



Gary Christenson, Mayor

To: Malden City Council
From: Mayor Gary Christenson
Date: July 28, 2026
Re: Filling of Northeast Regional Vocational School Committee Position

Over the past several days, I have been contacted by several residents requesting that I address a series of inaccurate statements made by Councillor Karen Colón Hayes in a recent social media post. While I generally do not respond to such posts, the level of inaccuracy makes it necessary to set the record straight.

By way of background, the vacancy on the Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School Committee arose following the passing of Jim Holland on September 17, 2025. On September 24th, after speaking with my office, City Clerk Carol Ann Desiderio communicated with the City Council to outline a potential process for filling the vacancy. In that communication, the Clerk noted the following:

- The Regional Community Agreement requires that the vacancy be filled by the School Committee and City Council acting jointly;
- The Mayor's Office recommended posting the position to gauge interest;
- The Personnel Committees of each body were encouraged to play an active role; and
- The Council was advised to consider the process used in Chelsea, where the City Council took the lead and submitted a nominee to the School Committee.

On November 13th, nearly two months after the vacancy occurred and with no substantive follow-up to the City Clerk's September 24th communication, I sent a letter to the City Council to help move the process forward. In that letter, I recommended Jeff Donahue for consideration based on his vast experience in the trades, prior service as a City Councillor and demonstrated interest in vocational education. I explicitly stated that the appointment had to be made jointly by the City Council and School Committee and suggested that the Council consider following the process used in Chelsea.

Contrary to Councillor Colón Hayes' claim that this was an attempt to push the matter through, the recommendation was placed on the City Council docket, advanced through a public agenda, and handled with full transparency and opportunity for discussion. By contrast, her own actions occurred outside of the public process and involved communications with a quorum of her colleagues.

The Attorney General subsequently found that Councillor Colón Hayes violated the Open Meeting Law by improperly engaging with a quorum of the City Council. While she is entitled to her opinion on any nominee, she is not entitled to disregard the law in the process. Her communications included urging colleagues to oppose the appointment, recommending an alternative candidate, and suggesting that the matter be delayed or tabled. In effect, she actively coordinated efforts to influence the outcome before the issue was heard in open session, conduct that directly undermines the transparency the Open Meeting Law is designed to protect.

In an apparent effort to deflect attention from her violation, Councillor Colón Hayes has mischaracterized my recommendation as an attempt to circumvent the Council and bypass an election. That claim is incorrect and unsupported by both the facts and by the Attorney General's findings. There was no election; rather, there was at best an ambiguous process with unclear procedures outlined in the Regional Community Agreement for filling a vacant seat. With that in mind, I then placed the matter on a public docket accompanied by correspondence explaining my position. Furthermore, once the then School Committee Vice Chair developed a process involving the City Council, I fully supported and adhered to it.

It is also important to emphasize that the Attorney General's determination did not challenge the existence of a recommendation or of the procedural framework itself. Instead, it focused on Councilor Colón Hayes' improper efforts to influence a quorum outside of a duly noticed public meeting. The law strictly prohibits such pre-meeting coordination regardless of intent.

Councillor Colón Hayes' claim that she was merely "alerting" colleagues of the situation and that some Council members contacted her, but that the specific matter was not discussed is simply implausible. The Attorney General's investigation found that she went well beyond what is permissible, including attempting to sway votes, personally attacking the character of the nominee, and discussing her position. She also suggested removing the item from the docket "quietly." These actions are inconsistent with someone who "champions" transparency and instead reflects an intent to influence the outcome outside of the public process.

Residents reasonably expect elected officials to act with integrity, follow the law, and accept responsibility when mistakes are made. Attempting to shift blame through inaccurate representations, particularly considering the Attorney General's determination, are inconsistent with those expectations. While I will continue to exercise restraint in responding to most public commentary, I will not allow demonstrably false claims to go unchallenged.