

City of Hudson Common Council
Minutes of Informal Meeting
December 9, 2024

In attendance:

Council President Tom DePietro

First Ward Councilmembers Margaret Morris and Gary Purnhagen

Second Ward Councilmember Dewan Sarowar

Third Ward Councilmembers Lola Roberts and Shershah Mizan

Fourth Ward Councilmembers Jennifer Belton and Rich Volo

Fifth Ward Councilmembers Vicky Daskaloudi and Dominic Merante

Fire Chief Shawn Hoffman; Police Chief Mishanda Franklin; Department of Public Works Superintendent Rob Perry; Youth Department Director Liz Yorck; Youth Commissioner Maija Reed; Crystal Peck, Counsel

Absent: Second Ward Councilmember Mohammed Rony, Senior Services Commissioner Nea McKinney

Mr. DePietro called the meeting to order at 6 p.m. at City Hall. It also was conducted via Microsoft Teams and livestreamed on YouTube at Hudson City Zoom Meetings.

Minutes and Communications

Councilmembers received minutes of special meetings on November 7 and 26, a public hearing on the 2025 budget on November 21, the Informal meeting on November 12, the regular meeting on November 18, the Finance Committee on November 19, Public Works Board on November 14 and the Ad Hoc Parking Committee on November 26.

Department Reports

Fire

Chief Hoffman reported 32 calls during November. There were two structure fires (one for mutual aid in Greenport and the other on Columbia Street), three motor vehicle accidents, one natural gas leak and one unauthorized burn.

The company that is building a new boat for the department is waiting for a computer chip, which is expected in the next couple of weeks.

Ms. Daskaloudi asked where the two accidents occurred and was told one was at the intersection of Green Street and Fairview Avenue and the other near the Hudson Area Association Library.

Mr. Merante asked if any tickets were issued for the burn, based on the new law regarding fire pits. Chief Hoffman said no ticket was issued. The department tries to educate first but will ticket if there is an ongoing issue.

Youth Department

Ms. Yorck said a Fall Festival was held at the Youth Center for all age groups. Games were played and a meal was enjoyed. Youths had a private screening of *Moana 2* at Spotlight Cinema with discount tickets that included popcorn and lemonade.

A highlight of November programming was skateboarding lessons given by a community member who is part of the youth basketball league. Four or five youths were taken to Oakdale

Park a few days a week for the lessons. “It was really great to watch him grow as a teacher. He was only 13 and still taking the time to really nurture these kids in their interest and did a great job encouraging and not letting them get frustrated because I don’t know how many of you have stood on a skateboard and tried to get around. It’s not as easy as they make it look,” she said. “It was a really great program, and he wants to come back with us in the spring.”

Other programming was offered by Bindlestiff Cirkus, Art School of Columbia County and the Sylvia Center. The Debate Club continued. One of the recreation attendants who is studying cosmetology showed 10 youths how to make sugar scrubs from ingredients available at a grocery store.

Teen programming included a home cooked Thanksgiving meal that they helped prepare for around 100 people. They also had a ping pong tournament.

Ms. Yorck said registration and attendance figures were on track for the past few years and were about the same as this time last year. Registration will continue throughout the school year.

She addressed questions surrounding the department’s budget. There were increases in two contractual lines in the budget—personal services and food service—and eight lines decreased or stayed the same. Personal services increased due to salary increases. The meal service line is a contract with the Columbia County Recovery Kitchen. “That was budgeted for the most amount of meals we think we’ll buy. We like to come in under budget with that because as you know, we go through our slow seasons and get fewer meals.” She added that paperwork had been submitted to the state for reimbursement for a portion of the food service line.

A breakdown of what was provided by supporters was provided, as was the cost of managing Oakdale Park. That included maintenance of the building, grounds and beachfront, lifeguard salaries and training. Part of the latter is supported by Friends of Hudson Youth.

She also touched on revenue generated by the department. “Obviously we’re never going to be the largest revenue provider in the City of Hudson, but it is something that we think about constantly.” For example, rental fees for use of the center were increased. A large sum of money was provided by the county, specifically for transportation for summer camp. The Hudson City School District provided many free services, such as free use of space for sports programs, as well as use of four classrooms, a cafeteria and a gym for six weeks for summer camp regardless of whether they are used or not. The district could have charged almost \$199,000 for use of the space. “We are looking to partner with other groups. We are looking to get outside resources for that.”

Ms. Yorck said the citizens of Hudson made a decision to invest in the community’s youth. “The community prioritized supporting, protecting and improving the lives of the children from the greater Hudson area because they still value its importance. That’s still the mission of the department today. We’re fortunate that we have the partners that they do that recognize the value of what we’re going and want to support us in that.”

Ms. Belton said the breakdown of the budget provide “how much you care and want us to understand everything that’s going on.” She asked the number of employees in the department. Ms. Yorck said there were about 15 permanent part-time employees and seven or eight full-time employees. All of the full-time non-supervisor positions were unionized and the permanent part-time employees had the option to join the union. “They’re all obviously benefitting and protected by the union whether they join or not.”

Ms. Belton said the department was providing employment and a service not provided by the city—a parks department. Ms. Yorck added that at least 30 more employees were on board

for the bike shops, lifeguards and counselors for summer camp. “It’s pretty large personnel and necessary for the services we offer,” she said, and all received extensive training.

Ms. Daskaloudi said she would forward the figures to the county supervisors to make the argument for increased funding.

Mr. Volo asked if there was an overlap between the Youth Department and Department of Public Works (DPW). Ms. Yorck said there was not; for example, her department collected trash and DPW picked it up or, on occasion, would be called to help cut a fallen tree.

Ms. Morris asked for clarification on whether funds from Friends of Hudson Youth and so forth would go directly against the \$800,000 the city budgeted or whether that was separate. Ms. Yorck said it was not taken out; the only money that comes back is for things like food and funds from the county money, which goes toward summer camp personnel.

Ms. Morris said the school district’s contribution was in kind. “Given that the Youth Department’s position is that all children in the school district can use the Youth Department, the least the school can do is actually provide facilities for their own students. It’s not exactly generous.”

Police Department

Chief Franklin said body camera reports indicated there was no need for training. There was one use of force incident in November. There were 16 arrests on 17 charges. Officers handled nine calls for emotionally disturbed persons, no drug overdoses and one motor vehicle accident involving a pedestrian at State and Carroll streets. Both parties were gone before officers arrived.

Chief Franklin thanked Council President DePietro for support of her department and especially the canine program. “We have had, since May, 22 deployments, which just means that we have been requested to appear at certain events, not just within the city but within the county.” One in particular involved the loss of Greenport Rescue Squad member Steve Walsh. “We were asked by the crisis team to respond with Wrigs (the dog). He did an awesome job and it was very beneficial.”

She confirmed that human remains had been found earlier in the day. The department received a call from the State Police at 11:18 a.m. stating that a survey team for the Mill Street housing project found the remains in a wooded area some 100 to 150 feet to the right of the Empire State Trail. An investigation was under way. She did not know how long the remains had been there.

Mr. Merante asked if there were calls for service at the warming center located at the First Reformed Church. Chief Franklin said there were not many calls there. “They try to keep us out of it unless absolutely necessary, but we are able to go in and do walk-throughs and talk to staff.”

Department of Public Works Sewer

Mr. Perry reported septage revenue of \$54,430 for October, which was on pace to exceed the annual revenue goal by about \$75,000 if November and December would hold to average.

Three projects were under review for sewer extensions and had paid application fees—Mill Street Lofts, Lil’ Deb’s Oasis at 735 Columbia Street and PBF Hudson.

The survey continued for the first phase of the stormwater separation project. Crews would be seen mostly on Columbia Street between Front and Seventh streets as well as Long and

Prison alleys. He anticipated that the survey would be completed in April or May of 2025, then design would begin with the expectation of a bid for the first half to be let at this time next year for construction in the spring of 2026.

Water

The city and Town of Taghkanic have communicated for at least 15 years about a dirt road that runs along the side of the reservoir. The town is abandoning roads that it doesn't use and the reservoir road between the Taghkanic Churchtown Road and County Route 27 is one of them. The city owns all of the property on either side of the road. "If there is no need for anybody who's not on city business to take that road. We've had issues with people defecating and all sorts of sordid things along the side of it because it has very little traffic." Temporary road closed signs were put up. Once discussions with the local fire departments about how they would like to have access, permanent gates with keys or another system will be put up.

There was a water main break at Fourth and Columbia streets last week. There were a number of utility conflicts so Premier did the excavation. A wooden water main was found.

Land Swap

Mr. Perry reported that the public and city access the eastern end of Long Alley by crossing lands owned by Galvan. Galvan requested an easement to formalize access. A lot line adjustment was discussed. The city would give Galvan about 500 feet of Long Alley then improve it to make a formal entrance to the alley. There is a spill area that was closed in 2005 by the state Department of Environmental Conservation that lies within the section of the alley to be transferred, which Galvan agreed to accept transfer of and assume any future liability. The site is at Galvan's Foundry project at the former Van Kleek's Tire building.

DPW

The staff has been busy with seasonal work, including collection of leaves. installation of holiday tree lights and construction of new "no parking" signs. A contingent of volunteers made improvements to one of the buildings in Santa's Village, known as the ornament house.

Damaged conduit was repaired so power could be run to one of the Santa's Village houses in Seventh Street Park. Outlets were repaired on now city-owned electrical infrastructure.

Mr. Perry reported that the waterfront advisory group's contractor would do soil borings next week in and around Rick's Point.

DRI

New catch basins were put in as part of the streetscape project, as well as new curbing. Construction will be suspended next week until spring.

Ferry Street Bridge

A new water man will connect to the existing main on Front Street, replacing one that was abandoned by the city about 25 years ago. It will go toward the Ferry Street bridge. Rebar was installed for both decks. "We ran out of time with the holiday. Amtrak wouldn't allow any work the week of Thanksgiving and after that the weather hasn't really cooperated, so it looks like we're pretty much tabled until next spring.

ADA Work

New sections of sidewalk and some pads were installed at Seventh and Union streets as part of Americans With Disabilities Act compliance.

Ms. Daskaloudi inquired whether a radar sign had been installed on Worth Avenue. Mr. Perry said it was installed. It is solar powered and will take a few weeks to warm up and work well. She asked him to recharge the battery on a similar sign on Parkwood Boulevard.

Resolutions

The following resolutions were laid on councilmembers' desks for consideration at the formal meeting on December 17:

- Appointment of Lyric Falkner, Tracey Roberts and Tyler Halstead as Commissioners of Deeds from January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2026. Introduced by Mr. Mizan and seconded by Mr. Sarowar.

- Authorizing the mayor to sign a memorandum of understanding to accept donations to the Youth Department by Friends of Hudson Youth for all of 2025. Introduced by Mr. Sarowar and seconded by Mr. Mizan.

- Authorizing acceptance of up to \$200,000 in donations to the Youth Department by Friends of Hudson Youth during all of 2025. Introduced by Mr. Mizan and seconded by Mr. Sarowar.

- Authorization to accept \$1,101 in donations to the Senior Center. Introduced by Mr. Mizan and seconded by Mr. Volo.

- Authorizing the mayor to sign a lease renewal with PBF Hudson to use a portion of a vacant parcel at 604 Washington Street, across from the Central Fire Station, for parking at a cost of \$13,000 for a year. Introduced by Ms. Daskaloudi and seconded by Mr. Merante.

Local Laws

The following local laws were presented to councilmembers:

- Amendment of Chapter 325, Articles III and XIII of City Code to allow licensed and legally exempt day care facilities as a conditional use in all zoning districts. Introduced by Mr. Sarowar and seconded by Mr. Mizan.

- Amendment of Chapter 188, §188-17 of City Code regarding harassment of city officers and staff. Introduced by Ms. Roberts and seconded by Mr. Mizan.

Mr. Purnhagen asked if he had a responsibility to assist a police officer, if asked, in the midst of a public disturbance. Ms. Peck said the City Code already prohibited interference with official duties. A new subsection states that “no person shall hinder, obstruct or interfere with any city officer in the performance of their duties, nor shall any person willfully refuse or neglect to assist any city officer when lawfully called upon him to do so.” She agreed that there could be a duty provided that the duty was required by law. “There would have to be a legal requirement, like a police officer asking you to step aside or provide information with respect to something.”

Mr. Purnhagen felt that the law was broadly written. Ms. Morris said the Legal Committee, which she chairs, modified some of the original language, specifically regarding the word “annoy,” which was vague. The committee discussed at length that it was not the intent of the language to interfere with free speech, she said, but counsel decided “not to explicitly discuss that we had talked about potentially putting that in here.” Another issue, which she wanted to get Chief Franklin’s take on, was why the law was needed if there was a state law already in place.

Ms. Peck said the law came in as a request to make sure that city employees and those working in various departments had some additional layers of protection. “There are reasons why this is an added layer of protection above and beyond what’s in state law.” For example, under state law several types of harassment situations dealing with city officers, especially those that serve the public, that may not be considered a crime, but a violation. Also, officers may be hesitant to get involved in those situations that would allow for city officers experiencing threatening behaviors or conduct from the public that interferes with their duties to at least call on law enforcement and perhaps even use it as a basis for an order of protection if the conduct rises to that level.

Other Business

Mr. DePietro announced that the last comprehensive plan visioning session would be December 16 at the Spark of Hudson building at Fifth and Union streets between 5:30 and 7:30 p.m. Food and refreshments will be available, and activities will be offered for children. All are invited to drop in and share their thoughts on the process and hear updates on the process.

Ms. Daskaloudi requested that Ms. Peck look into the possibility of a fee on developers that would go into a fund for a parking garage. The two agreed to communicate via telephone.

Public Comment

Resident Ron Kopnicki said he raised questions to the Legal Committee about how the law would reflect on freedom of speech and was told that there were protections in it that did so. “I ask that these be incorporated into the draft of this law, and it be explicit about the law not applying to speech in public forums or in print. “I’m very disappointed to see that that hasn’t been done.”

Ms. Peck said a variety of protections for free speech were written into the Constitution and case law at the federal and state levels. A law cannot discriminate based on the content of speech with some limited exceptions, such as hate speech, but “a law on its face cannot discriminate on the content of speech. This law doesn’t.” The next question would be whether the law was being unconstitutionally applied. “There’s a lot of case law on this subject and it is a case-by-case circumstance. It is not something that would be appropriate to necessarily write into the law because it is very much a case-by-case scenario for how these laws are applied and that was the reason why additional language was not included in here because those protections are already afforded at the federal and state case law levels.”

Resident Matt McGhee said it was his understanding that the Common Council and other public bodies that have meetings and hearings would be covered by the proposed law as being officers of the city. He was told that was correct.

Mr. McGhee said the proposal could undermine liberties by inhibiting speech. Fear of punishment will be a violation of the First Amendment “by bridging the freedom of speech, of the press and of the right of people to petition government for regressive grievances.” He cited Amendment 14, Section 1 which states that no state shall make or enforce any law that will abridge the privileges or immunities of U.S. citizens or deny any person within jurisdiction equal protection of the laws.

There also are issues with Article 1, Section 9, which states that no bill can be passed that can be construed as denial of civil rights by way of punishment, he said.

“All of these civil liberties protections likely are in danger of being abridged or denied under the proposed law. Just opening up the possibility should be unacceptable,” he said. Article

6 indicates that the Constitution was the supreme law of the land. “We are the great crossroads for our republic. Can constitutional guarantees given to the people, can constitutional government long endure in this nation if we choose not to go out of our way to honor the Constitution? The White House, Congress and Supreme Court are already given over to enemies of the Constitution. Must Hudson take this wrong step away from responsible governance? Surely there are already reasonable ways to respond to the issue at hand. Just saying because laws protecting speech are on the books makes everything okay doesn’t cut it when the proposed law, on the face³ of it, is in opposition to the laws.”

He said the proposed law should be tabled.

Mr. Kopnicki said that the law, as drafted, would still permit speech to be interpreted as interfering with the performance of an official’s duties and should be clarified. He felt that more discussion was needed as well as a public hearing. The Council should not vote on it at this time of year when many were preoccupied with the holidays. Mr. DePietro said the Council would not vote on the measure this year and that there would be a public hearing.

There being no further public comment, Mr. Purnhagen made a motion to adjourn at 6:59 p.m., which was seconded by Mr. Merante and approved by all members in attendance.

