



Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

*Chair: Councilor Maureen T. Carney
Vice-Chair: Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge
Councilor Dennis P. Bidwell
Councilor James B. Nash*

Meeting Minutes

Date: November 4, 2019, 4 p.m.
Location: City Council Chambers
212 Main St., Northampton, Massachusetts

Present: Councilor Maureen T. Carney, Chair
Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge, Vice Chair
Councilor Dennis Bidwell
Councilor James B. Nash

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4 p.m., Councilor Carney called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilors Carney, Bidwell, LaBarge and Nash were present. Also present were Senior Services Director Marie Westburg and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler

Councilor Carney announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

There being no members of the public present, there was no public comment.

3. MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 9, 2019 AND OCTOBER 7, 2019

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of September 9, 2019 and October 7, 2019 as a group. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed by voice vote with 4 Yes, 0 No.

4. UPDATE FROM SENIOR SERVICES DIRECTOR MARIE WESTBURG

Director Westburg reviewed the Senior Services Director's Report dated November 4, 2019 adding explanatory comments as needed. (See attachment to original minutes.)

She started in her position more than a year and a half ago, Director Westburg reminded. The first thing she put into place was an expansion of hours to enable the senior center to serve people who are still working, since previously the center wasn't open hours working people could access. Along with that, she extended fitness center hours. They called it a pilot and expanded fitness offerings with classes through the Hampshire Regional YMCA. With the Fitness Pilot, the senior center saw a 12% increase in usage of its fitness center. 827 people used the fitness programs and gym for a total of 27,165 uses to date (from October 1, 2018).

Administrators looked at how seasons affect usage. In the summer things die down a little while in winter it gets really busy. Staff who have been there a long time said it was the busiest summer they have had.

The transportation program is very busy, having served 266 people with 7,483 rides.

The lunch program was closed down for a little bit but since reopened. Since reopening, Mary's Bistro has served 3,696 meals to 506 different people.

She thinks people are really happy about the expanded hours. Former Senior Services Director Linda Desmond did a survey and found people really wanted evening and weekend hours. They did a survey about the fitness center and have gotten a lot of feedback they are going to use to inform what they do going forward. It is a balancing act since they have trouble filling classes in some cases; i.e. when the weather is bad. They are trying to figure out how to accommodate a more flexible system where people don't have to commit to paying for all classes.

ARTS AND CULTURE PROGRAMS

They have become an 'Arts Night Out' venue and have had people come in for performances. Sometimes they will have an author doing a speaking engagement at the same time as they are showing an artist in the gallery.

They have added a lot of art classes. They are trying to make sure to have free offerings, low cost offerings and another tier. She gave examples of the types of offerings, including different fiber arts, printmaking, etc.

They have some evening programs such as a Shakespeare play reading workshop, meditation group and fitness center. They also have weekly movies with free popcorn which draw up to 90 people.

EDUCATION

Administrators added Chromebooks through a capital improvement request, the director reported. She thought having the ability to check out a Chromebook and work on it was a nice thing to make available. There are computer classes and how to use Iphone classes every Friday night as well as one-on-one tutoring. They have a conversational French group, Italian, Spanish and Irish Club where people learn about Irish culture.

NUTRITION

To help support the \$3 meal program, Mary's Bistro offers onsite catering to generate additional revenue. The bistro also offers monthly special lunches for \$5 paired with live entertainment (performances and speakers). Patrons can enjoy cabaret-style seating in the great room or eat in the Bistro dining area while listening to the music.

They had a farmer's market this summer open to the community in partnership with Grow Food Northampton. Pre-prepared healthy food made with farm vegetables was sold at the market.

Program operators added a lot of new food items to the coffee shop so on the days they're not serving lunch people can still get lunch. They are doing a Veterans' luncheon next week.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Staff have started a new information and referral line for social service programs. Because the department only has one social worker, she wanted to make sure people were not waiting for a call from her if they actually needed to talk to someone else since they are really a gateway agency. They have trained volunteers to take those messages and call people back with information to determine if they really need to meet with the social worker.

MOLST workshops, i.e. - planning ahead for health care decisions – were offered twice this year.

In the spring they are launching a six-week workshop called “Living Your Best Life.” The program - a Department of Mental Health (DMH) project - covers 10 tools to help seniors become more resilient so when they face transitions such as losing a spouse they have daily practices in place to manage stress. It is also a way to connect socially. She is excited about this because they don't have a lot of programs that are mentally-health focused.

They have a caregiver support group. She thinks there is more room to let people talk about coping with stress.

They have a partnership with the UMass nursing department in which nursing students come in with a teacher to present workshops on smoking cessation, topics around addiction, etc. They don't have a lot of inter-generational activity at the senior center and have been trying to get that going. She thinks it will take a little time to build the inter-generational piece.

In Williamsburg, she had a partnership with the school where students were paired with a senior for six weeks. She is hoping to develop more inter-generational programs.

INITIATIVE UPDATES

Northampton has been designated as an age and dementia-friendly community by AARP. They held two community listening sessions this year which were advertised on the radio.

The first project they have chosen to spearhead is working with the Chamber of Commerce in getting businesses to invest in being more age- and dementia-friendly in a two-fold way: in terms of hiring older workers and being user-friendly for people with dementia.

As part of the Employment after Retirement Network (EARN) initiative – started by Linda Desmond - the city got a grant to partner with the age- and dementia-friendly initiative to work with the business community. Forbes has agreed to be the first project site.

The director reviewed some of her recent activities, including speaking last week at the Tufts Foundation Global Age-Friendly Forum.

The Senior Services Department has a contract with the Gazette to produce the Chronicle. The Gazette has agreed to create an Age/Dementia-Friendly business designation as one of its Readers Choice Categories.

With the EARN initiative, they are able to offer a monthly workshop in job readiness skills. Staff will be developing a website that will serve both job seekers and business people.

Westburg noted the following additional activities:

- ❖ partnering with the Conway School of Landscape Design and local pollinators to improve the senior center green space and make it more pollinator-friendly. About 30 people attended a workshop. They also added plants to encourage pollination in the back.
- ❖ added outdoor seating with umbrellas in the back. Administrators are thinking about making the place look more vibrant from the outside too.
- ❖ fitness center survey
- ❖ They will be doing a transportation survey and also getting feedback about programming

There is a real shift at the senior center demographically, Ms. Westburg observed. A lot of programs that were popular before are waning. They have about 400 people join as members every year and are seeing a lot of new faces.

With a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) request, she started a study with an architect to look at the use of the lobby. It is a very big space that she thinks can be utilized better.

Councilor Nash noted that the senior center is in close proximity to some public housing. He asked how that relationship has developed.

She thinks people are feeling more connection, Ms. Westburg responded. Northampton Neighbors is doing neighborhood circles. That comes up a lot; how to make sure people who may experience barriers are being served.

Councilor Bidwell said he knows the YMCA is concerned with social isolation. He encouraged Ms. Westburg to share how the senior center addresses this issue.

She thinks Northampton Neighbors is filling some gaps, Westburg said. They are doing some cross-pollination; i.e. - making sure their members know about senior center programs and that the senior center refers to them. Northampton Neighbors is bringing people through their doors through its speaker series, etc.

She thinks as they work together to collaborate people will not fall through the cracks.

Members said they would be delighted if she could come back since they needed to suspend the conversation to open scheduled public hearings.

Councilor LaBarge asked if there was a contract with the YMCA to come to the senior center.

There was a temporary contract for the Fitness Pilot, Ms. Westburg said. The city will put out an RFP for a more permanent fitness program.

The Y is teaching about six classes. If a senior is a Y member, they don't have to pay for the classes. Senior center members pay a small fee. They have a drop-in rate of \$5. If people sign up for a whole month, it is \$3 per class.

Ms. Westburg agreed to come back Tuesday, November 12th at 4 p.m. to continue the conversation.

5. Public hearing to consider the laying out of Finn Street
6. Public hearing to consider the laying out of a portion of North Street (from King Street to Market Street)

Councilor Carney introduced the street layout public hearings for Finn Street and North Street. Councilor Bidwell moved to open the public hearing. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

The street acceptance process is a requirement to facilitate the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) project for the reconstruction of King Street scheduled to be bid by the summer of next year, Public Works Director Donna LaScaleia explained. The project is both federally and state-funded so there are certain requirements. City officials need to make sure prior to generating bid and construction documents that they deliver to the Department of Transportation (DOT) a right-of-way package with current and temporary easements necessary for the project and that they have officially accepted affected streets.

The city just went through this process with Damon Road, she reminded. They have to do an identical process for the reconstruction of King Street but need to make sure all the streets affected are publicly accepted ways.

In the course of its preparation for the project, DPW staff found out Finn Street and a portion of North Street were never officially accepted, meaning there is no official documentation that the city has a right of way there. The proposed process seeks to overlay a public way on top of what already exists. There is no effect to anyone's property or anyone's property deed with the exception of one owner (Pegorsky), she assured. Everybody else's property deed exactly matches the location of the street with the exception of Petegorsky, where the sidewalk encroaches on a tiny sliver of land. The city is going to overlay the right of way directly on top of the existing street, she advised.

She referred to the 'Derelict Fee' statute, which states that an abutter technically owns to the centerline of the roadway. The public way overlays directly on top of the roadway and is a permanent easement that supersedes all others. If the city discontinues the street, ownership reverts to the abutters.

They are not taking value; they are actually improving the value here, she asserted. She did field some calls from abutters and talked to Mr. Petegorsky, she confirmed.

The next step is an order to lay out the street as a public way, then the city will take permanent and temporary easements for construction to allow them to get federal and state funding for the project. "All we are doing is memorializing something that has existed for a very long time," Director LaScaleia stated.

Simon Ahtaridis of 43 Finn Street said he had concerns about plans for a traffic light at Finn and State Streets; in particular, concern about it creating a log jam on Warfield. A logjam of cars from the traffic light might make the current traffic logjam a lot worse, he suggested.

He asked if any requirement is tied to the federal funds.

The only requirement is that the city has to maintain the street, LaScaleia responded.

Regarding the traffic light, they have had a pretty robust debate on the subject. The DPW had modeling of traffic impacts done. Engineers heard from people concerned about people cutting through their neighborhood to avoid the light. They did not see in that modeling any negative impacts to Warfield. The point is well taken and they will make sure it is something they continue to look at. They certainly don't want unintended consequences, she noted.

They just did a traffic signal project at Bridge and Jackson Street, LaScaleia added. A light "is going to control things better for pedestrians." She is not adverse to having the state pay for this light and just leaving it on flash.

John Murray of 45 Finn Street asked about temporary easements; is it for lay down of material?

Ms. LaScaleia explained that it is for sidewalk construction as a machine might encroach on the front yard by a small amount. The temporary easements are for temporary impacts based on the work.

Mr. Murray expressed his understanding that this is to memorialize this section of road and put in a set of lights. He asked the extent of the project.

It is really a King Street project that creeps a little into North Street and Finn Street due to intersection improvements, LaScaleia clarified. The limit of the project is the signal on State Street but when city engineers realized the city hadn't accepted Finn Street it went ahead to accept the whole thing.

Director LaScaleia fielded additional questions about the overall project, including the installation of the signal at State and Finn Street. City officials want to leverage available funds to put some controls in this intersection, she explained, as they are talking about a \$300,000 improvement. Even if they disable it for everything but pedestrian controls, it is worth the investment, she opined.

Councilor Bidwell asked if there are sidewalk improvements.

Yes, there are ramp improvements and ADA improvements as part of this, LaScaleia confirmed.

Councilor LaBarge asked the cost, and LaScaleia estimated between five and seven million. The city needs to accept the street regardless of whether it does the project, she pointed out, as the city should not be plowing a road that is not formally accepted. Even if the entire project gets scuttled tomorrow, this needs to get done.

The derelict fee statute states that in the absence of a formally-accepted street plan, adjacent property owners are the owners to the centerline of the street, she reiterated.

Councilor Bidwell termed it an 'important piece of housekeeping.'

North Street is an identical scenario, LaScaleia confirmed. There is nothing remarkable to discuss in its case. City councilors are also laying it out as a public way. The city is taking a permanent easement right on top of the street.

There being no further public comment, Councilor Bidwell moved to close the public hearing. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote. The hearing was closed at 5:17 p.m.

Given that there were no objections from the public, Councilor Bidwell moved to support the laying out of Finn Street and North Street as considered here today. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

7. **ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE**

None.

8. **NEW BUSINESS**

Councilor Carney suggested sending questions to Ms. Westburg in advance of next Tuesday's meeting if possible. Members discussed ideas for a departmental presentation for December. Councilor Bidwell said he thought it would be interesting to hear from the Office of Planning and Sustainability (OPS) re: the current set of plans for the redesign of downtown. However, Councilor Carney expressed the opinion that OPS isn't within the purview of city services.

Members asked if Ms. Westburg could be asked to send the notes of her presentation.

9. **Adjourn**

Upon motion made by Councilor Bidwell and seconded by Councilor Nash, the meeting was adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

Prepared By:

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Senior Services Director's Report

City Services Committee at City Council Chambers, Nov 4th, 2019

Info/Reports on STATS from Sept 2018-present

- Approximately 390 new members join every year
- Expanded Hours, pilot started last Oct (M/W/F 8-5pm, T/TH 8-7pm, Sat 8-12)
- Mary's Bistro served 506 people a total of 3696 meals
- Transportation Program served 266 people with 7483 rides
- Fitness Pilot 12% increase in use w/new hours
- Pilot of HRYMCA Classes- very successful in daytime classes, less interest in evening classes but still some interest from working seniors.

Arts and Culture Programs:

Arts Night Out Venue- at least 6 evenings with multiple artists, authors and musicians

Authors/MUSIC: performers including Berkshire Hills Music Academy, Young at Heart Chorus, Hampshire Music Club etc.

Art Classes : Art Buffet-free weekly art club, Drawing Class, Printmaking, Painting etc

Fiber Arts: Bag Share Project, Knitting, Sewing Class, Quilting, Needle Work,

Photography/Writing Clubs

Shakespeare Play Reading Workshop: evening program, well attended

Movies: Weekly movies with free popcorn

Fitness:

Pilot Outcomes: Use Increased by 12% over last year in gym and in the 21 classes per week
Pilot contract with HRYMCA for several classes that are specifically geared towards seniors.

Survey: Developing a new fitness payment and membership model

Dance: Partner Dancing Classes (35 people + 15 waitlist), Line Dancing, Tap

Education:

Technology: Weekly Computer Classes and individual tutoring appointments, ChromeBook Trainings, How to use your iPhone etc.

Language: Conversational French, Italian (Smith Students), Spanish, Irish Club

Guest Speakers monthly or more often presenting on travel, medical issues, etc.

NN Speaker Series: In Partnership w/ Northampton Neighbors, host a monthly evening event onsite

Nutrition

Catering: Onsite for groups/rentals creates revenue for lunch program.

Farmers Market w/Grow Food Northampton, Cooking Club and selling of food products made with farm vegetables - also supplied to markets at other sites as samples.

Lunch 2x weekly \$3 for seniors, Monthly Special Lunches \$5 with live entertainment

Coffee Shop: Adding new food items for inexpensive meals and gatherings

Veteran's Luncheon: Nov 12th, 40 Veterans will eat free and be honored

Social Services

Social Work: *New* Information and Referral phone line

RAD Program- 1 Day Self-Defense Program

MOLST Workshops- offered 2x this year

4K Grant Award: MCOA "Living Your Best Life Program" Spring 2020, 6 week (3 hr classes) Resiliency Training for older adults

Intergenerational Programs: Recent weekend event cancelled due to low enrollment, we will continue to work on offerings

Collaborations with Community Organizations and city Departments:

Rail Trail Committee, HRYMCA, Forbes Library, Planning Dept., Smith College, Northampton Neighbors, aging service partners and businesses (Cooley Dic, Nursing Homes and Assistive Living)

Initiative Updates

Age/Dementia Friendly Initiative: 2 Community Listening Sessions held this year

- **Tactical Urbanism-** Planning Dept (AARP Funded) Senior Forum for Age friendly design project in downtown Florence.
- **Tuft's Foundation Global Age Friendly Forum** Cindy Langley and I spoke at the Oct 28th with panel and Dr. Kaletche (Previous Director of The World Health Organization, coined the term "Age Friendly")
- **Age Friendly Businesses Initiative:** Meeting with Chamber of Commerce, Gazette has agreed to create an Age/Dementia Friendly Business designation in *Gazette Readers Choice Categories*. In collaboration with EARN -see below

(EARN)Employment After Retirement Network : 4K Grant from MCOA

- **Job Readiness Workshops** -monthly workshops for regional job seekers 50+
- **Job Fairs- 2x year**
- **Website:** educating businesses on value of hiring older workers as well as sensitivity to older consumer needs.

Landscaping at Senior Center- Fall workday with Conway School of Design, Local Harmony and Western Ma. Pollinators to increase pollinator friendly plants and improve greenspaces onsite.

RainGarden - now more pollinator friendly! Elder Vision donation of \$500 for plants

Fiscal:

Annual Appeal: solicitation for donations will be sent out in Census mailing for revenue to support programs and services, considering categories for gift(programs/financial aid fund)

Fundraising Needs: Financial Aid fund, building upgrades, new furniture, new carpeting etc

Wellness Grant: Monthly means based financial aid of \$15 per month to be used toward a fitness class/membership, clinic, or farmshare.

Communications

Marketing Plan: radio ad, regular presence of ads and content in Gazette products

Donor Directory: Approx 2K has been received to support cost of publication/mailing to residents and thru subscriptions by non-residents.

Assessments and Surveys:

Transportation Survey: currently being formulated to identify ways to streamline services and make the program more sustainable.

Participant Program Evaluations: planning for this to happen this Fall. I have samples of questionnaires used by other Senior Centers we will build off of with input from the council next month.

Facilities/Staffing

Building Upgrades: conducting a space utilization study with **Dietz & Company Architects, Inc.** (Capital Improvement Funds) Exterior Painting is planned by Central Services for 2021

Staffing Updates: Linda DeMercurio and Jenn Carbery have moved on. I will be restructuring a bit and hiring a new Department Assistant and Transportation Coordinator.

Restructuring of Building Use Policy: No longer renting space during our program hours but we are partnering with other organizations for collaborative programming. Space is made available for community use and rentals after hours. We are providing catering for rentals to build revenue for our food programs.