

**SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN
(PUBLIC PARTICIPATION)
September 7, 2021 at 7:00 PM**

Mayor Craig called the meeting to order.

Mayor Craig called on Alderman O'Neil to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

A moment of silence was observed with the Mayor asking those present to keep Police Chief Fauvreau and Paula D'Allesandro's families in their thoughts and prayers.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Cavanaugh, Stewart, Long, Roy, Sapienza, Sharonov, O'Neil, Levasseur, Terrio, Shaw, Gamache, Hirschmann

Absent: Alderman Barry

The Mayor advised that the purpose of the special meeting is to give residents of Manchester the opportunity to address the Board on items of concern affecting the community; that each person will be given only one opportunity to speak, all comments shall be limited to three minutes and any comments must be directed to the Chair.

The Mayor requested that any resident wishing to speak come forward to the nearest microphone, clearly state their name and address when recognized, and give their comments.

William O'Connor, 215 Wilson Street, stated:

I am here to speak about the lack of safe and affordable housing in our city. After years of living in a dilapidated apartment with consistent infestation situations, Jessica Margeson, the housing advocate with GSOP, who had been helping another tenant in my building for a year at that point coordinated with Brandon Lemay to help me and four other tenants organize to learn our rights and advocate for them. I am a disabled father with four children at home. Mr. Terrio is my alderman. Thank you, Sir, for taking time

from your busy schedule multiple times to help myself and other tenants in voicing our concerns with the Building Department. I have also reached out to other officials, only to be quickly shuffled off to City Welfare about my situation, which didn't help. My children and I live in substandard conditions at this time and despite the backing of a housing voucher and emergency rental assistance, I am unable to find a new home that meets the needs of me and my family. In search of apartments, I have sent out over 50 emails and viewed over 20 apartments of which only 4 were willing to accept the housing voucher and of those 4, one was substandard and another one was a sardine can with only two options available. When speaking with landlords, they tell me they are getting over 200 emails per listing unit leaving tenants at a horrible disadvantage to find a home that is safe and suitable for their children and families. I urge you today to do something to help people and families in this city like mine as we face the crisis ahead of us and to fund any and all affordable housing projects you can. Housing is a human right and nobody needs to go through what me and my family are going through. Thank you for your time.

Richard Girard, 283 Orange Street, stated:

I have three brief points to raise tonight. First, former state rep Carlos Gonzalez has been nominated by Alderman Hirschmann to fill the vacancy created by Kelly Thomas on the School Board for Ward 12. Alderman Hirschmann speaks for the ward in these matters as Alderman Cavanaugh spoke for Ward 1 when there was a vacancy on the school board and as Alderman Shaw spoke for Ward 9 when there was a vacancy in her ward. Why there is even a contest here I have no idea. It is very disappointing that Alderman Cavanaugh brought forth a nominee for Ward 12 really violating the protocols that have been present on this Board for an awful long time. I don't know why. Carlos Gonzalez is a very well-qualified person. He has represented Ward 12 and if seated he would be the first Hispanic immigrant to sit on the school board and I thought that was a perspective that we wanted in this city. The tax revaluation has people on edge, especially seniors who have been in their homes for many years. The increase in value is shocking and hazardous to their finances and many of them are concerned. As soon as it is possible, I think it is only fair that the new tax rate that reflects the value increase

of the tax base is released so people can estimate their tax liability. Moreover, since all of the data that will be needed to file for the tax rate with the state will be ready by mid-October, I urge you, Your Honor, and members of this Board to direct all City staff necessary to file the paperwork as soon as possible in October so the tax bills are released prior to the election. That is something that Mayor Wieczorek did back in 1991 when the first revaluation in the city hit in 20 years. He thought it would only be fair for the taxpayers to know what their tax bill was going to be prior to the election and the same applies here. Finally, speaking of concerned seniors and the revaluation, Your Honor I am going to ask you to repudiate the comments of Kathy Sullivan, former State Party Chair and a political advisor and confidante of yours who on a Facebook post made by former Alderman Porter said to people who were concerned about the reval that "if you want cheap real estate move to Coos County. It is very pretty up there. We will miss you but you will never be happier." I really don't think that is a way to respond to citizens concerned about their tax liability in a revaluation that has shown a massive shift away from the commercial and industrial base towards the residential base. I hope, Your Honor, that you won't let comments like that by one of your political allies to stand. Thank you.

Victoria Sullivan, 1056 South Beech Street, stated:

I am here in regard to two issues. The first is the revaluation. State law requires revals at least every five years. As we were in a state of emergency with the pandemic, it is unfortunate that this Board did not reach out to the state and submit an application for the reval to be done at a later date. These revals are going to force property taxes and rents up on families across our city. Our middle class families, our elderly, families and individuals renting apartments who are often our most vulnerable will be hit the hardest. In a city in the midst of a housing crisis with an increase in homeless of over 24% in recent years, this will only exacerbate the situation and lead to more people losing their homes. That being said, it is imperative that this Board is transparent and releases the required paperwork so that the state can issue a new tax rate prior to the election. Only then can our citizens be armed with the information they need to make the right decisions at the voting booth. The fact is that we can no longer afford to elect officials

who disregard the needs of the people they are supposed to represent and have a history of voting to override the tax cap. The second reason for being here tonight is in support of the Honorable Carlos Gonzalez. Carlos and I served in the NH House together. I found him to be a great person with a good heart who I can speak with on issues and with whom I could find common ground. Carlos and I did not always agree on legislation but I knew that he was a free thinker and he voted on what he believed to be the best interest of his constituents. Not too long ago my school board member resigned and my alderman nominated someone that many in our ward disagreed with. When I reached out to this Board, I was told that Alderman Shaw's role was to nominate a candidate for school board for our ward and that nomination would be supported by the Board. Now Alderman Hirschmann has brought forth a nominee under the same rules, standards and conditions. His nominee is being challenged. It begs the question why. A school board which often states they are not diverse enough in their representation should be welcoming Carlos Gonzalez. He has proven himself to be a great public servant and he represents what I think we can all agree is an under represented population of our city. I ask this Board to do what is right. If my alderman nominating someone for the ward's school board position was the rule, the same should follow for Alderman Hirschmann. Please confirm Carlos Gonzalez for school board. Thank you.

Will Infantine, 89 Windward Lane, stated:

I would first like to thank Your Honor and Alderman Long. United Way was paved today and it makes me very happy. The last 15 years you have been putting up with my emails and pictures so thank you very much. I am here today in support of Carlos Gonzales. Carlos and I have been friends for the last 20 years. I also serve with Carlos in the statehouse. I support Carlos mostly because he is not a lifelong educator. I feel that the job of an alderman or school board member is to be diverse in your education and your background and your overall knowledge. That is what your job is. I don't feel we need an additional teacher or somebody with that many years of background on the school board as his opponent. Again, I am not going to discuss the fact that I don't know why there is even an opponent. There was an article in the Union Leader a few

days ago about the diversity between white and non-white members in our society in youth and adults and the biggest delta in disparity was here in Manchester between the youth and the adults. It was an 18% difference if I read the article correctly. We talk about diversity and inclusiveness here in the city. I think Carlos would serve as the only non-white alderman or school board member which is vastly needed in this city based on that criteria or the information provided alone in that article. If you truly believe in that, I would respectfully request that you vote for Carlos Gonzalez for this position. He will serve us well. He is an honorable man and I think he would do a fine job. Thank you.

Brandon Lemay, 20 W. River Drive, stated:

I am here to continue to remind you all of the importance of affordable housing in the city. I promise you that I will not go away until every single person in Manchester that wants a safe affordable home can get a safe affordable home. Mostly I wanted to thank William who spoke first tonight. I have to tell you that I go door knocking every single Saturday in the city center and for every person brave enough like William to speak in front of you tonight, which is really difficult to do, there are dozens more who are too afraid to speak up for themselves. We have a housing crisis here. As William said, a landlord puts an apartment up for rent and they get 50 emails usually within a few days. It is leading landlords to feel bold. I just spoke with somebody today who told me that a landlord tried to discriminate against him because he had kids in the apartment. A lot of landlords don't really know tenant's rights in that regard. I was very glad to speak with that landlord and tell them that it is illegal and they shouldn't do it. I can tell that these tenants that I speak to every single Saturday and who message me on Facebook always say that they are too afraid to mention a problem with their building because they are afraid that their landlord would try to retaliate. Maybe it is not for something you would think of. Maybe the landlord just suddenly decides they need to renovate the apartment. There really are no protections for tenants and I just need you to keep in mind that we need affordable housing for the everyday people of America like the man that I talked to on Lake Avenue who gets \$1,200/month in Social Security benefits and his rent was just raised from \$900 to \$1,050/month. He doesn't know how to pay for

food after he pays for rent. That is the kind of person that needs affordable housing in the city. It is the father of four who is taking care of his kids and on disability. I just want you to remember that next time we have a proposal for funding affordable housing. Thank you very much.

Jessica Margeson, 108 W. Merrimack Street, stated:

I do volunteer housing advocacy with Granite State Organizing Project. Bear with me because I have a horrible headache but tonight was too important not to show up, especially as Brandon said one of our tenants, William O'Connor, showed up. Last Friday William had to go to court against his landlord because there is a conflict of interest with NH Legal Aid, which a lot of tenants are encountering. Since their systems joined, they don't have access to any legal aid. Not many of them are able to find me. We were able to help him get prepared and be there for him. As you see, he has trouble standing up. That was a rough day but he made it through it. What is happening in William's building that we are gathering right now five tenants out of nine is there are investors coming in and these buildings are prey; these dilapidated buildings that are sitting there with numerous code infractions that have been going on for years or just barely having infractions so they make it through. These buildings dilapidate over years and become either eyesores or dangerous spots to live but they are some of the last affordable housing around. They are prey because these investors come in and buy the building and they know about this thing called constructural evictions and they start doing evictions with the problem makers one by one which is retaliation. Then one by one you have to help them but that is exhaustive of the efforts offered for you to have more to offer anyone else. These are happening and people are getting evicted so they can come in and renovate these buildings and make 10 three-bedroom units when you have about 20 one to two bedroom units there. Those three-bedrooms are going to go for so much money that now you have 10 homeless families. There is no vacancy out there. There are no three and four bedroom units. We had a few years where we missed the opportunity as a state to install rules and safeguards for rent increases. We failed our tenants with that. Right now they are reaping the worst of it all. It is really important that the RFP for Pearl Street pass and that it is affordable.

What I see are countless people having three months while some people are offering a year. They are taking the cream of the crop of the renters. People with three months of rent can't get a place that previously they would have gotten very quickly because that is a lot of money. They are just not out there. We have to get them built. We can't build that much that quick so we need to think outside the box. Within the next week you will be seeing an article in the Union Leader about an employer in our city that is doing just that and that will hopefully spark ideas for other people.

Glen Ouellette, 112 Auburn Street, stated:

I came so close to being evicted and for reasons that made no sense. When you file your income tax, that is proof of your income. I don't know how they found \$5,000 more that doesn't exist. My rent went from a 96.150% increase and they relooked at it and discovered an error and brought it down to 81%. The problem is my income this year is going to be 40% less because I have prostate cancer and I am not able to work as many hours as I want plus they cut a lot of hours. There are five months out of the year that I won't be able to pay my rent. It is like a set-up to become homeless. Have we come to that point here in this city? We have. You know that I support the homeless and I have always been tough on the homeless. Since we took away the portable bathrooms, we see poop all over the streets – downtown, in my neighborhood, etc. It is incredible. There is only one positive thing that came out of taking away those portable bathrooms and that is that the alderman at-large, JKL, can no longer go in in the morning and take pictures of who is in there. Disgusting. We need to do a better job. We have been talking about bathrooms for six or seven years now. I am happy that in the Ward 3 area on the corner of Pine and Auburn, after five years of fighting for lights on that street because there were rapes and there were shootings and car accidents and it was horrible...since they installed the lights last February, there have been no major interruptions. It is called the broken window effect. It shouldn't take five or six years to fix the window. We need to do a better job. Another thing I want to say is that somehow all of my accounts and communications have been closed because I no longer have the old number and they won't use my new number. Do you know how it feels not to have an identity and not to be able to communicate with anybody? It took

me an hour and a half on the phone with Google today and I still don't have an answer. Is this what the world is coming to? In this city, I am very happy Your Honor that after three or four years we are going to get back an Economic Development Department. I have always said that in a city our size, if we had a grant writer, it would bring in multiple millions to help us in our situation. The last thing I want to say is there is a couple who were born and raised in this city, graduated from high schools in this city, got married and had three kids. We couldn't find them a home. We tried to ship them to Laconia but they had no room. Laconia sends their people here as does Dover and other communities and we do nothing about it even though the Constitution of NH simply states that every community must take care of its own people. That is a positive for us if we acted on it. What happened is they are now living in Hooksett. They were our people. The homeless are becoming worse but I want the police officers to start enforcing the rules. If they take drugs in public, they need to be arrested. If they walk into people's apartments, we need to respond. They are not allowed to break the laws. They may be poor and have a right to live outside but they are not allowed to break the laws. Thank you.

Martel stated I am the Housing Coordinator at Granite State Organizing Project. I wanted to share with you a few stories that I hear. I live in Hooksett but I work in Manchester and I wanted to share a few stories with you. Prior to coming here, I spoke with the President of the Liberian community and he was telling me that within...I am a Liberian. He was telling me that within the community...I was trying to get him to come here tonight but he had to work so he wasn't able to make it but some of the things he was telling me was that the places people are living in are very substandard housing and people with the rents going high are looking for areas to move where they can still be able to take care of their needs such as pay rent while at the same time be able to take care of their family. They have been having a hard time finding three-bedroom apartments for their family. Basically he said that if you guys can speed up the process a little bit, that might help these families not have to leave the city and go out of state. These are hardworking people that we want to stay in Manchester. That is what I wanted to share with you.

Carlos Gonzalez stated:

I am a former state representatives for four terms and I have also been a candidate for school board three times. Two times in Ward 12 and the last experience was not long ago when I ran for at-large. I am here today to speak on my behalf. I am a graduate from the University of New Hampshire with a Master in Science, Management and Economics. I also have specialty training in language and business and leadership certification from the John F. Kennedy School at Harvard University. My experience is extensive but I have to come back to a core value. My core value is inclusion. When I first came to the United States of America, I came with the intent of becoming one just like you. Why? Because when you are in Rome you behave like the Romans. I am speaking to you in English, however, I speak Spanish. I do that because English is the number one language of this country. I encourage my peers to do so. The school board for me is not an exception or something that I take lightly. I am the product of education. I am a first generation child that had to make it in America and become educated. If I were to remember people that basically touched my heart when I was a child, I would talk about Martin Luther King and I would talk about Abe Lincoln. Both of them had humility towards millions of people, not just in the United States of America but also in the world. I was a child when I first started to read books which were called encyclopedias. My father was a librarian and I remember this encyclopedia and reading about Abe Lincoln and Martin Luther King. It motivated me together with my mother to get my education so that I could make a mark in the country in which I live, particularly the city of Manchester. I do appreciate you accepting me and including me. This city has been in my heart since the moment I came to Manchester. I thank all of you.

Leticia Ortiz stated I am a good friend of Carlos Gonzalez. I have known him for years now as well as his family, his children and his wife. I know that he is a good man with a good heart. He has served for many, many years at many levels. I wanted to come to support his nomination.

*There being no one else present wishing to speak, on motion of **Alderman Long**, duly seconded by **Alderman Cavanaugh**, it was voted to take all comments under advisement and further to receive and file any written documentation presented.*

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

A True Record. Attest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Normand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

City Clerk