

Boston City Employees Now All Clear to Make Fun of Olympics

A controversial section of the joinder agreement Boston Mayor Marty Walsh signed with the United States Olympic Committee last month has been removed from a new version of the agreement, which was released by City Hall on Tuesday.

The previous version of the agreement—a contract between the city and the USOC—suggested that city employees were not permitted to speak negatively about the Olympic bid, the USOC, or the International Olympic Committee. The previous agreement was roundly criticized, upon its release to the media through Freedom of Information Act requests, as prohibitive of free speech. Walsh responded by dismissing the language as “boilerplate,” and said he was working on a new version of the contract. The USOC also downplayed the term.

The paragraph pertaining to that language has been eliminated in the new version.

Other changes in the agreement brush upon the possibility that voters could seek to block the Olympics from happening. One new bit is tacked on to an existing paragraph that says the city does not need approval through any kind of governmental action (including a referendum) to sign a host city agreement. A sentence was added, with the city saying a referendum may yet happen. “(T)he City explicitly does not represent or warrant that a public referendum or initiative petition, binding or non-binding, related to the IOC Bid will not occur at the State or local level,” the new agreement reads.

And another part of the revised agreement adds to a section that said the city would indemnify the USOC from some losses related to the Olympic bid. The new agreement says the city will not be on the hook for “failure of payment to the USOC under Section 10.3 of the Bid City Agreement or Section VIII.F of the OCOG Memorandum of Terms, if and to the extent that such payment was necessitated by a State or local law prohibiting the hosting of the 2024 Olympic Games in Boston.” The terms of those separate documents—the Bid City Agreement and OCOG (Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games) Memorandum of Terms—are not clear at this point; Boston.com has asked the city for further clarification. However, the language suggests the city is protecting itself in the event that voters move to block the games.

The new version of the agreement also gets rid of a previous provision that said the city could not release the joinder or other bid agreement to “any third party.” (And with that, it was emailed out to the press.)

By Adam Vaccaro