

BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN

February 4, 2025 at 7:00 PM

Mayor Ruais called the meeting to order.

Mayor Ruais called on Jon Hopkins to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

A moment of silence was observed.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Morgan, Goonan, Long, Fajardo, T. Sapienza, Kantor, O'Neil, Levasseur, Terrio, E. Sapienza, Burkush, Barry, Vincent, Thomas

Mayor Ruais stated I have two recognitions that I would like to make this evening.

Would Jon please come back up. We all count on our police, fire and DPW departments to be there when we call but they can only respond if their vehicles are in top working condition. That critical responsibility falls to the men and women at the city's Central Fleet Services. Fleet Director Jon Hopkins is retiring and I want to pay tribute to him this evening. Jon began his career in Manchester as a police officer in 1988. Starting in the Patrol Division, he worked his way up to detective. Over this 37-year career, other promotions followed from Sergeant to Lieutenant and then to Captain. His bravery was honored as well. In 2004 he assisted with evacuating a burning 16-unit residence conducting a floor-to-floor search in sections of the building engulfed in flames. For his bravery, Jon received MPD's Lifesaving Medal and a NH Hero Award from the Union Leader. In 2019, Jon took his talents to Central Fleet and over the past six years he has made his mark by helping to develop a training program with Manchester Community College for Ford vehicles to keep fleet mechanics up-to-date on all of the latest trends and repairs. Emphasizing continuing education, 90% of fleet employees have done training to achieve an A-step. He worked with the Police and Fire Departments to design and purchase specialized vehicles. He also standardized fleet vehicle and equipment purchases to optimize parts inventory and purchasing power. He worked with outside vendors to establish relationships that gave Fleet a priority in purchases. He started a refurbishment program for fleet vehicles to extend the life of the vehicles and purchased equipment such as service trucks, lifts and other tools to enhance the repair capabilities at Fleet. Jon, needless to say, you have been

extraordinarily instrumental in keeping the City of Manchester moving by ensuring that our most critical vehicles are ready to respond to all types of emergencies and your work as a first responder and a police officer in the City of Manchester was rightfully heralded as well. We will all greatly miss your service to the City of Manchester. Thank you so much for everything you have done.

Mayor Ruais stated I have one last recognition that I would like to make. For those who saw this morning my press release, my wife gave birth on Saturday to our beautiful baby girl. It has been quite a week. I want to thank the Elliot Hospital doctors and nurses that were there to help her and our baby. We were there for about a week starting last Monday and the care that they gave us was nothing short of heroic. I want to thank the doctors and nurses and I want to thank everybody that reached out to congratulate us and offer their prayers and support. It was incredibly heartwarming to myself and Veronica who sometimes only sees us getting beat up in here. She was thrilled with the outpouring of support. I want to thank all of you as well who reached out and everybody in the city who did as well. Most importantly, to my wife Veronica, she has been an absolute rock and amazing throughout this entire last week and throughout her pregnancy. Her beauty inside is only outpaced by her strength and her resilience. I think she is watching right now in the hospital with Brielle. Thank you so much. I love you and hopefully I will see you soon.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Ruais advised that the purpose of the public comment session is to give residents of Manchester the opportunity to address the Board. All people wishing to speak must sign up with their name, address and topic prior to 7 PM. Once called, they will have up to three minutes to speak and any comments must be directed to the chair and concluded when their time is up. If the Clerk calls their name and they are not present to speak, they will not be given a second opportunity. Any resident wishing to speak will come forward to the nearest microphone, clearly state their name and address when recognized and give their comments.

Michael Constance, 490 Dunbarton Road, stated:

I am the Executive Director of the Manchester Animal Shelter. For nearly 30 years, the Manchester Animal Shelter has worked closely with the Manchester Police's Community Policing Division to ensure that all animals are deserving of life, respect and care. The Manchester Animal Shelter is more than just a facility for homeless animals. It is a cornerstone of compassion, education and public safety. It provides critical services such as rescuing abandoned pets, reuniting lost animals with their families and offering low cost spay/neuter programs to reduce overpopulation as well as providing thousands of pounds of pet food for those in need in our community. In 2024, we cared for 798 animals, many of which come from Manchester's homeless population. We also spayed and neutered over 850 animals to achieve our mission of zero population growth. These efforts not only save lives but also strengthen the bond between our community and the animals who depend on us, all while saving the city hundreds of thousands of dollars. Investing in the shelter ensures the well-being of both animals and residences, it promotes responsible pet ownership, reduces the strain on local resources and fosters a more human and caring city. Currently, the Manchester Animal Shelter has the lowest euthanasia rate of any shelter in the state; something that NH's largest city should be extremely proud of. My request today is that you accept my invitation to visit the shelter, come for a tour and see the positive impact that the staff and volunteers are making in this city. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lucy Lange/John DeWespelear, 490 Dunbarton Road, stated:

John and I are here representing the board of the Friends of the Manchester Animal Shelter, which is the city's shelter. The document that is being handed out is a little financial overview of what the shelter has taken in. You will see that the 728 that Michael referenced were actually animals that came in through the animal control officers or the Manchester Police Department in one of two ways. We have a direct line where an animal is brought to us from animal control or another officer. The other is an indirect referral. That could be a landlord who has an open space and the animal was left behind and is told by Manchester police to bring the animal to us. The cost for each of the animals that we care for is roughly \$1,200 and we cared for a total of 910 animals over the FY23/24. The city currently contributes roughly \$89,000 to the operating

expense at the shelter. In this year's budget we are going to ask for a little bit more money to help care for these animals. The mission is zero population growth so you may see our volunteers out trapping animals. You may also see our staff our trapping animals and/or helping to get these animals who are wild in the city and/or abandoned by some of our homeless friends around the city. The other thing that Michael did reference is the fact that we do provide food. We have a free pantry for folks who are unable to pay for food for their animals so they can continue to provide care.

John DeWespelear, 490 Dunbarton Road, stated:

Thank you all for the time. This is in conjunction with the shelter. We are able to expand it to keep helping the city of Manchester. In our efforts currently, our shelter is on the smaller side for a city of our size. We are just looking to continue to grow our mission and support the city in its efforts. As we said, we are going to come back and ask for additional funds to support that effort.

Ms. Lange stated we know that Mayor Ruais is the only one in this room who has come to tour the shelter. It is really important for you to come and see the condition of this city building. It is on city property and considered a city building. Please take the time to come and visit the shelter and see what we are up against.

Glenn RJ Ouellette, 112 Auburn Street, stated:

I am glad to be back. It is cold outside and there is lots of ice. I am more concerned about the cold. I personally know seniors who can't afford to heat their place but they seem to be too proud to get some help. I hope, Your Honor, you can call me and advise me on how we can some help to these people who really need it and they are seniors. That would be nice. When it comes to homelessness, there is no bottom line here. My rent is more expensive than my Social Security check so if I didn't work part-time, I would be homeless. Social Security doesn't pay everything. It pays the rent and that's it. You have to pay electricity and food and everything else. I hope you guys realize that. After seeing yesterday's market close at a loss, it seems like that is the beginning of what is going to be happening in the next few weeks or more. I hope not. Inflation is going to start going up again because the prices are going to go up. I hope there is a good means to the end but in the meantime, you have a budget starting pretty

soon. Don't think that oil won't go up because it has already started. Don't think that your costs won't go up because they will go up. That makes it harder on the taxpayer. Every time the taxes go up, especially at a high level, what happens is you have more people who are on that border of losing their home now not being able to afford their taxes. Just consider that when you do cuts. I don't mind cuts being done when they need to. We all know that there is waste. There is always something we can cut out but be careful what you cut. One thing you cut last year, which is very important to our seniors and our people downtown, was the concerts in the park. You decided to have only movies in the park. I am hoping that this year you will have a few concerts because the seniors are asking for them. That is the only enjoyment for those who live in the high-rises. Thank you very much and have a good week.

Viola Katusiime, 1065 Elm Street, stated:

I am the Deputy Director for the Granite State Organizing Project. We are a non-profit based right here in Manchester and we bring people together to work towards a more just NH but also mostly in Manchester so that everyone is thriving in our city. I am just here to speak about my disappointment with the Board and the city for not taking a position on one of the bills, HB60. It is a very dangerous bill that would allow landlords to evict people as soon as their leases are up and it goes as far as if you have a lease of six months, that would be a cause for eviction. People don't have to prove anything, including good tenants. I am here because I know the city has done tremendous work regarding building more housing. We just went through a rezoning ordinance which is of course targeted at increasing the supply of housing. That is all great stuff but at the same time we can't just sit here and increase housing while we don't take a position on this bill that would actually keep people out of their houses and increase homelessness. We already know that the rental market is very tight in this city and statewide. For people who are spending more than 30% of their income on rent, it would be very challenging for them to find alternative housing. To put that into perspective, if you are making 50% of the area median income, for example if you are one person you are making around \$35,000 and if you are a family of three you are making around \$45,000 a year. We know that the housing that is going up is going for \$1,800-\$2,000. Not many people can afford that. Last month I spoke with a Manchester resident who was working at one of the chain stores in the city. They had to live in their car for over two

weeks before they could find their current apartment which is a studio that they are paying \$1,100/month for. It is already hard for this person to pay that rent. They told me they could not leave that apartment right now because there is nothing on the market for them. This is the kind of housing security we are talking about that is not visible. This bill, if it is passed, will be voted on this Thursday. It would actually increase homelessness and increase the spending by the local Welfare Office because people would be going there for resources. It would also mean that people would be uprooted in their communities – kids, families and jobs. That insecurity is not something that we want to see in our city right now. I hope that the city will take a position on this. I hope you will discuss it. Let's keep making progress and not go backwards. Thank you very much for your time.

Anne Grossi, 1045 Elm Street, stated:

I am on the Board of Directors for Granite State Organizing Project. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening. It is my understanding that the Mayor and Board of Aldermen have not addressed or taken a stand on House Bill 60 which allows landlords to terminate a tenancy when a lease expires under specific conditions. Specifically, it permits the eviction for leases that are six months or longer with no reason or cause. This bill would change a law that has been in place for 40 years in NH and would end protections for tenants from arbitrary evictions since landlords, again, do not need to give a reason for the eviction. This bill will make vulnerable populations more vulnerable. Older people, people with disabilities and people of low income for no reason can just be evicted. I am confused. I know that the Mayor and BMA understand that there is a housing crisis in NH and that there is a homeless crisis in NH and in Manchester. There is a .6% vacancy rate in the state and many apartments are beyond people's ability to pay for them. The homeless population in NH has increased 52% from 2022 to 2023. I would think that the Mayor and BMA would understand that HB60 would not solve the housing crisis here and would certainly increase the city's population of unhoused people. I am very confused as to why the city has not made a statement and come out against HB60. Housing is a human need and a human right. By Manchester's Mayor and BMA staying silent and not speaking against HB60, you are being complicit in causing more housing issues and homelessness issues in

Manchester. I hope that the Mayor and BMA will make a public written statement in opposition to HB60.

Maddy August, 55 River Road, stated:

I also am asking the Mayor and Board of Aldermen to make a statement and oppose HB60. HB60 would change the law that has protected tenants here in NH from arbitrary eviction for the last 40 years. Eviction without cause makes it easier to hide ill intent and it puts our most vulnerable citizens at the greatest risk. These are elderly, people with disabilities and low-income people who will be evicted simply because a landlord might prefer a younger or able-bodied tenant. The average rent in Manchester, NH in 2024 was about \$1,900. This was a 4% increase over the prior year. The vacancy rate at the end of 2024 was about 3% which is an improvement and I think due to the good work that the Mayor and the Board has done here in Manchester. I admire that and applaud that but the average rent is around \$1,900 and the average renter median income is around \$53,000. If you are paying around 30% of your income on rent, it should be no more than \$1,300. We clearly have people paying around 50% of their income on rent. The Pew Research Center has shown a strong correlation between rising rents and homelessness. When people are pushed at the margins of affordability, they become more vulnerable to losing housing. The credit checks, security deposit, last month's rent and first month's rent are all required when you change housing should you lose your housing. That is all going to be pushing our low-income families into losing housing for a period of time. Most of these people will probably be homeless for at least a period of time if they lose their current housing due to this repeal of no cause eviction. I really hope you consider opposing this bill. It is an important protection that our most vulnerable tenants here in Manchester have. Thank you.

MacKenzie Verdiner, 37 Coburn Street, stated:

I am here to bring further attention to the HB60 bill. Both of my parents have experienced homelessness in this city and I have experienced housing insecurities myself. At my previous home, there were nine of us living in a three-bedroom apartment. I slept on the couch throughout my high school career. I did not have a bedroom to myself. If the landlord decided to kick us out for whatever reason like maybe they wanted to bring in someone who had more money, me, my little sisters, my

elderly grandmother and my elderly uncle would all have been out in the street because we didn't make any money. They were all collecting Social Security and I was 15. It would have turned me into another statistic. At 19 years old, I make about \$40,000 a year which is an astonishment for someone my age but 1/3 of my income, which is what you need to rent in Manchester, is about \$800. The only apartment I could find for that was a tiny little box on a not so nice street. There is really nothing for me out there and I am in no way unique. I just graduated from high school last year and I can tell you that a lot of my friends are in the same situation where their parents aren't very good financially which means that they are not very good financially. As we enter the adult world, there is nothing there for us. We are going to end up on the streets. That little piece of security we get from knowing that our landlord needs at least a reason to kick us out will keep a lot of people off the street. I really want you guys to know that this is a serious, serious issue. Don't let me out on the street. Thank you.

Maurice Pilotte, 98 Lancaster Avenue, stated:

I am here to talk about the rail trails and how they are being plowed within a day or two after a storm. They provide a safe, motorized free opportunity for walkers, runners and cyclists to exercise throughout the winter. May I ask if it would be feasible and advisable for only half of the trail to be plowed allowing the snow on the other half undisturbed for the benefit of snow shoeing and cross-country skiing? Again, feasible and advisable. Thank you very much.

*On motion of **Alderman Vincent**, duly seconded by **Alderman Long**, it was voted to take all comments under advisement and further to receive and file any written documentation presented.*

CONSENT AGENDA

Accept and Remand Funds

2. Donation of \$1,000 to the Fire Department from the Louise Diaz Jackson Revocable Trust.

Information to be Received and Filed

3. Communication from Sharon Wickens, Finance Director, advising the Board that the 3-year average used in preparation of the FY2026 budget is 4.27%.
4. Communication from Xfinity regarding channel changes.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

COMMITTEE ON ACCOUNTS, ENROLLMENT AND REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

5. Advising that the Finance Department reports:
 - Accounts receivable over 90 days
 - Aging report
 - Outstanding receivables have been accepted.*(Unanimous vote)*
6. Advising that the Monthly Financial Report (unaudited) for the first six months of fiscal year 2025 has been accepted.
(Unanimous vote)
7. Advising that the update on the Revolving Loan Fund has been accepted.
(Unanimous vote)

COMMITTEE ON LANDS AND BUILDINGS

8. Recommending that the request from the Economic Development Director and Southern NH Planning Commission to access Arm's Parking Lot for Phase 2 of the Brownfields Assessment Study be approved.
(Unanimous vote with the exception of Alderman Goonan who was absent)

*HAVING READ THE CONSENT AGENDA, ON MOTION OF **ALDERMAN LEVASSEUR**, DULY SECONDED BY **ALDERMAN TERRIO**, THE CONSENT AGENDA WAS APPROVED.*

REGULAR BUSINESS

9. Nomination:
Senior Services Commission
Pete Escalera to fill a vacancy as a regular member, term to expire January 1, 2028
(Note: Pursuant to Rule 23 of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, this nomination will layover until the next meeting of the Board.)

10. Confirmations:

Planning Board

Brian Beaupre to move from an alternate to a regular member, term to expire May 1, 2026

Office of Youth Services Advisory Board

Katrina Ealy to succeed herself as a regular member, term to expire January 1, 2028

Karen Meteyer to succeed herself as a regular member, term to expire January 1, 2028

*On motion of **Alderman Fajardo**, duly seconded by **Alderman O'Neil**, it was voted to confirm the nominations as presented.*

11. Report(s) of the Committee on Community Improvement, if available.

There were none.

12. Report(s) of the Committee on Public Safety, Health & Traffic, if available.

There were none.

13. Report(s) of the Committee on Bills on Second Reading, if available.

There were none.

14. Report(s) of the Committee on Human Resources/Insurance, if available.

There were none.

NEW BUSINESS

Alderman Vincent stated I want to announce that the city has hired and filled the position for the Grant Coordinator. Her effective hire date will be February 10. Her name is Angela Cavanaugh. My understanding is she will come before the Board at the next meeting so we can introduce her.

Mayor Ruais stated yes, I would love to make the introduction to everybody on the Board at our next meeting on 2/18.

Alderman Vincent stated I want to thank everyone on the Board and the Mayor and his staff for making that happen as quickly as it did. I think we have a really good hire and I expect great things to come.

Mayor Ruais stated thank you for your leadership on that.

Alderman Terrio stated I have two things. First, I have been down to the IT Department a few times because I needed their help. I want to say thank you to Matt O'Rourke for helping me twice. He is a very helpful young man. Secondly, our intrepid reporter on Manchester Ink Link has reported that the Islamic Society of NH is expecting the local mosque to open up in Ward 6 on Karatzas Avenue. You and I have been down to the one on South Willow Street. They were very nice to us and I would ask that the mosque invite the Mayor and Aldermen to their opening. I would love to go.

Alderman Barry stated maybe Alderman Long can talk about the House Bill 60. I did have a chance to read it today but prior to today I wasn't even aware of it. I know in the past we had aldermen who were also legislators that would bring these kinds of things our attention. I don't know if you can address it and what we can do as a city.

Alderman Long responded I was going to ask if there is a legislative process that the city has like we had in other mayoral terms. It started with former Mayor Gatsas. For example, this worries me because we are spending a lot of money on homelessness and we are trying to decrease that and an eviction notice will go on the books so if you go to get another apartment good luck. You are not going to get it. That creates more people that are homeless. I understand that the landlord owns the building and if he doesn't want to lease to somebody that is his purview but to evict somebody to me is not what we need to do. Is there a process that we use?

Mayor Ruais responded not at present but I would be happy to set something like that up. You said it started under Mayor Gatsas? I would be more than happy to bring a faction of the Board together that wanted to participate on state level issues and come

to the Board with recommendations on different pieces of legislation for us to then have a discussion about whether we would want to send a letter of support or opposition.

Alderman Long stated it is an opportunity for the state reps to be introduced to our department heads. I know I got an email from Water Works. There is a bill that I am going to be supporting because of Water Works. With 33 state reps, you need that communication.

Mayor Ruais stated as you recall, we did these meetings with the state reps and department heads last year which you were really helpful in setting up. I would be more than happy to restart those. I would also be more than happy to have the aldermen come to the meetings as well to meet their state reps and have those conversations and make those introductions.

Alderman T. Sapienza stated this one here is a pretty easy call. I move that this Board publically oppose HB60 to prevent evictions for no reason. Alderman Fajardo duly seconded the motion.

Mayor Ruais stated I think what would be best is if we have an opportunity to get a...I know Representative Cole had an editorial this morning in the paper about this bill specifically. I think what would be helpful, and I would be happy to facilitate this, would be to provide the information to the aldermen for us to make a determination on it prior to consideration because I don't know if everybody has the background on this.

Alderman Barry stated I was going to suggest the same. I read the editorial this morning. I think it is important to hear from both sides of the issue. I will tell you that back when I was with the Sheriff's Office, we enforced evictions for landlords. The last thing that we want to do is add to our homeless situation. That is what this is going to do because if landlords in the City of Manchester have the ability to just evict someone just to evict them without any reason other than they want to rent to someone else.

Mayor Ruais stated we can pull the legislation and send it to the BMA and have the editorial sent also. If individuals want to send pros and cons about the resolution to the

BMA, we can consider all of that. As we all know, the legislative process can be a winding one so even if it were to pass the House, there is still time for conversation to be had afterwards.

Alderman E. Sapienza stated I think this is a great idea. I would like to expand it a bit and also get in contact with our federal delegation and lend our support to federal issues like supporting federal law enforcement authorities. I think that would be terrific.

Mayor Ruais stated I know we have a motion and a second. My gut tells me that we need more information before we oppose the measure.

Alderman Levasseur stated I don't do evictions myself as an attorney but I have been a landlord for quite some time and I have gotten calls over the years from people who have been evicted. Basically, the rule is it has to be for just cause. You can't just throw somebody out if they are paying their rent every month on time. What landlords will do is say we are going to renovate it and that is their excuse or a lot of landlords have become friendly with their tenants and they want more rent and they don't want to jack their rent because they don't want to be seen as price gauging or they want to sell the property and the person who is buying the property has the tenants removed. There are a lot of moving parts but if somebody gets a notice to quit that means they have been evicted and I don't see how anybody could put that in some kind of registry that someone has been evicted if they just got a notice to quit. I would consider that slander if my future landlord said well, I am not going to rent to you because you have been evicted when they have not been evicted. The terms and the language in that bill I would like to read.

Mayor Ruais stated I will pull the information together and share it with the Board and we can consider it at a later date.

Alderman Fajardo stated for those of us who would like to take action in the short term, you can go online to the state house and look up the bill and weigh in through the website with your opposition. Could you let us know what committee is going to hear it?

Alderman Long stated I have it right here.

Alderman Kantor stated I will be quick because you have to get back to your beautiful wife and beautiful daughter. Congratulations. I think what Maurice said about the rail trails is a great idea. Maybe you can bring that forward on the next agenda so we can talk about it?

Mayor Ruais stated I can just start the conversation tomorrow with Director Clougherty and Owen and we can work something out to get back to everybody.

TABLED ITEMS

- 15.** Report from the Committee on Community Improvement recommending that the Amending Resolution and Budget Authorizations providing for the transfer and expenditure of funds in the amount of \$400,000 for CIP 610625 80 Merrimack Street (Residence at Chestnut Phase II) be approved.
(*Unanimous vote*)
(*Note: Tabled on September 4, 2024.*)

This item remained on the table.

- 16.** Report from the Committee on Lands & Buildings recommending that the request from Alderman Morgan to name the soccer field at Sheridan-Emmett Park after Thamba Mbungu be approved.
(*Unanimous vote with the exception of Alderman Long who abstained*)
(*Note: Tabled on November 19, 2024.*)

This item remained on the table.

*There being no further business, on motion of **Alderman Barry**, duly seconded by **Alderman Vincent**, it was voted to adjourn.*

A True Record. Attest.



City Clerk