commented he is in favor with the comments made by Councilor Soucy, but they were advised by our City Attorney and there are some adjustments that need to be made under our rules and regulations as how the Council is conducted, as far as people from outside the city being a part of the committee. He agrees with Councilor Soucy that nonresidents have no place here.

Manager Beattie referenced what Councilor Haynes was talking about with the conversation with the City Attorney, he handed out a summary from the subcommittee meeting to the City Council, and the City Clerk has one for the record. That brings up the questions that were asked. Following along from the proposed ordinance, section A had no changes. Section B there was a question about who appoints members, asking if the City Manager should be allowed to appoint someone. And then it was mentioned but not really discussed upon whether or not the school board should have a member on the committee. Under Section C, comprise of members this in conjunction with what Councilor Soucy was saying, there was a question about if we were going to leave business in there, how we were going to define it, if it was a business for profit or not for profit or if the committee should have any members from outside Laconia. Nothing was finalized at the subcommittee meeting, it was just to continue the conversation and bring it back to the City Council. The last thing he'd like to mention

and he'd like to read it into the record is under Section D it states the Human Relations Committee will create Policies and procedures and paraphrased the Council will approve that. He knows that had a lot of concern at the beginning, that it should go the other way around. It should be the Council driving the bus and still bringing it back here. He drafted some language, legal added some to it and made some adjustments, this is under section D if the council decides to go with this ordinance he is going to read it into the record: "The City Council's Government Operations and Ordinances Subcommittee shall create a Human Relations Committee Purpose Statement to identify the purpose of the subcommittee as well as to delineate its manner of operations, which shall be approved by the City Council prior to adoption. The Purpose Statement will be reviewed by legal counsel prior to approval by the full City Council. As the Human Relations Subcommittee operates at the behest of the City Council with no independent authority, the Purpose Statement shall be reviewed and ratified by the City Council every three years after adoption."

Councilor Soucy asked Manager Beattie a question, he is looking for the definition of what the council can allow and not allow the committee to do, for example can the Council say, the committee is approved to hold the Martin Luter King celebration, and participate in the Multicultural Festival, but any other activities or events must be approved by the City Council. Manager Beattie confirmed that yes, the council will be able to define all of those terms and conditions when they create the committee and determine its functions.

Councilor Hoffman feels that the change under letter D. He feels it addresses the concern and what is before them tonight addresses all the legitimate concerns that people have about the Human Relations Committee. He understands people's hesitation with doing this in December, but the approval of the mission statement and the appointments to the committee are being put on the next council. So, he thinks it's a good idea.

Councilor Bogert over the past few months these are some of the thoughts he came up with: the formation of a committee is one of the most important decisions the city council can make. The committee shall serve under a defined purpose. If we look at each of our current boards, we would see they all serve a distinct defined purpose. They all fulfill a statutory need for the City, by reviewing applications for requests of various actions by the residents of the city of Laconia. As citizens have first amendment rights to speak their minds, government voice is based off current law and city councilors interpretation of the laws based off the advice of the City Attorney. Each committee that is formed must abide by the rule of law and its voice is the reflection of government speech, not their interpretation. As the City of Laconia and all of its departments and boards and commissions operate under federal, state and local laws, RSA's and Ordinances. Where every citizen is already treated equally and with respect. The formation of a Human Relations Committee would indicate that the City of Laconia does not operate within the federal, state and local laws or treats its citizens equally. As stated each current committee or board has a purpose that fulfills particular statutory needs for the citizens it serves. To form a new committee that has no purpose, which he hasn't heard; is a committee in search of a problem. Remember this famous quote that Nancy Pelosi said about the affordable care act "lets pass this so we can see what its purpose is." Therefore, this item should be tabled until the city council has a chance to define its purpose and then set up how it will operate.

Councilor Bogert made a motion to table item 22 A., there was no second.

The motion **failed**.

Councilor Soucy stated that he understands what Councilor Bogert went through. He'd like to send it to the committee, have the committee come up with the mission, he doesn't know who is going to be on that committee, it's going to come back through the next council and probably be rewritten 10 times. But here is a way that it gets acted upon, instead of dying and never being acted upon and giving the group the opportunity to bypass the city. This way here we are going to bring it under city review, and under city ordinance. He thinks this is the right way to go so that the city maintains control.

Mayor St. Clair stated if he recalls correctly when this came up 2 or 3 meetings ago, there was a

complaint about this committee, not following rules, minutes, and other things. The suggestion was to make it a city committee, so that the oversight would be there. He believes it was Councilor Soucy who suggested it become an official committee and Councilor Bogert stated that was a good idea.

Councilor Bogert stated that the question was raised because in the City Council Rules and procedures did not support reappointing members on a mayoral committee. The question was discussed and it was Councilor Hoffman who suggested making it a city committee may help solve some of these problems, and he agreed with the fact that it could help solve some problems. But the question was posed to the City Manager to come back with all options available to deal with the situation and this was the only option that was offered. He still hasn't seen or heard a purpose for this committee. No one on the council has told him what the purpose is for starting this committee.

Councilor Soucy stated that one of the comments that were made about the committee being too far left. The committee was created 25 years ago by Mayor Lahey, it was formed as what it was and is this a continuing thing, is the committee as it is now, is it dissolved? Manager Beattie stated that if they are not reappointed it doesn't mean that the committee died. Councilor Soucy would like to know what keeps this committee moving forward. Manager Beattie stated it was 25 years of not being monitored properly.

Councilor Hoffman stated people keep saying that this committee doesn't have a mission statement, and the city council asked them for a mission statement and they did provide one. another point he'd like to make is he thinks that a lot of people are upset with the Human Relations Committee because they are trying to tackle the issue of homelessness. He thinks the city's strategy in how to tackle homelessness should come from the City Council and not from a subcommittee of a subcommittee or a mayor's committee. This should be something that the City Council should be working on and not delegating it to someone else.

Councilor Cheney wanted to point out to Councilor Bogert or ask him what the purpose statement was for the appointments committee. He's trying to show an example, it was approved and there was nothing provided, the council all knew what was going to happen. but he could come up with all sorts of crazy things. This is not the first committee that was created and built afterwards.

Councilor Bogert stated in response those committees are served by city councilors, not general public. He referred to Rule 24 B in city council rules and procedures. Then section K. subset he doesn't recall any mayor saying they are going to continue this committee.

Councilor Felch wanted to comment about a few things brought up by the City Manager, he is in full support of the City Manager appointing. He doesn't feel the school needs an appointee, if a school board member wants to apply they certainly can. He agrees if someone is a business owner and pays taxes here in Laconia, they could be apart of the committee. He agrees with letter D. that the manager created and read into the record earlier.

Councilor Hoffman agrees for the City Manager to be able to make an appointment, he doesn't agree on the schoolboard member, he agrees on the business owner being allowed on the committee but possibly be a nonvoting member, he'd also like to see staggered 3-year terms.

The council agreed on the following:

1. Staggered terms every 3 years as determined by the appointments committee.
2. To keep the language the same, for how many people on the committee and who is appointing them, they will not be taking the recommendation to have someone from the school board on the committee. If someone from the school board wanted to apply to be a regular member, they could do that.
3. the committee members shall be comprised of Laconia residents only. Business owners can

come to the meeting and voice their opinions during public comment.

4. d. adopt language as written from legal.

Councilor Haynes called the question.

Councilor Haynes made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-5-20, 5-32, 5-33 – Amending Chapter 5, Administration of Government, Article III – Boards and Commissions – Human Relations Committee, as presented and amended, and to refer appointment of membership to the Appointments Subcommittee, as well as referring this matter to the Government Operations and Ordinances Subcommittee to prepare a proposed draft of the Human Relations Committee's Purpose Statement. These referrals shall be sent after January 1, 2026. Seconded by Councilor Felch.

Discussion: None.

The motion *passed with 5-1 in favor*. Councilor Bogert is opposed.

23. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- 23.A. Master Plan**
- 23.B. Milfoil Treatment funding requests**
- 23.C. Sewer & Water Master Plan**
- 23.D. Single Stream Recycling/Concord Co-op/Solid Waste disposal cost reductions**
- 23.E. Strategic Planning/Goal Setting**
- 23.F. WOW Trail**
- 23.G. Weirs Beach Restoration Project**
- 23.H. Fair St/Court St traffic problems and accidents**
- 24. Any other business that may come before the Council**
- 25. NON-PUBLIC SESSION (According to RSA 91-A:3, II)**
- 26. ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor St. Clair adjourned the meeting at 8:58 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Katie Gargano, City Clerk