

Holyoke's bid to avoid special mayoral election sent back to Statehouse

By [Dennis Hohenberger](#) | [Story source: MassLive.com](#)

HOLYOKE — The City Council on Tuesday approved, 11-1, a revised home rule petition that seeks to forgo a special mayoral election in the wake of Alex B. Morse's recent exit.

Interim Mayor and City Council President Todd McGee called for the special meeting [held online](#) Tuesday night. The council accepted changes to the petition made by the Massachusetts Legislature.

Besides eliminating a special election and special runoff, the petition would let any city councilor serve as acting mayor. McGee made it clear during his [March 26 swearing-in](#) that he could serve no more than a few weeks.

State Rep. Patricia Duffy, D-Holyoke, notified House leaders of McGee's limited tenure and the importance of forgoing costly special elections. Duffy will present the petition Wednesday to House leaders.

In a recent interview with The Republican/MassLive, Duffy said she did not expect the Legislature to pass the petition this week. Duffy, who took office in January, joined Tuesday's Zoom meeting.

"Everyone knows this is coming, and the Legislature and governor's office want to do what you (the City Council) want to do," she said. "It's a sensible course of action, and there's no controversy here. I think we can push it through pretty quickly."

The city charter clearly states that a special election must occur if the mayor's office is vacated with more than six months remaining on the term. Councilors pushed

for a [one-time exception](#), which requires approval from the Legislature and governor. The Legislature recently passed similar petitions from Boston and Lawrence.

Acting City Solicitor Crystal Barnes and a Statehouse lawyer hashed out the petition's final language. Barnes told the City Council little changed from the original petition, only the language required by the Legislature. She said the City Council would have 10 days to appoint an acting mayor if a vacancy occurs.

On Monday, Barnes submitted her letter of resignation, which takes effect in late April. Councilor James Leahy wished Barnes future success. She joins a long list of department heads who have tendered their resignations in recent months.

If the home rule petition fails, then a special election would occur, and a likely runoff. The mayoral race has three declared candidates, School Committee Member Devin Sheehan and City Councilors at Large Rebecca Lisi and [Michael J. Sullivan](#).

City Councilor Joseph M. McGiverin, who served as acting mayor in 1991, said the latest petition draft is what the council initially supported.

"It's unfortunate we have to fill in for nine months, but it's good to know that a couple of city councilors are willing to step forward and do the service until the November election," McGiverin said.

Ward 3 Councilor David Bartley was the lone "no" vote. Ward 1 Councilor Gladys Lebron-Martinez was absent.