



## **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: June 6, 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 9:43 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 and Jim Nash. (Councilors Alisa Klein and Ryan O'Donnell were absent)
3. Approval Of Minutes From The Previous Meeting
  - A. Minutes of May 16, 2019  
Councilor Carney moved to approve the minutes of May 16, 2019. Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion passed 4:0 by voice vote.
4. Financial Orders
  - A. 19.081 An Order To Borrow Money And Authorize Acquisition Of 100 Acres At Pine Grove Golf Course  
Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

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

Planning Director Wayne Feiden stressed that, even though the order is seeking borrowing authority, the city is not going to be borrowing this money. They are required to do this in order to get the grants they are applying for. He referred to orders to rescind borrowing votes on the City Council's agenda tonight as an example of other instances where the City Council has authorized borrowing and later rescinded that authority. The city will not be using General Fund revenue, planners will be applying for grants, using Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds and doing some fundraising, he confirmed. Each year, they tend to identify one big project. This is by far their top priority this year; frankly their top priority for several years. The golf course owner is retiring and has been trying to market the property as a golf course but has been

City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for June 6, 2019

unsuccessful. A stream runs through the property and eventually down to the meadows. The reason the partnership is with both Kestrel Land Trust and the Mass Audubon Society is because it is such a desirable property.

She has had people approaching her about this property asking who the realtor was, etc., Councilor LaBarge related. She was asked what started the conversation to purchase the property on Old Wilson Road. Apparently, the realtor approached the family. She knows the family very, very well and also knows the previous owners. It is absolutely beautiful. The wildlife is unbelievable; she mentioned a sighting of 15 deer and turkeys. Having the city buy the land for conservation purposes is the owner's choice, she confirmed. The lounge part will be torn down and there will be four lots, one toward the top of the property and three houses toward the bottom. This is what the owners themselves want, she stressed.

She encouraged fellow councilors to support this, "because it's beautiful."

Councilor Murphy said he had seen versions of this plan with more lots on it. For valuation purposes, they do a build-out analysis, Mr. Feiden explained. The final plan has four lots, he confirmed.

The property now contributes about \$12,000 to the tax base, Councilor Murphy noted. The city is starting to take properties that pay considerable taxes. He cited Burt's Bog – a property that paid \$8,000 in taxes - as another example. From a philosophical perspective, he likes to point out that when revenue is lost, taxes get re distributed across the tax base. The loss of revenue has an effect on the tax base be it ever so minor.

Mr. Feiden said he agreed from a philosophical standpoint, but that, in this case, the majority of taxes come from the cell tower site, while the remainder of the property is classified as 61B.

The 61B value is \$675,000, Councilor Murphy said. He agreed that the cell tower contributes quite a bit of the income.

Councilor Dwight asked if the four building lots would offset some of the loss in revenue, and Mr. Feiden said, 'yes,' three houses with spectacular views of the Holyoke range would make up some of the loss. He offered to run the numbers to project the amount of taxes that would be generated by creation of the lots for second reading.

Councilor Nash asked if it would be returned to forest.

Planners want to restore the historical stream (restore the natural flow in the stream) and the wetlands to original functioning, Mr. Feiden said. Restoration would be a multi-year process.

Golf courses are notorious for their use of pesticides, Councilor Nash said. He asked if Mr. Feiden was worried about pesticide use.

In the normal course of things they will be doing an environmental assessment but they are not particularly concerned, Mr. Feiden said. There are no red flags but they are certainly going to investigate. They are happy not to have inherited the house.

Councilor Carney moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for June 6, 2019

**B. 19.082 An Order To Purchase 5.8 Acres In The Broad Brook-Fitzgerald Lake Greenway**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

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

This is much more modest, Mr. Feiden advised. There is conservation land all around the property and it is desirable for a lot of reasons. They would at some point like to close off Old Boggy Meadow Road because there is dumping there but there are still some private property owners on the road, he noted.

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

**C. 19.083 An Order To Convey A Permanent Historic Preservation Restriction For Bridge Street Cemetery**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

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

The order is fairly straightforward but he wanted to make two points: 1) they are choosing the boundaries of the cemetery as being the fence itself so there is room to expand the road right-of-way if a decision is ever made to create on-street parking on Bridge Street, and 2) old burial properties often don't have deeds and are assumed to be grants from the king. The city is actually going to be granting a deed to itself for the site.

Granting a historic preservation restriction is a condition of the grant [from the Massachusetts Historical Commission Massachusetts Preservation Project Fund].

Councilor Bidwell asked what would and would not be permitted within the cemetery.

Anything consistent with a cemetery [is allowed], Mr. Feiden said. What wouldn't be allowed is disinterring bodies and turning it into something other than a cemetery. There would be no impediments to interpretive signage, he confirmed.

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

**D. 19.084 An Order To Approve FY2020 General Fund Budget**

Councilor Murphy read the order, noting that it requests \$94,706,462 to fund the FY2020 General Fund budget.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

**E. 19.085 An Order To Approve FY2020 Sewer Enterprise Fund Budget**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Carney seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for June 6, 2019

F. 19.086 An Order To Approve FY 2020 Water Enterprise Fund Budget

Councilor Murphy read the order. He noted that it mistakenly cites the budget year as July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019 instead of July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020.

Councilor Carney moved approval with the scrivener's error corrected. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

G. 19.087 An Order To Approve FY 2020 Solid Waste Enterprise Fund Budget

Councilor Murphy read the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

H. 19.088 An Order To Approve FY 2020 Stormwater And Flood Control Enterprise Fund Budget

Councilor Murphy read the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

I. 19.089 An Order To Approve FY2020 Revolving Funds

Councilor Murphy read the order.

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

In response to a question, Finance Director Susan Wright confirmed that the gift shop has closed. Probably at some point she will bring an ordinance to close the fund, she said.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

J. 19.090 An Order To Rescind Borrowing Authority - 3 Votes

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

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

The city didn't end up using the borrowing authority so they wanted to rescind it. Even though they aren't using it, it counts against the debt ceiling, it was noted.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

K. 19.092 An Order To Rescind Unused Borrowing Authority For MSBA Projects - Bridge Street And Leeds School Roofs

Councilor Murphy read the order.

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

This order is analogous to the previous one, it was noted.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

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 LaBarge moved to adjourn. Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion carried on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting was adjourned at 10:22 p.m.

**Contact:** D. Murphy @ [david.murphy8@comcast.net](mailto:david.murphy8@comcast.net)  
or 413-586-5461