



# Allentown

435 Hamilton Street  
Allentown, Pa. 18101

## Minutes - Final

### City Council

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Wednesday, October 3, 2018

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

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#### Confirmation Hearing

#### Roll Call

**Present:** 6 - Candida Affa, Courtney Robinson, Cynthia Mota, Daryl Hendricks, Julio Guridy, and Ed Zucal

**Excused:** 1 - Roger MacLean

#### RESOLUTIONS FOR FINAL PASSAGE (To be Voted On):

[15-2577](#)

R112

Appoints Karen M. El-Chaar as Director of Parks and Recreation

**Attachments:** [R112 Director of Parks and Recreation Appointment](#)

[Karen M. El-Chaar resume](#)

[Resolution #29708](#)

Mayor Ray O'Connell introduced Ryan Griffiths, Hamp Smith, Becky Kiss, Hugh Gallagher, Dave Snyder in support of Ms. El Chaar. He stated that tonight I bring forward Karen El Chaar for a Confirmation Hearing the Director of Parks and Recreation. She has been the Executive Director for the nonprofit for the Friends of the Allentown Parks since 2010. She has been a very successful grant writer. They have brought over 2,500 volunteers to park clean up events. Karen is qualified to serve as the Parks Director. She is currently an assistant professor at Cedar Crest College in the Department of Business Management and Economics. She served 10 years with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, included as seven years as Director. Karen has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Secondary Education and German from East Stroudsburg University, an MBA from Wilkes University, and a Law Degree from the Temple University School of Law. He introduced Karen El Chaar, my nominee for the Director of Parks and Recreation.

Ms. Karen El Chaar thanked Mayor O'Connell, members of City Council and the search committee for providing the opportunity to express my interest in the position of Director of Allentown Parks and Recreation. Throughout my career in private, public and nonprofit sectors, I bring numerous skills and expertise. I learned a lot about each sector as a

progressed. We all know that Allentown has one of the best parks systems in the country and through my activities with Friends of Allentown Parks installed in me a greater appreciation of the parks as well as the challenges of attracting and engaging our use and meaningful and productive activities such as sports. In addition to my education and work experience I would bring to this position leadership, management, grant writing and other needed skills. Most importantly, I bring a very strong interest and passion in bringing Allentown's great Parks System even better and improving the quality of life of Allentown's citizens, families and visitors.

Ms. Candida Affa asked if there were any comments or questions from my colleagues.

Mr. Julio Guridy thanked Ms. El Chaar for applying. He stated that you certainly bring to us a wealth of skills including grant writing and management and know the parks inside out. He stated that he is amazed looking at your resume that you can speak Spanish, French, Sprechen Sie Deutsch, Russian and Arabic. I am happy to see that. You graduated in 1979 from ESU. I came in 1980. We were destined to meet in Allentown. He asked about knowledge and skills in regards to recreation. What are some of the plans you have for recreation for our youth and adults.

Ms. Karen El Chaar stated that she works very closely with Ryan and the people in the Recreation Bureau. Part of it is an understanding of what they do and they need. I also done grant writing to support some of those programs. Friends of the Allentown Parks primarily emphasis has been parks related as you already know. However, given some of the activities in order to increase interest in the sports and get more students into the leagues on the side of the Recreation Bureau. We established with Friends of the Allentown Parks in collaboration with the Recreation Bureau, Cedar Sports Day. I have gotten a grant from a local organization to bus students from the summer playground. We have the typical football, baseball, and basketball. We also provide disc golf, regular golf and tennis for kids.

Mr. Julio Guridy stated that we have pristine parks in our city, beautiful parks in our city. That will be the biggest challenge that you are going to encounter. He wanted to make Ms. El Chaar aware of the questions that Council get on what they can do with the children, bathrooms in the parks. He stated that she will be up to the challenge.

Ms. Candida Affa asked if there were any other comments.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated welcome. She stated that she is really excited.

She stated that she is also an East Stroudsburg University alumni. She stated that she is looking forward to working with Ms. El Chaar. As you know, we have a diverse community and I am hoping that we can be open minded to having different sports and keep an open mind. Our numbers have been really low especially when it comes to the summer program. It would be good if we can ask the community as to what they would like to see happen. She stated that she doesn't know when was the last time they did a survey to the community. On the Southside, our parks had to combine the children because the numbers were really low.

Ms. Candida Affa thanked Ms. Mota and asked if there was anyone else.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks commended the Mayor, unlike the previous administration for bringing us a very qualified candidates. Two of which I know personally and are very qualified. I don't know Ms. Adams, but on the resume she looks very qualified. There were very good choices. Very tough choices to make.

Ms. Candida Affa asked Mr. Zucal if he had any comments.

Mr. Ed Zucal thanked Ms. Affa and asked Ms. El Chaar is her brother Tony from Tony's Pizza. He welcome her and stated she will get to meet his wife. She goes to the park about four times a week and loves to take pictures of the birds. She was always concerned on who was running the place. She has a strong interest on the trees that are there and the injured deer. He welcomed Ms. El Chaar on board and commended the Mayor on saving a few dollars in the budget for picking her.

Ms. Karen El Chaar stated Tony is my brother-in-law.

Mayor Ray O'Connell thanked Mr. Zucal.

Ms. Candida Affa thanked Mr. Zucal and asked Mr. Robinson for his comments.

Mr. Courtney Robinson thanked Ms. Affa and stated to Ms. El Chaar that he had the benefit of being involved with the selection committee. He asked for a rough overview of your general management style. How do you deal with outside groups, recreation commission, leagues, Council and interested parties and coordinating them and have them work well together.

Ms. Karen El Chaar stated that her management style is a very participative style of management. It is not just top down. We work together. It is a team effort. We all have to work together as a team. It is a small department for such an immense park system and recreation

challenge. I have a good relationship with the existing personnel. They know my management style. The collaboration activities is extremely collaborative. I have done a lot of activities seeking input, guidance and counseling. I worked with individuals on the Recreation Commission. I tried to incorporate people from the community from networking, support, and we are acting as a community.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that she has seen Ms. El Chaar in action with the college students in the park. That is great.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks asked if Ms. El Chaar will continue to work with the Friends of the Allentown Park and incorporate that with working with the city.

Ms. Karen El Chaar stated that it will be a transition, but some of the projects that she has undertaken with Friends of the Allentown Park should eventually go to the Parks Department. She has been working with a Water Resource Management Plan. It has to go back to Parks because it's their parks. As Friends, I don't have jurisdiction for implementation, but can make recommendations. She stated that they are working on the flooding that occurred in Cedar Beach and Cedar Creek Parkway. It is Water Resource Management. We have begun investigating where the issue begin and why does it occur so intensively and extensively at Cedar Creek Parkway. We started looking at the water resources at Trexler Park and looking at other potential resources that may have an impact that feeds into the waterways.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that she doesn't mean to be bias, but as a female we are able to handle many things. She asked Ms. El Chaar is she still going to be teaching because I know that you teach too.

Ms. Karen El Chaar stated that she will be adjuncting because she teaches a leadership course, and an ethics course at night.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that she had the pleasure of interviewing as with the other three. She echoed Ms. Hendricks, thank you to the Mayor for picking three really good candidates. It wasn't an easy choice. She stated that she was so impress with Ms. El Chaar's enthusiasm. I was forced to listen so intently to you because I wanted to get up and start cheering. You are so passionate about this and I was impressed with that and you work so hard for grants. She congratulating Ms. El Chaar and stated welcome to the city. She asked if there were any comments from the public.

Mr. Lee Zettlemoyer, 37 E. Lynnwood Street, stated that he is a 35 year Park Department retiree. I live in Allentown and volunteered for Friends of

the Parks for the past five years. I work very closely with Karen. I am her go to guy. He stated that he has worked from 1969 to 2005 in the city's park system and not much he has not done. He stated that he doesn't think the city can pick a better person. She is very passionate and talk about the water problem, the pools and flooding. If I were you I would have hired her last year.

Ms. Candida Affa asked if there was anyone else from the public.

Mr. Hamp Smith, Allentown, stated that it is a good choice to have Karen because he had the pleasure of working with her on many events. She has a way of making people get things done. She is a great listener. There are many times that I have been around, and not involved in conversations with Karen, but listening to conversations with Karen having with other people and things get done. Now, is the time to make some changes and it is a good change. It is time for the Parks and Recreation and Council to make those changes. We do have a city to run. We all must live in the city of Allentown.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that it is most important and what made my mind up is that Karen will be a great mentor to all those she works with. That will be one of the most important things she could do as an administrator of the system. She has a lot of people under her that needs a lot of guidance. They do a great job. That is a big plus and something that made by mind up.

Mr. Dan Blount stated that he is one of the ministers at Union Baptist and was told that they had \$90,000 set aside for Valania Park. Is that still true?

Mr. Rick Holtzman stated that is still true. We are still working on the project and things are in motion.

**Resolution to Appoint Karen M. El-Chaar as Director of Parks and Recreation  
Effective October 15, 2018 at the salary of \$95,000, passed**

**Yes:** 6 - Candida Affa, Courtney Robinson, Cynthia Mota, Daryl Hendricks, Julio Guridy, and Ed Zucal

**Absent:** 1 - Roger MacLean

Enactment No: 29708

**ADJOURNED: 6:28 PM**