

**COMMITTEE ON LIAISON
MONDAY, JUNE 7, 2021, at 6:00 p.m.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER
WOBURN CITY HALL**

Voting Members present: President Edward Tedesco, Alderman Michael Concannon, Alderman Darlene Mercer-Bruen, Alderman Joseph Demers, Alderman Joanne Campbell, Alderman Jeffrey Dillon, and Alderman Richard Gately. Absent: Alderman Robert Ferullo

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Communication from Rep. Richard Haggerty regarding cessation of Covid-19 state of emergency – Motion made by Alderman Demers and seconded by Alderman Mercer-Bruen to suspend the rules to allow Rep. Haggerty to address the committee; approved, 8-0. Rep. Haggerty said an email was sent from the Governor’s office indicating the emergency orders established under Covid-19 will be expiring on June 15. He said there is legislation that will address the emergency orders. He said there may be a variety of changes to the Governor’s executive orders. He said there will be public hearings. He said he wants to get a sense from the City Council which orders should continue. President Tedesco said he definitely does not want to continue the process that allows public hearings on the Zoom platform. He said public hearings should be held in a live format. He said there were issues with Zoom. He said there are other platforms that could have been used like You Tube and Facebook Live that do not have the same issues as Zoom. He said the School Committee and other municipal boards had issues with virtual meetings. Alderman Concannon said each community did what it had to do in order to conduct public meetings during the pandemic. He said former City Council President Lindsay Higgins did a good job managing the virtual meetings. He said there were glitches and problems with virtual meetings. He said he thinks in-person meetings are the way to go. Alderman Mercer-Bruen agreed former President Higgins did a tremendous job managing virtual meetings. She said one of the benefits of virtual meetings is people can join and leave any time they want. She said remote access was also beneficial. She said she hopes the remote access component can be extended. Alderman Gately said Zoom killed a lot of stuff. He said he wants to be able to see people and read people, and he cannot do that during a Zoom meeting. He said Zoom limits how much you can see. He said municipal government is a human contact sport. He said he wants to be able to see people and talk to people. Alderman Gately thanked Rep. Haggerty for his commitment to the city and told him to keep up the good work. Alderman Campbell said she agrees with Alderman Gately and the other members of the council who said a Zoom meeting is not as effective as a live meeting. She said it seemed to her they could have held live meetings with social distancing measures in place, like a TV monitor in the rotunda. She said she it seemed to her the time frame for the virtual meeting format went on too long. She asked what Rep. Haggerty and other legislators are thinking about the changes that were implemented for voting during the pandemic. Rep. Haggerty said there have been more than 7,000 bills filed relative to the end of the state of emergency. He said there are bills going through the committee process. He said he thinks some the changes that were made to accommodate early voting will stay. He said that is his gut feeling. He said voting by mail will probably remain in some capacity, though there may be changes to the format that was used last year. He said there were many, many bills filed, and the legislature is gathering information. He said if any members of

the council have any specific thoughts about voting procedures, he would welcome their comments. Alderman Campbell said she has no problem with the absentee ballot procedures. She said she would prefer to not see ballots sent out to everybody. She said she would prefer to see ballots sent by mail to people who request them. Rep. Haggerty said no excuse absentee balloting was very popular. He said whether the Secretary of State's office will decide to send out vote by mail cards again is up in the air. Alderman Campbell said it is very expensive. Rep. Haggerty said it is an unfunded mandate. Alderman Campbell asked Rep. Haggerty if he has a preference. Rep. Haggerty said he is the lead co-sponsor of a bill that extends voting regulations until June 30, for towns that have elections until then. He said he has confidence in local voting officials. Alderman Demers said one of the bigger concerns is relief for small businesses. He said he knows Rep. Haggerty has recently conducted a walking tour of the downtown area. Rep. Haggerty said the cocktails-to-go and outdoor dining concepts were popular with restaurant owners. He said he hopes both will remain in place, even though he expects there will be push back from package store owners to cocktails-to-go. He said he thinks outdoor dining is here to stay, but he would like to see more local than state control. He said his preference would be to give control to special permit granting authorities. He said the authority over outdoor dining was initially given administratively, to expedite the process. He said he is working with a state agency to explore grant opportunities for downtown Woburn. Alderman Demers said communities like Woburn rely a lot on local aid. Rep. Haggerty said there are discrepancies with the disbursement of local aid. He said Salem got \$35 million in local aid and Woburn got \$11 million in local aid. He said he has made it clear local aid needs to be distributed equitably. He said the Legislature will be having that conversation in the next 30 days. President Tedesco said there is interest in rooftop dining. He said there is zoning legislation currently under consideration. He said anything Rep. Haggerty could do on the state side to advocate for the restaurant industry would be appreciated. Alderman Dillon thanked Rep. Haggerty for all he does in the community. He said he sees Rep. Haggerty all over town. He said his efforts are greatly appreciated. Alderman Dillon said he thinks City Council meetings should be conducted in City Council Chambers, in a more formal setting. He said this venue brings out the best in people. He said City Council business is serious business. He said the council did what it had to do during the pandemic but he thinks with the Covid restrictions being lifted the council should be conducting all of its business at City Hall. Alderman Dillon said he spoke to a Mr. Piazza who made sure he voted in the last election. He said he wanted to make sure there was a plan for absentee voting. He said the voting process should not be nonchalant. He said voting should be formal. He said people gave their living to preserve the right to vote. Rep. Haggerty said the Woburn Public Media Center has a system that will allow streaming, but they need dollars to implement it. He said there ought to be a way to provide streaming access for everyone. Alderman Concannon said the one thing that was learned during the pandemic was that the trust in local officials to make good decisions was warranted. He said if there is a lesson to be learned, local level government can be trusted. Rep. Haggerty said the liquor license process in the state is antiquated and should be updated. He thanked the members of the council for their effort during the pandemic. Motion made by Alderman Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Alderman Dillon to return to the regular order of business; approved, 8-0. Motion made by Alderman Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Alderman Dillon to accept an email from Rep. Haggerty to President Tedesco dated Tuesday, June 1, and entitled "Re: City of Woburn Officials" and make it part of the permanent record; approved, 8-0.

Motion made by Alderman Demers and seconded by Alderman Mercer-Bruen to adjourn;
approved, 8-0. President Tedesco adjourned the meeting at 6:23 p.m.

Attest: _____
Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees