



## **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: May 2, 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 7:12 p.m. Councilor Murphy called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were committee members David Murphy (Chair), Maureen Carney, Marianne LaBarge and Gina-Louise Sciarra. Also present from the City Council were Dennis Bidwell, William H. Dwight, Alisa Klein, Jim Nash and Ryan O'Donnell.
3. **Approval Of Minutes From The Previous Meeting**
  - A. **Minutes of April 18, 2019**

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of April 18, 2019. Councilor Carney seconded. The motion passed 4:0 by voice vote.
4. **Financial Orders**
  - A. **19.048 An Order To Appropriate Free Cash To Cover Snow And Ice Deficit**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order, which asked that \$152,791 be appropriated to cover the deficit in the Snow and Ice account.

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

Not bad, Councilor Murphy commented. Better than some winters.

Administrators budgeted \$500,000 in the Snow and Ice account, Mayor Narkewicz explained. The overage was \$152,791. As usual, they have come back in the spring to true up the account.

Councilor Murphy called the motion to approve the order to a vote, and it passed unanimously 4:0.

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**B. 19.049 An Order To Authorize Taking Of Triangular Parcel At Intersection Of Riverside, North Elm And Milton**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order, noting that the corner is Riverside, *Elm* and Milton, not *North* Elm. He stated that the word 'North' should be struck.

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

Mayor Narkewicz deferred to Office of Planning and Sustainability Director Wayne Feiden.

Mr. Feiden informed members that Finance Director Susan Wright convenes various department heads once every quarter to look at the city's tax title list to move delinquent accounts along. They look at the list every three months to see if any of the properties might have a public benefit. The intersection of Milton, Riverside and Elm is a relatively high-crash intersection. The city has no immediate plans to redesign it but staff thought they should grab it. Once acquired, it will go into a long-term inventory. Planners have brainstormed two potential long-term solutions to the intersection's awkward configuration; one is a mini roundabout and the other is making Milton Street turn due left to hit Riverside before connecting to Elm Street. They will be back in five years with specific plans.

The owner of the body shop thought he owned that parcel at first but found out in reviewing the deed that he didn't, Councilor LaBarge related. He was very willing to pay the tax title amount to acquire the parcel but said he had talked to Mr. Feiden and not reached an agreement. Since he owns an adjacent lot, buying the parcel would give him sufficient land to develop it for a two-family residence.

He had a conversation with him a couple of years ago, Mr. Feiden confirmed. He told him that if the city decides to make Milton take a left turn to hit Riverside at a right angle they might do a land swap with him in the future, but he wouldn't want to give up the land at this point.

"He's not losing any property" since he presently does not own the parcel, Mr. Feiden pointed out.

Councilor LaBarge moved to amend the order to say "Elm." Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

In response to a question from Councilor Klein, Mr. Feiden said he mentioned the taking in passing to the Bay State neighborhood association at a recent event. Councilor Klein asked if he'd gotten any feedback from neighbors and Feiden said he had heard general concerns over the years about the safety of the intersection. Councilor Murphy said he has gotten a number of complaints over the years about the angles of the intersection.

Former City Councilor Alex Ghiselin was getting his vehicle repaired at the body shop, and owner told him about the plans for the intersection. Mr. Ghiselin said he didn't know anything about it, Councilor LaBarge added. The city has not done any particular outreach at this point, Mr. Feiden reiterated.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

**C. 19.061 An Order To Appropriate Compensation For And Authorize Eminent Domain Taking Of Land Of Damon**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order

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

The City Council authorized a Community Preservation Act (CPA) expenditure about five years ago to survey the entire Saw Mill Hills, which had never been well-documented, Mr. Feiden advised. When the area was surveyed, surveyors found a parcel in the middle that was essentially abandoned. (Somebody died a number of years ago and no one ever took it over.) The city is acquiring it to fill in the gaps between conservation areas. You wouldn't know it's not city land because it has established trails. The city already has funds set aside, so it is an appropriation of existing funds.

The parcel is almost in the geographic middle of a triangle between Chesterfield Road, Ryan Road, Spring Street and Sylvester Road, etc., It is south of Roberts Hill.

Councilor Sciarra asked if taxes were owed on it.

The parcel had no Assessor's ID because it had never been identified as a separate parcel, so no taxes have ever been assessed. The city has to put funds in escrow in case an heir ever comes forward.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

**D. 19.064 An Order To Appropriate Money And Authorize Takings By Eminent Domain For Damon Road Reconstruction**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order

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

The long expected Damon Road project, Councilor Murphy observed.

The city began working on the design in 2008, and the state ramped up the project in 2012 when it reached the 25% design stage, Mayor Narkewicz confirmed. The state then agreed to take over the design and put it on the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) administered by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

The state is going to pay for and manage the construction, and the city's role in the process is to pay for right of way acquisitions, Mayor Narkewicz explained. These aren't all the acquisitions; there are actually two more on the other side of the railroad tracks which will be handled by the state. The city will take the opportunity while the road is torn up to replace about 1,800 feet of sewer line as well as 3,800 feet of water line with funding from water and sewer enterprise funds. The state will be paying for other major infrastructure including the replacement of a major (72-inch) storm sewer that crosses under the Norwottuck Rail Trail. Road reconstruction will include sidewalks and bicycle and pedestrian amenities, including pedestrian safety improvements and crossings for residents at River Run. The project will also make the final needed improvements with widening of the road and installation of queuing lanes at North King Street and Damon Road. The project is programmed for the FY2020 TIP.

Councilors may remember an e-mail back in 2017 informing them that the city hired Peter Sleeper Associates to contact each of the property owners, Mayor Narkewicz continued. Consultants held a meeting and City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for May 2, 2019

have been holding individual meetings with each of the property owners to explain what is needed for the project, whether it be a construction easement or the taking of a piece of land. This culminated in the calculation of a dollar figure for acquisition. In a couple of cases people have just agreed to donate construction easements. The order allows them to move forward to the next step and provides money needed to sign contracts with land owners. The process is very similar to what happened on Route 66 or any big project involving alteration of a right-of-way. Damon Road is the interchange between the north and south exits of Interstate 91 and carries a lot of traffic to the hill towns as well, he noted.

Councilor LaBarge asked if the \$680,300 requested is to pay for eminent domain takings.

As stated, it is primarily for acquisition but allows for several different ways of acquiring, including possibly eminent domain. If city officials go the eminent domain route, they have to offer damages. They have appraisals for each of the easements and/or acquisitions. The order does not authorize eminent domain taking but appropriates funds for acquisition of the properties. If they end up having to use eminent domain, they will come back to the City Council with an additional order.

Who is doing the construction work? Councilor LaBarge asked.

MassDOT has not yet awarded the project but it will be put out to bid, Mayor Narkewicz said.

Her main concern is because of what they went through with the reconstruction of Route 66, Councilor LaBarge said. Property owners were promised that property pins would be replaced and they never were. She is asking that, in due respect, if contractors remove the pins, they put them back.

This project is a little bit different from Route 66 because there is a lot of asphalt and commercial lots, so he's not sure there are as many property pins, but in cases where there are they can certainly ask them to be mindful of that, Mayor Narkewicz responded.

Councilor Sciarra wondered if sidewalks would go all the way up Bridge Road to Jackson Street.

He's fairly certain they do, but he can look at the plans to verify that, Mayor Narkewicz replied. That was one of the goals of the project.

His question is also pedestrian safety and the interests of Hampshire Heights and River Run residents in safe access across King Street, particularly to the Pride gas station which serves as a convenience store for nearby residents, Councilor Dwight agreed.

Councilor Nash asked about the list of figures for individual parcels. Are those negotiated and agreed-upon numbers? He asked.

The city has had a third party appraiser appraise the properties, Mayor Narkewicz reiterated. They can't sign a contract unless there is an appropriated source of funds, so this order moves the process forward.

Councilor Nash asked, by and large, whether people along Damon Road are happy with this.

The only extended discussions they have had are with Pacific Printing's owners -Mayor Narkewicz advised. The sidewalk for them is going to be right in front of their door as opposed to right now where there is a little bit of separation. By and large, his understanding is that people who live on Damon Road and have to try to

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get out of their driveways and want to walk know that this project is long overdue. "We don't foresee any issues with it."

Councilor Bidwell asked about the breakdown of funding.

The \$10 million figure is the full project cost, and \$8,034,922 is the federal contribution toward the project, Mayor Narkewicz clarified. State funds make up the difference between \$10,043,653 and \$8,034,922. The local piece is the Chapter 90 funds used to hire Mr. Sleeper for his services and the cost of acquisitions.

He is a member of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and in many ways its program is like the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), Mayor Narkewicz said. Last week members spent about two hours trying to rejigger projects because a bid came in higher than expected. The \$8,034,922 is a placeholder based on an engineers' estimate. Until the project goes out to bid, they won't really know the total cost. The city's cost is the right-of-way acquisitions and about \$1.2 million in water and sewer improvements.

Councilor Bidwell expressed his understanding that the difference between the \$10 million figure and the \$8 million figure is the city's \$1.2 million contribution toward water and sewer replacement, but Mayor Narkewicz said he would have to verify that. He's not convinced the difference between those two figures is a local match, he said. There are direct federal highway funds and funds that are allocated to the state, he noted. In any event, Northampton is getting significant leveraging of its local dollars, he concluded. This is not a project they would otherwise be able to tackle themselves.

The other side he's concerned about is under Interstate '91, Councilor O'Donnell said. He always sees people walking there.

MassDOT has installed a sidewalk there, Mayor Narkewicz said.

However, it is poorly lit and a dangerous, narrow area, Councilor Dwight stressed.

The sidewalk comes up to the offramp and continues up to the Walmart plaza, Mayor Narkewicz advised. There will be a pedestrian signal at King Street and Damon Road to help people cross, he confirmed.

Councilor O'Donnell said he would like to add his voice to other councilors that that is something he'd like to see. The city has done great work in building out the connections towards Walmart. He asked if it's possible to amend the plans.

Mayor Narkewicz said he wanted to verify existing plans. He referred to a zoomed in plan with greater detail. Referring to this plan, he advised councilors that when drivers turn left onto Bridge Road, there will be a five-foot sidewalk going up the hill and a bike lane. The sidewalk widens to six feet and goes all the way up to Jackson Street. There will be a four-way crosswalk like in downtown with crosswalks to all corners of the intersection. There are full pedestrian accommodations at that crosswalk, he confirmed.

Councilor Carney asked how folks can access those plans.

They are on the MassDOT website and he will verify that they are also on the city website, Mayor Narkewicz said.

Councilor Klein asked if this coincides with the roundabout to be built up on North King Street.

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That's actually starting sooner, it's a FY2019 project, the Mayor said.

Councilor Carney clarified that Councilor Klein is talking about the roundabout up by Mark Motors.

That one may be in FY2020 or FY2021, Mayor Narkewicz said. They have an interesting convergence; a number of Northampton projects are advancing in the queue because they're ready, he noted. The newest roundabout will be where exit 19 is at Damon Road. These projects move around a lot as funding gets moved from one project to another. For his money, if MassDOT wants to do these projects now and they're on the TIP, he'd prefer that they do it because there is a risk of projects getting bumped off the TIP.

Councilor Nash asked if they could get an overview for either a City Council or public meeting of some sort to address questions about crosswalks on King Street, etc.

Because this is a MassDOT process, state officials already held design public hearings, Mayor Narkewicz reminded. He's happy to provide lots of information but is reluctant to say, 'Let's all get together and redesign Damon Road.' He could try to bring in a presentation for second reading with a more blown-up version of the plan, he said.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

**E. 19.066 An Order To Reprogram \$45,000 From Bridge Street Elementary Roof To Forbes Library HVAC Project**

Councilor Carney stepped out.

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order

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

The city has been doing two major capital projects at Forbes Library spanning several years and involving multiple bids and rebidding, Mayor Narkewicz reminded. The HVAC project was designed to provide better heating and ventilation for the special collections at the library. There is work remaining to be done to complete the project so there's a shortfall. They have some remaining funds from the Bridge Street School roof project, so he is basically asking to reprogram those funds to the Forbes Library project.

Councilor Sciarra expressed her understanding that it is capital money and so can't be used for other school expenses, and Mayor Narkewicz confirmed that is true. It is also bonded money and so has to be appropriated for projects with a similar useful life, he added.

Councilor Carney returned. Councilor Bidwell stepped out.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

**F. 19.067 An Order To Appropriate \$122,441 Free Cash To Forbes Library Window Replacement**  
Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

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

This is the other project they are doing at Forbes Library in conjunction with the HVAC project - part of the energy efficiency upgrades to the building, Mayor Narkewicz explained. Staff can tell you papers blow off the tables in the winter time so there is significant energy loss. The windows are original to the building. They applied for more money from the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) but were only granted \$100,000. He would like to complete this project, especially since it's not going to get any cheaper. He knows Lisa Downing and the Trustees are also very interested in doing this.

Councilor Murphy called the motion to a vote, and it passed unanimously 4:0.

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 Carney seconded. The motion carried on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

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