



Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council

*Councilor David A. Murphy, Chair
Councilor Maureen T. Carney
Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge
Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra*

**City Council Chambers, 212 Main Street
Wallace J. Puchalski Municipal Building
Northampton, MA**

Meeting Date: April 4, 2019

Note: The Finance Committee Meeting took place during the City Council Meeting as announced. The City Council Meeting began at 7 p.m.

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 7:19 p.m. Acting Chair Councilor Carney called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were committee members Maureen Carney, Marianne LaBarge & Gina-Louise Sciarra. Absent was Chair David Murphy. Also present from the City Council were Jim Nash, Ryan O'Donnell and Dennis Bidwell. Councilors William H. Dwight and Alisa Klein were absent.
3. **Approval Of Minutes From The Previous Meeting**
 - A. **Minutes of March 21, 2019**

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of March 21, 2019. Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion passed 3:0 by voice vote (Councilor Murphy absent).
4. **Financial Orders**
 - A. **19.036 An Order To Approve Purchase Of 85 Acres +/- In The Mineral Hills, Rocky Hill And Beaver Brook Greenways, And To Appropriate CPA Funds For Such Purpose**

Councilor Carney read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Sciarra seconded.

Office of Planning and Sustainability (OPS) Director Wayne Feiden presented. OPS staff usually comes before the City Council for acquisition of one piece of property, but because the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) funded all these together, they have bundled them in one order, he explained. He described the four parcels to be purchased as being 'scattered all over the city,' pointing out their locations on a locus map. Two parcels seen in the lower left of the map are part of the Mineral Hills, a parcel to the north is part of Beaver Brook and a very small parcel off of Route 10 is next to the Rocky Hill Greenway.

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The first parcel is off of Glendale Road. With City Council support, the city has acquired a greenway with frontage on Glendale Road and Route 66. Immediately south of this is the Waggin' Trails Dog Park to be developed soon. The city is paying \$500 an acre for 19 acres behind the Waggin' Trails Dog Park – an excellent price, he related. The land is owned by the owner of the dog park, who is required to preserve a certain percentage of the property as open space. They already have an agreement to purchase the property and so are ready to close whenever authorization is received.

The next parcel still in negotiations is the rear of St. Mary's Cemetery in Leeds at the confluence of Beaver Brook and the Mill River. The Leeds Civic Association approached the city to propose its purchase. It offers lots of walking opportunities. The city wants to buy and the Catholic Church wants to sell.

The next property is also part of Mineral Hills and is a wooded property owned by Fay and John O'Masta. It is beautiful wooded land abutting conservation area.

Last is a very small parcel next to the Rocky Hill Greenway past the transfer station and the bike path bridge. The lot, which used to contain a single-family home, provides some opportunity for parking for the bike path and is surrounded on 2 ½ sides by conservation land. Because the home was built on wetlands, once it was gone the wetlands started emerging so it's no longer a developable piece of land.

Mr. Feiden fielded questions from members. Councilor LaBarge confirmed the purchase price of several parcels. Councilor Bidwell asked if it's true that none of these parcels have residential development value.

The only one with some development value is the one on Easthampton Road since it has frontage. However, wetlands are present, he reiterated.

There being no further questions, Councilor Carney called the motion to a vote, and it passed 3:0 by voice vote with one absent (Councilor Murphy).

B. 19.037 An Order To Appropriate \$30,000 In CPA Funds To Florence National Register Historic District Project

Councilor Carney read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Sciarra seconded.

Northampton and Florence in particular has a rich history of abolition and reform, Conservation, Preservation and Land Use Planner Sarah LaValley reminded, citing Sojourner Truth, David Ruggles and the Arts and Industry building as notable examples. The area has already been recognized as part of the state's Underground Railroad Historic District. This project will expand and build upon that and has tremendous public support. Many people came to the CPC meeting to speak in favor, and the CPC was pleased to provide unanimous support.

Councilor Bidwell asked about the state's Underground Railroad Historic District and how it relates to this district.

That district was put forward by the Massachusetts Historical Commission; it was not a local initiative, Ms. LaValley confirmed. Several houses belonging to that district will be part of this district as well.

Councilor Sciarra asked the boundaries of the district and Ms. LaValley referred to a slide. It's not a contiguous district, she noted.

The motion passed unanimously by voice vote with 3 Yes, 0 No (Councilor Murphy absent).

C. 19.041 An Order To Declare Surplus And Authorize The Sale Of Former South Street School

Councilor Carney read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Sciarra seconded.

This would be the third former school building his administration has asked the City Council to surplus for sale, Mayor Narkewicz related. A local committee was formed to study the South Street School in 1995 and at that time recommended that the building be declared surplus and leased. It ended up becoming the site of the Northampton Community Music Center. The first lease was issued in 2007 and, in 2008, a young strapping Ward 4 councilor brought forth a resolution to extend the lease on the property to 2033. There is currently a lease on the property for \$1 a year but the Community Music Center has come forward with interest in buying it outright. The fact that they don't own the building limits their ability in some cases to apply for certain grants. They have invested millions in upgrading the facility. This order would declare the building surplus and allow an RFP to be issued. The proposal is somewhat analogous to the Feiker School which had a long-term tenant with a lease - Nonotuck Preschool. The city surplussed the school and the tenant was the successful bidder. From his perspective, the Community Music Center has been operating in the building for decades and has been a good steward. There's no reason for the city to continue to own it; it's really a liability on its books. In the same spirit in which they decided to surplus the Feiker School and before that the Florence Grammar School, he is proposing to do the same for the South Street School.

Councilor Sciarra asked if the contract would specify that it continue to be a community music center.

It will specify that it has to be used for early childhood education for a set period. It will be sold with the lease on it until 2033 so if someone other than the Community Music Center were to acquire it they would have to honor the lease. Embedded in the order is the requirement that it be used for music education. The property could only be used for a school or for housing under current zoning.

With all agreements, the city has stipulated that if a tax-exempt organization purchases it would have to negotiate a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) with the city. He's been applying the 25% model that he presented several years ago. The city has the same arrangement with the Feiker School and several other smaller PILOTS. It has been a fairly consistent policy of the city.

Councilor Bidwell commented that he is a huge fan of the Community Music Center as a neighbor and how it has added to the cultural richness of the city. He thinks this is a win/win in that the city picks up some capital similar to tax revenue and the center can proceed with improvements it wouldn't otherwise be able to finance.

Councilor Carney called the motion to a vote, and it passed unanimously 3:0 with one absent (Councilor Murphy).

D. 19.038 An Order To Appropriate CPA Funds For Broad Brook Greenway Invasive Plant Control Project

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Councilor Carney read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Sciarra seconded.

This is not the first time this project has come before them; it's been funded twice before by the CPC and City Council, Ms. LaValley reminded. This will allow the Broad Brook Coalition (BBC) to continue the work.

Councilor O'Donnell asked about the status of the project, given Ms. LaValley's mention that this would be the third time the city has appropriated money for it.

A lot of progress has been made and the amounts of the requests has been going down from year to year, Ms. LaValley reported. The BBC has been able to do more with volunteer labor.

Councilor O'Donnell registered his observation that they don't want to become part of the operating budget of another organization. It would be encouraging to know that BBC had a multi-year plan. He likes the fact that the amounts have been going down year after year. His comment would be that he hopes it's being thought about that it's not a perpetual source of money and that he'd like to see a long-term plan.

It is definitely part of a long-term plan, Ms. LaValley confirmed.

Councilor O'Donnell referred to a description by a member of the public during public comment of how carefully and judiciously chemicals are applied in the process of invasive removal. Ms. LaValley said the BBC uses the same consultant/contractor as used by the Lathrop Community.

Councilor LaBarge asked how much of an improvement has been made since they began using chemicals on the property. Ms. LaValley said it depended on the species. Some are almost gone while others have a longer seedbank.

Councilor Nash asked about the types of herbicides being used here. Are they pre-ordained? He asked.

She doesn't have the application in front of her, but it proposed options that were recommended in consultation with the consultant.

Councilor Nash asked what length they go to not to use pesticides.

BBC is really judicious in its use of pesticides and has been trying to rely more on volunteer labor. For some species like Water Chestnuts, there are some groups that will use herbicides but BBC doesn't do that. They've been relying exclusively on hand-pulling. But their consultant has advised them and they've seen through experience that some of them really can't be treated through hand-pulling alone.

Councilor Sciarra asked if these are different plants from the last application. She believes so, Ms. LaValley said.

The motion passed unanimously by voice vote with 3 Yes, 0 No (Councilor Murphy absent).

E. 19.042 An Order To Accept Gift Of Bench From Leeds Civic Association

Councilor Carney read the text of the order.

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Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Sciarra seconded.

The city will be accepting a donation of \$1,103 from the Leeds Civic Association for the purchase of the bench, Mayor Narkewicz confirmed. This is a great collaborative project, and they are grateful to the Leeds Civic Association for making the donation. The DPW will be working with the donor to help install it.

How could they say 'no' - this is great, Councilor LaBarge commented.

The motion passed unanimously 3:0 by voice vote with one absent (Councilor Murphy).

5. **New Business**

-Reserved for topics that the Chair did not reasonably anticipate would be discussed.

None.

6. **Adjourn:** There being no other business, Councilor Sciarra moved to adjourn. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion carried on a voice vote of 3 Yes, 0 No, 1 absent. The meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

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