

FPC Nomination - Amanda Avalos
Public Safety and Health Committee
12-14-2020
Agenda Item #3, File #201107
Testimony Statement

Thank you and good morning, Chairwoman Dimitrijevic and distinguished members of the Public Safety & Health Committee. I am Amanda Avalos, and I have the privilege of being before you today having been nominated to be a Commissioner of the Fire and Police Commission (FPC). I want to thank Mayor Barrett for his confidence in me, and I express my appreciation to members of this committee and Common Council for your consideration of my candidacy.

I wish to start this morning by providing you a little bit of my background.

I was born on the South Side of Chicago, my dad is an immigrant from Mexico, and my mom is a first-generation daughter of Mexican immigrants. Since a young age, I was taught to lead courageously and continuously seek my education. After completing high school at Loyola Academy, I moved to Milwaukee to attend Marquette University (MU). At MU, I got involved in various organizations like the Latin American Student Organization, Hunger Clean-Up, and with my multicultural sorority Sigma Lambda Gamma. My studies ranged from Pre-Medicine to Social Welfare and Justice. As a student I spent my time studying, volunteering on campus and around the city, and playing basketball at night when the gyms were the calmest.

Little by little, I began discovering the city, venturing off campus and taking long bike rides through different neighborhoods. There has always been something about Milwaukee that felt familiar but fresh at the same time. After graduating in May 2013, I decided to stay in Milwaukee rather than move back to Chicago because I felt myself growing here and wanted to see it through.

Immediately after graduating, I was accepted into Public Allies Milwaukee, an AmeriCorps full-time paid apprenticeship program where you are matched with a local nonprofit. I sought to get nonprofit experience and leadership training before moving into what I thought would be my career plan--social work. It was during my first year of service at the United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County when I had my first experiences with local government and public health. I witnessed the processes between implementing programming at the community level and how that programming was funded and supported through different city grants. I was able to serve and assist on various task forces, such as the Latina Taskforce and the Human Trafficking Taskforce of Greater Milwaukee, and collaborative committees, such as the Lifecourse Initiative for Healthy Families and the Teen Pregnancy Oversight Committee, many of which presented to this very committee. It was then when I began learning about the connections between socioeconomic factors that can contribute to one's future and local policy. It was also the year that I learned about the FPC.

During my second/fellow year of Public Allies at the Milwaukee Health Department, I continued my habit of attending FPC meetings and following the agendas. I learned that the FPC is a board so unique in its structure and purpose that there are almost no equivalents across the country. This presents a special opportunity for Milwaukee to affect real, independent change. The more meetings I attended, the more familiar I became with how the FPC operates. In these years of being in my observer role, I witnessed the work being done on all sides and I enthusiastically aspire to be a connecting force between the community and City Hall.

As a community organizer, Emerge program alumna, and a resident of Milwaukee for over 12 years, I bring those experiences and the following values:

- **Integrity** - remaining true in every space I occupy.

- **Accessibility** - having the ability to navigate within and throughout systems. It is inclusive and creative, and allows for everyone to participate in their democracy.
- **Honesty** - is how I show respect.
- **Openness to learning** - meaning that I will continuously seek to learn and become more effective.
- **Responsibility** - because earning it is an honor, and is something that as a big sister, I have always been proud to have at the forefront of my identity/actions.
- **Accountability** - meaning that I hold myself to my values and respect my peers by mutually holding each other to a fair standard and moving collectively in our agreements and disagreements.
- **Commitment** - it is the promise I keep to myself to see things through fairly and completely.

During my years of observing the FPC, I have noticed and learned the following things:

- The fact that the FPC still exists today as an independent body composed of community members is a huge opportunity for the city because it enables a direct path for the public to engage in the process of police and fire effectiveness and accountability.
- There is an enormous amount of work being done behind the scenes, on all sides- FPC, Common Council, Mayor's office, community organizing, city hall staff. It would be worthwhile to develop more innovative ways to share updates with the public. If appointed, I would contribute to the effort being made to share regular updates on pending business, and in more inclusive and accessible ways. Though we are limited due to Covid-19 precautions, we can disseminate information digitally and frequently, as needed.
- There is some misunderstanding in the community about the FPC's work, roles, and responsibilities; specifically between the Board of Commissioners and the

Executive Director. If appointed, I would take the time to explain processes and decision-making authority during meetings that are open to the public as needed, in the spirit of increasing community understanding and showing acknowledgement.

- The FPC has undergone high turnover, staff is overworked, and there has been significant attention on all parts of the FPC. Though there are about 12 staff vacancies that remain, the staff continues to strive to move the work on a timely basis. The work speed and efficiency will only increase as more staff are hired. There has been an effort to engage more intentionally with the community, seen this year through virtual community meetings and the hiring of a community engagement coordinator.
- Part of the FPC's responsibilities also include ensuring the compliance of the ACLU Settlement Agreement. We are in year three of five and we are still figuring out how we move forward. I want to learn and work on finding a road to full compliance and I want to make sure we are aligned with the Community Collaborative Commission (CCC).

Milwaukee has been undergoing a shift in energy. After a difficult year, one that layered crisis after crisis for individuals, organizations, businesses, and whole communities, we are starting to find the light again. Covid-19 has brought our cities' most desperate issues, like health disparities, access to care, educational inequities, housing insecurity, and institutional racism to the forefront. We are now left with re-configuring those pieces to put the city back together better than it was before. We are realizing the impact of young organizers and the importance of investing in the next wave of leadership; I wish to be part of that new generational leadership that helps move our city forward in a healthy, honest, and transparent way.

The FPC is one of the most important bodies of government our city has to help our Milwaukee community thrive. The Board of Commissioners, in its full authority, is

charged with oversight of the Milwaukee Fire and Police departments that hold an incredible responsibility to the city.

If appointed, I intend to work to improve the effectiveness of the FPC, increase accessibility by making it easier for the public to engage, as well as help rebuild trust by strengthening the communications between the FPC, Common Council, and the public. I've heard the requests by the community calling for more transparency in FPC business and I believe that I am a trusted source for contributing to that work. I intend to work towards ensuring that the FPC is operating at its best and fullest capacity possible by showing up consistently prepared to make fully informed decisions.

Thank you for your consideration and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.