



# MAYOR DAVID J. NARKEWICZ

City of Northampton  
210 Main Street, Room 12  
Northampton, MA 01060-3199  
(413) 587-1249 Fax: (413) 587-1275  
mayor@northamptonma.gov

---

November 18, 2019

Northampton City Council  
210 Main Street, Room 3  
Northampton, MA 01060

To the Honorable Members of the City Council,

Pursuant to my authority under Article 6, Section 6-1 of the City Charter, I am respectfully submitting the attached Administrative Order making the following changes to the City's Administrative Code:

**(1) Transfer of Housing, Community Development, and Disability Coordination to the Office of Planning and Sustainability.**

The recent and pending retirement of two longtime city staff serving in the positions of CDBG Director/Housing Planner and CDBG Administrator created an opportunity for both mission review and reorganization. Prior to Fiscal Year 2010, these two staff positions had been part of what was then called the Office of Planning and Development. In FY2010, they were transferred by my predecessor to a new, stand-alone Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO). As part of my first budget in FY2013, I eliminated CEDO as a stand-alone department and moved the two grant-funded positions into the Office of the Mayor in response to significant reductions in CDBG funding.

This Administrative Order would complete the circle and move the housing and community development positions back into what is now our Office of Planning & Sustainability. One of the positions has been re-configured and is being advertised as "Community Development Planner." This person will be responsible for administering the City's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and coordinating and collaborating the City's planning for affordable housing, homeless and social services, and the needs of those with disabilities. The former CDBG Administrator position has been reconfigured as just "Grants Administrator" and will administer both our CDBG and CPA grant funding as well as the myriad of other grants that our Office of Planning and Sustainability has been so adept at securing over the years.

Another significant aspect of this reorganization involves the new Community Development Planner taking over the role as the City of Northampton's designated Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator. This designation is currently held by the Director of Senior Services. During my tenure as Mayor this has been a topic of significant discussion with three successive Directors who felt they lacked both the time and expertise to carry out these responsibilities effectively. These concerns have recently crystalized with a recommendation by the Disability Commission in its proposed ADA Transition Plan that the ADA Coordinator Role be assigned to another, more appropriate staff member.

For the past several years, the Office of Planning & Sustainability has played a larger role in addressing accessibility issues in Northampton. It has both obtained grant funding and overseen bricks and mortar improvements, including: 1) Analyzing city policies in anticipation of an updated ADA Transition Plan

(\$10,000), 2) Upgrading the City Hall campus sidewalks to address the Disability Commission's top sidewalk priority (\$300,000), 3) Fixing accessibility obstacles on the downtown bike paths (\$100,000), 4) Extending sidewalks on North King Street and Hatfield Road (\$500,000), 5) Building a new, one mile paved trail connecting three neighborhoods off Florence Road to replace a walking path and make it accessible (\$450,000), 6) Improving accessibility of sidewalks in the Bridge Street School area (\$700,000), and 7) Fixing substandard wheelchair curb cut ramps (\$140,000). Planning & Sustainability has also done significant accessibility planning, including an accessibility assessment of open space, parks, and recreation and an accessibility stakeholder engagement process.

Moving the ADA Coordinator function from Senior Services to Planning & Sustainability will offer many benefits. First, it will put the four primary city accessibility plans (ADA Transition Plan, Parks & Recreation Accessibility Assessment, Community Development Accessibility Plan, and Community Development Consolidated Plan) under one roof, increasing the coordination and efficiency of that work. Second, it will consolidate our community development and social equity planning in one department. Lastly, it will merge the work of the ADA Coordinator and Disability Commission into the department already coordinating the city's bricks and mortar accessibility work.

In sum, adoption of this Administrative Order would transfer the ADA Coordinator designation to Office of Planning and Sustainability and delete it from the Senior Services Department in addition to effectuating the overall transfer of housing and community development responsibilities.

### **(2) Updating Department of Public Works (DPW) Divisions**

This Administrative Order reflects the updated divisional structure of the Department of Public Works (DPW) as effectuated by the FY2020 budget. Most notably, this involved creation of our new Forestry, Parks, and Cemeteries Division led by its own Superintendent who also currently serves as the Tree Warden. It also reflects the combining of Administration and Engineering into one division as effectuated by the FY2019 budget.

### **(3) Revisions to Four Multiple-Member Bodies: Board of Assessors; Housing Partnership; Energy and Sustainability Commission; Transportation and Parking Commission**

This Administrative Order modifies and/or clarifies the size, composition, and responsibilities of four multiple-member bodies. There is also a broader change affecting all multiple-member bodies via the elimination of the requirement that they elect a clerk as part of their officers. I am making this specific change to reflect the current practice. Nearly all of our boards, committees, and commissions are staffed for minute-taking, so the election of a clerk responsible for the minutes is not necessary.

The Board of Assessors membership composition is expanded from two city residents to three, and the Principal Assessor would no longer serve as the third member of that body. This change comes at the recommendation of the Principal Assessor and reflects a more modern city property assessment structure that distinguishes between paid professional staff and uncompensated appointed board members. It also eliminates the now-implicit requirement that the Principal Assessor be a Northampton resident by virtue of serving on a multiple-member body.

This Administrative Order reduces the size of the Housing Partnership from 15 to 11 members. This change comes at the recommendation of staff both to bring it in line with the size of our other large multiple-member advisory bodies and to reduce the challenge of ensuring a meeting quorum. There are currently vacancies on the Housing Partnership and at least one member will be departing in January, so this change will not impact the membership of any sitting members of the body.

Finally, this Administrative Order makes modifications and/or clarifications to the membership, leadership structure, and roles of the Energy and Sustainability Commission and the Transportation and Parking Commission. These two Commissions are modeled upon each other and are unique among our advisory bodies in that membership combines executive branch officials, legislative branch elected officials, and city residents. Both were created prior to adoption of the current City Charter, however, so while their collaborative model remains relevant and valuable there is a need for structural clarifications that ensure a clear separation of executive and legislative powers.

The membership of the Energy and Sustainability Commission is simplified by specifically designating the Facilities Director of Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School – the counterpart to the Director of Central Services – as a member. The membership of the Transportation and Parking Commission is changed by replacing the Director of Central Services with the Parking Enforcement Administrator as a standing member. While both of these executive branch officials play important roles in parking, I have come to realize that the latter’s focus on day-to-day, street level parking operations and enforcement is more relevant to the work of the body. Both officials support this change.

The other membership change removes the sub-appointment of a Planning Board member and simply expands the number of City residents on the Transportation and Parking Commission from 4 to 5 members. There is already planning representation on the Commission at a staff level and I believe this change both simplifies and ensures more continuity of membership by removing this rotating, biannually appointed member from another multiple-member body who is already by definition a City resident. Finally, there are clarifying changes to the authorities and responsibilities of the Commission to clearly delineate the advisory role of the body from the administrative and operational role of the subject-matter departments represented on it.

The more significant change to both Commissions is the specific designation of an ex-officio Chair and Vice Chair. In the case of the Energy and Sustainability Commission, the Director of Planning and Sustainability is designated as Chair and the Director of Central Services as Vice Chair. In the case of the Transportation and Parking Commission, the Director of Public Works is designated as Chair and the Police Chief as Vice Chair. I believe that this change will help clarify for the public that these two mixed membership advisory bodies are ultimately executive branch agencies as defined by the City Charter. There has been frequent public confusion over the years about this important distinction between executive and legislative branch committees, particularly when one or both bodies have been chaired by a member of the City Council. This change in leadership model should eliminate that confusion. Elected officials would continue to serve as members, bringing important policymaking perspective and communication while maintaining the separation of powers that is fundamental to Northampton municipal government.

Thank you in advance for your review of these proposed changes to our Administrative Code. I stand ready to answer any questions or provide additional information and respectfully request the City Council’s approval of the attached Administrative Order.

Sincerely,



David J. Narkewicz  
Mayor

cc: City Clerk