



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: May 6, 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 P. Bidwell
Councilor James B. Nash

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4:02 p.m., Councilor Carney called the meeting to order and introduced members. On a roll call, Councilors Bidwell, Carney, LaBarge and Nash were present.

Also present: Veterans Services Director Steven J. Connor; Tom Pease, Commander of VFW Post 8006 and Vice President of Veterans Council of Northampton

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 APRIL 1, 2019

Councilor Bidwell moved to approve the minutes of April 1, 2019. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed with 4 Yes, 0 No.

4. VETERANS SERVICES DEPARTMENT - UPDATE ON MEMORIAL DAY ACTIVITIES

Veterans' officers passed out a sheet listing upcoming activities, including OTI Training, Cruise-in Northampton Classic Car and Truck Shows at the Bluebonnet Diner and the Memorial Day Parade. The car show is a multi-day fundraising event to help veterans and spouses of veterans in need and will take place May 15, 2019, June 19, 2019, July 17, 2019 and August 21, 2019. The annual Memorial Day parade is Monday, May 27, 2019 and will mark the parade's 151st anniversary. The parade steps off at 10 o'clock from Trinity Row in Florence and ends at the Park Street cemetery, lasting 45 minutes to an hour.

Mr. Connor recommended getting there at 9:30 a.m. Councilors Bidwell and LaBarge said they are planning to attend. Councilor Carney said she would RSVP.

As an added feature, this year they will have a narrator (Brian Joyce) narrating the parade from the little triangular park. Two F-16 jets will do a flyover assuming there is no cloud cover. Every year one of the service organizations provides a collation for the parade and, this year, the Elks reached out to them and asked to use their parking lot. They will be setting up their tent in the parking lot and all are welcome to come over. Connor cited this as an example of the lodge and club working together. There will be a ceremony after the parade with him as speaker and the theme of sacrifice and survivors (family left behind).

He reviewed other upcoming events, including Flag Day Ceremony June 16th, the Annual Pig Roast Saturday, July 27th and the Veterans Day Parade on Monday, November 11th.

There will be a Veterans Day Parade this year, he confirmed. It will step off at 11 a.m. from Lampron Park and proceed up Main Street to Pulaski Park where there will be a ceremony to recognize local veterans. They are talking about the possibility of having a brunch at the Senior Center or the WWII Club. For the last dozen years they have always had a Veterans' breakfast on another day and then had a ceremony and a speaker. This year, they will have a ceremony but the speaker will be at the breakfast or brunch to limit time outdoors in the cold. (There will be a briefer ceremony outside after the parade, he clarified.)

The VFW has bingo every Friday night open to the community, and any and all are welcome.

There is a post meeting Wednesday, Mr. Pease advised. Post members will be doing another policeman and fireman's award meeting. This past year the ceremonies were in October and March and they will most likely do that again. He will let them know the dates.

For the first time this year, local veterans will be doing a 'field of honor,' Mr. Connor added. A few communities have had these, including West Springfield and Mansfield. It will be presented as a community experience and is an opportunity to put up a whole lot of flags. The event will start on Armed Forces Day weekend and run through the 4th of July. They are planning something for the community on Memorial Day, Flag Day and the 4th of July. The event is an opportunity to sponsor and put up flags for those killed in the line of duty. They are hoping to have 150 flags. It will be at the Elks in conjunction with the city.

Councilor Carney asked if Mr. Connor wanted outreach to the community about the opportunity to sponsor a flag. Members encouraged him to attend the public comment section of an upcoming City Council meeting to let residents know about the occasion.

Mr. Connor reviewed sponsorship levels for memorial flags. Prices range from \$2,500 for corporate sponsors with 15 flags to \$200 for individual sponsors, he said. At the end, sponsors can either receive the flag or organizers will ship them to deployment units.

In conjunction with the parade, the Elks will be building a float with a mini field of honor, Mr. Pease advised.

Mr. Connor passed out a status report for his FY2019 budget. With two months left, his department should be all right with the amount budgeted for benefits, he reported.

"Our numbers are down," he advised. He said he is not exactly sure why but thinks they will see it rise a little more as Vietnam vets are retiring and dependents receive benefits. One day at the Three County Fair will be Veterans' Appreciation Day. This will be a big outreach event and opportunity for staff to let veterans know about benefits.

The bell has been moved outside on a concrete pad where the flag used to be because they were told the floor was sinking inside Memorial Hall, he noted.

When he started 15 years ago the city only paid out \$34,000 in benefits; now they are at \$600,000.

Members asked questions and offered comments.

The burial benefit recently increased (as of Veterans Day) from \$2,000 on a maximum funeral cost of \$3,000 to \$4,000 on a maximum funeral cost of \$5,000, Mr. Connor shared. Disabled children are eligible for their parent's benefits, he added.

Councilor Nash asked what benefits are available to them. Mr. Connor said he could pay an additional \$700 a month to a disabled child on SSI who is already receiving a monthly SSI payment. They will get it until the day they die.

Councilor Bidwell asked how common it is that veterans may not be aware of benefits.

Mr. Connor related an anecdotal account of a woman he met recently who didn't know about the availability of a state annuity of \$1,000 twice a year. She was 100% service connected. Another veteran didn't know there was a Massachusetts bonus. Service people are informed of benefits as they leave the service but are often so anxious to get home that they are not in a position to retain the information, he suggested.

This is one reason the outreach program is so important, Mr. Pease said.

Councilor Carney encouraged them to make a passing reference to benefits at public comment.

Mr. Pease mentioned the difficulty of getting veterans to join the fraternal organization since they don't have access to records of veterans residing in Northampton and can't actively solicit at the VA.

They have been working a lot with building bridges in the community, Mr. Connor continued. Any veteran that wants to go to lunch on Wednesday from 12 to 1:30 p.m. can enjoy a free lunch courtesy of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts.

Councilor Carney asked about the turnout and Mr. Connor said they get 50 to 60 each month. They do 90 a month in Greenfield. Northampton has four WWII vets who come every week. The

diocese is doing it to stop isolation. Now, as less than 1% of the population has served, veterans are feeling the isolation.

They have a busy couple of months ahead of them, Mr. Connor concluded.

Members thanked the veterans for the presentation.

5. **ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE**

A. **19.040 Appointment to Council on Aging - referred by City Council - 4/4/2019**

Council on Aging

Robert Dionne, 87 Vernon Street, Northampton

Term: April 2019 to June 2021

To fulfill the unexpired term of Jean Petty

Housing Partnership

(Correction to term length for recently appointed member)

Carmen Junno, 73 Straw Avenue, Florence

Corrected Term: March 2019 to June 2022

Note: On March 7, 2019 the City Council appointed Carmen Junno to a term expiring in June of 2019. The term expiration should have been June of 2022

The council is just being asked to correct the date of appointment for Carmen Junno, Councilor Carney noted.

Robert Dionne is a lifelong 'hamp guy, Councilor Bidwell shared. He has been going to the senior center as a customer and decided he wanted to step up to serve on the Council on Aging. He is very much looking forward to taking on that role and said he would be quite honored to serve.

Councilor Bidwell moved to forward the appointment of Robert Dionne to the Council on Aging to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

Councilor Bidwell moved to correct the term of Carmen Junno to reflect an expiration date of June of 2022. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Discussion of Reappointment Process**

A list of 22 reappointments was referred to the committee at the May 2, 2019 City Council meeting, it was noted. Members discussed how to handle.

A lot of them are very recent appointments, Councilor Carney pointed out. Members discussed determining which were appointed within the last six months. If an appointment was just reviewed, the reappointment could be pretty much automatic.

Mrs. Krutzler offered to send out a list tomorrow indicating the names of those most recently appointed.

They may want to reserve the next couple of meetings to deal exclusively with appointments, Councilor Carney suggested. The Council President left it up to members' discretion whether to rely on personal knowledge, e-mail or contact by phone to review a reappointment, she noted. She thinks the practice was established at the last iteration of the City Services Committee.

Members decided that Councilor Carney will assign applicants to members and it will be up to their discretion as to whether to contact the candidate by phone, e-mail or to rely on personal knowledge.

Councilor Bidwell said he would talk to Martha Lyon and Terry Culhane. Councilor Nash said he would reach out to Tess Perrone Poe, Craig Della Penna and Christa Grenat. Councilor LaBarge said she would call Emma Cornwell and Donna Park and Councilor Carney said she would interview Sara Northrup.

7. Adjourn

Upon motion made by Councilor Bidwell and seconded by Councilor Nash, the meeting was adjourned at 5:17 p.m.

Prepared By:

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