



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 Nash

Meeting Minutes

Date: July 2, 2018, 4 p.m.

Location: City Council Chambers

212 Main St., Northampton, Massachusetts

Present: Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge, Vice Chair
Councilor Dennis P. Bidwell
Councilor James Nash

Absent: Councilor Maureen T. Carney, Chair

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4 p.m., Acting Chair Marianne LaBarge called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilors Bidwell, LaBarge and Nash were present. Councilor Carney was excused.

2. Announcement of Audio/Video Recording

Councilor LaBarge announced that the meeting was being video recorded.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Brian Bruce of 32 Round Hill Road commented on the overall condition of Round Hill Road. He purchased his property 11 years ago and, other than filling some potholes, the road has not been resurfaced despite some 'incredible construction' there. Clark School sold its campus other than the one building across from his property, and this property has gone through several owners and a serious fire several years ago. There has been a sequence of events over the last 10 or 11 years where the road has just been brutalized, he shared. He goes to the YMCA several times a week via Massasoit Street, and Massasoit has been resurfaced several times in that time period.

He is wondering why Round Hill Road doesn't have the same kind of positive treatment as Massasoit, he said. As the city sets up future projects for its road construction crews, he would love to have it factor Round Hill Road into that schedule, he stated.

Buck Deggendorf of 88 Round Hill Road expressed his understanding that the person responsible for streets was supposed to attend the meeting for a discussion of paving issues. He said he had a map published by the city showing the worst streets in Northampton, and he lives on one of the worst streets. There are others that are as bad, he acknowledged, but there are others that are not as bad, and they are better taken care of than Round Hill Road.

He is asking for a review of the priorities and a commitment to a timeline. He would like to know when Round Hill Road is going to be replaced, not just pothole-fixed, he stressed. "Those are band-aids that washed out," he advised.

Jim Cope of 14 Jewett Street said his street is worse than Round Hill Road but his real concern is the condition of streets city-wide. They are generally in bad shape, he asserted. He said he knows the city has a pavement management program, which is laudable – it is a rational way to prioritize and evaluate streets taking into account a variety of factors. He is well-acquainted with pavement management, but he doesn't think the city is going to get where it needs to be by just using the resources that have been allocated. Because of the really bad condition of so many streets, allocating a million or three million dollars a year "is never going to make it."

"You're going to be falling farther and farther behind, and some of the streets will just turn to dust," he maintained. He said he thinks a serious look needs to be taken at the totality of the condition of the city's infrastructure, particularly streets. City officials should consider a bond issue to address streets, sidewalks and bikeways and bring about, as far as possible, a state of good repair, he suggested. Once they are at a state of good repair, applying the pavement management system will pretty much keep them there. With crack sealing, periodic maintenance and resurfacing, it is possible to maintain streets for a very, very long time provided they are properly constructed to begin with. Many of them were not constructed properly and have poor drainage so it's a big problem. Only by doing a bond issue and perhaps a Proposition 2 and ½ override will the city get to where it should be, he opined. He acknowledged the existence of many other facilities that need to be taken care of but voiced the sentiment that the streets and sidewalks "have really been let go."

People end up walking in the street in his neighborhood because the sidewalks are worse than the roads, with frost heaves and gaps between sections. It's really an unfortunate situation, and he thinks it is time to consider doing something that will get them "a quantum leap" from their present condition. At the rate that they're going, "we're just going to fall farther and farther behind," he lamented.

Janice Moulton of 55 Prospect Street applauded Mr. Cope for his comments. This winter, potholes popped two of her tires, and she had to rent a car because she only had one spare. The replacement tires were over \$900. She filed a claim, and the city paid back \$488, which she is very happy about. However, something needs to be done, because many other people who get flat tires do not know about filing a claim. Soon after her pothole damage, the potholes on her street were filled, but new potholes have since formed. The adjoining street – Trumbull Street – did not get filled for months, possibly because no one lost a tire there, she speculated. She is grateful for the compensation and grateful that the potholes were repaired but agrees with Jim that something should be done. She's not sure it's cost effective for the city to pay back drivers for all the damaged tires, she added.

A man who didn't identify himself for the record said he wanted to talk about the size of the traffic on Round Hill Road. For whatever reason, he doesn't see traffic on Massasoit Street that is remotely the size of the traffic on Round Hill Road, he asserted. They have semi's, trucks filled

with stone and earth-moving vehicles that struggle to get up the hill because their engines can't stand the weight. "This is not ordinary traffic . . . you have extremely heavy trucks," he observed.

Another gentleman who did not identify himself facetiously stated that he was there in rebuttal. He disagreed with the man from Jewett Street who said his road was worse than Round Hill Road. He proposed putting members of the City Council in a UPS truck and driving them up and down Round Hill Road as a way to verify his assertion.

Janet Gross of 38 Round Hill Road told members that when the development was proposed, there were a series of meetings and discussion of Round Hill as a glacial drumlin filled with streams. No one did a survey/study of the drumlin, which probably should have been done. There are places on the road where water bubbles up, seemingly indicating the presence of a spring. It's not just a matter of repaving; the hill needs to be looked at carefully. The trucks are terrible, she agreed, noting there are weeks when they go up and down repeatedly. The project has been profoundly destructive, and she thinks the city needs to realize it. Neighbors are being held hostage because she suspects city officials will not do anything about Round Hill until the project is finished. Probably between now and then there will be more years when the development is exempt from taxes. "I think the total picture needs to be looked at," she concluded.

Hedwig Rose of 96 Round Hill Road said she'd like to add more fuel to the fire. Every time residents see someone coming to fix potholes they are relieved. However, they soon realize that the repair is "not exactly the way it should be" because new kinds of lumps and bumps form while other potholes "are totally ignored." The DPW came this year in three sections to try to fix the potholes and she's not sure there was much difference in the final condition. "It's just so bad," she lamented. Last year they were all very disappointed that the city wasn't doing anything about the street but they certainly did not expect that it would do nothing about the street this year. The piecemeal work that has been done has been so poorly done that there's almost no improvement and in some situations it has actually created further damage.

4. MINUTES OF JUNE 4, 2018

Councilor Bidwell moved to approve the minutes of June 4, 2018. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

5. NEW BUSINESS

A. Discussion of city-wide paving issues

Councilor LaBarge said she'd like to move Item 5A, Discussion of city-wide paving issues up on the agenda. There being no objection, she introduced Mayor David Narkewicz and DPW Director Donna LaScaleia.

Mayor Narkewicz said he'd like to step back a little bit and discuss the public process for approving capital projects. Each year he submits the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) with priorities for the next five years and then follows up with spending and appropriation requests for individual projects. This is the first part of the budgetary process as required by the city's charter, after which they move on to the operating budget. City Council approved the CIP and just recently approved the operating budget, he reminded.

When he became Mayor in 2013, like many communities, Northampton was relying solely on Chapter 90 funding to finance paving projects. The vast majority of communities around them rely exclusively on Chapter 90 funds, he pointed out. For the benefit of those present, he explained that Chapter 90 is a portion of the gas tax which is received by the state and reallocated to local communities. Interestingly, of total gas tax revenue, the state keeps roughly 80% while cities and towns get back about 20%. Each year, the state does a Chapter 90 bond bill. This year, the bill was level-funded at \$200 million, as has been the case for the last five years, although they all know that the cost of asphalt, gas, labor and construction goes up exponentially each year.

So, tired of being funded at just \$1 million each year, in FY2015 the city began contributing local funds from tax revenue to try to catch up on some of the backlog. This infrastructure deficit is not unique to Northampton but is a national problem that exists in every state, he noted. He said he would not go into the tax and spending policies in the United States that have led to this problem.

After putting \$500,000 a year into paving in his first five-year capital plan for FY2015, FY2016, FY2017 and FY2018, in his most recent capital plan he proposed to triple that by contributing \$1.5 million a year. The City Council just approved a borrowing authorization for \$1.5 million which administrators are going to try to maintain over the next five years.

The city pays for debt service as part of its operating budget, he confirmed. The operating budget just approved two Thursdays ago has a structural deficit built into it. Northampton had a general Proposition 2 and ½ override four years ago in order to maintain basic services. They have been waiting, hoping that potentially more funding might be coming from the state. However, by means of a Supreme Judicial Court ruling, a taxation proposal that would have levied additional taxes on high income earners with 50% of it going to transportation funding was shot down.

The challenge is having a significant backlog of road and bridge projects despite having allocated additional funds. When he hears that they should just "float a bond" to fix it, the question becomes, 'how do we pay for the debt service?'

In order to maintain the tripling of funding the FY2019 operating budget has a structural deficit just a little short of \$300,000, he pointed out. That is the fiscal situation, which he said he hoped was not news to any of the councilors. If they were to increase spending to cover all the paving in the next six to seven years, it would increase the city's operating budget by \$600,000 to \$700,000, raising the question of what they would cut to cover that debt service.

In light of this larger picture, an option for increasing spending would be an override, but they are looking at the possibility of a general override in the next few years just to keep schools and public safety functioning, Mayor Narkewicz reported. It becomes a question of how to ask taxpayers for more money and whether taxpayers can afford to do that. They are caught between trying to maintain services and making needed investments, he explained.

What they've attempted to do is prioritize projects using the pavement management system. Each year the DPW typically publishes a paving memo outlining the projects being finished up this fiscal year and projects they're looking at for next year. Accordingly, councilors know when approving the \$1.5 million what it's most likely going to be spent on, subject to the results of

competitive bidding, etc. A collection of projects have gone out to bid for this year with some of them coming in quite a bit higher than estimated, he advised.

He expressed his understanding that members have asked for a clearer picture of what the city is going to do over the next five years. He doesn't think that is prudent or realistic as they come to the City Council each year for borrowing authorization based on the city's fiscal condition. They are constantly monitoring and updating the list of proposed projects, he assured.

Another factor is that roads that have not been in difficult condition suddenly rise up in priority as has happened this year, he explained. "This was one of the more challenging winters in terms of the temperature swings that we had," he observed. Other challenges are the sheer number of potholes, the fact that asphalt plants are not open in winter and the logistical task of scheduling DPW crews at a time when they are engaged in snow removal operations.

The DPW Director can give them an estimate for bringing all the streets up to an acceptable condition, but he thinks it is north of \$70 million while the total General Fund budget is \$96 million, Mayor Narkewicz continued. Even if they were to do \$6 million worth of projects at once, members would be surprised at how few streets could be done and it would be difficult to sustain since the city's debt capacity would be quickly absorbed. These are all constraints councilors hear about in the context of the General Fund budget, but they have a cascading effect when it comes to the capital plan. Past debt exclusion overrides for the High School, Fire Station and Police Station are still impacting the tax rate.

As for Massasoit Street, the most recent repaving was actually paid for by Columbia Gas because it had to tear up the road to replace gas lines only a few years after the city repaved.

Councilor Nash said he thought the discussion they'd like to have and were indeed beginning today is to better quantify the cost of accelerating the paving program so that residents/taxpayers could realistically weight the cost/benefit of speeding up the pace of road repair.

He has to balance the operational needs of the city with its capital needs, Mayor Narkewicz reiterated. He's happy to have the conversation but thinks it needs to be grounded in reality. He pointed out that administrators spent a lot of time this year with residents of Ward 3 advocating for more staff at the Bridge Street School because it has a high-needs population. City officials did allocate many more resources to that. That's hundreds of thousands of dollars that would otherwise be available for debt service, he indicated. He doesn't want to compartmentalize the conversation, he stressed.

It's also important to understand the respective roles of various parties; i.e. – that the executive branch is explicitly given responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the city and developing a capital plan for approval by City Council. He kind of feels like they should have been having this conversation four months ago as part of approval of the capital plan. They are going to have another opportunity to do that next year when it will be part of a real-world exercise where councilors can make the decision that, rather than buying police cruisers or technology for the schools, they'd rather spend money paving the streets. That is a valid choice because it is a financial choice, which is the role of the council. The council's role is not to develop strategy or direct the day-to-day operations of the DPW, he reminded.

Councilor Bidwell said he thought the point Mayor Narkewicz made is critical. They should have been having a more in-depth conversation about some of this much earlier in the process, earlier even than the formal presentation to the council of the CIP, at which point it is a pretty fixed document. A free-flowing conversation earlier in the process would be welcomed, he added. He expressed his understanding that there is a Capital Improvement Committee, suggesting that perhaps a more robust and participatory conversation at that level could bring some more discussion of priorities into the conversation. The timing of conversations like this is critical, he agreed.

He is one of those who encouraged the committee to host this conversation, he acknowledged. He doesn't think any of them are unaware of the financial realities, but there is a massive infrastructure deficit in the United States in general and in Northampton in particular; in part because infrastructure doesn't have a natural advocacy group. Therefore, he thinks it's appropriate that, every once in a while, they provide an airing for folks to talk about infrastructure. As someone who is on the receiving end of a lot of comment about the roads, one of the things missing is a real understanding of the cost; he doesn't think it is widely understood that addressing the real list of needs would cost the city \$70 million. He doesn't think there is a real understanding of how relatively little would be accomplished in terms of road miles with \$6 million. One thing that would be helpful today to both the public and councilors is understanding just what they would get for \$6 million if they were able to find the funding, he suggested.

Mayor Narkewicz said he thought that might be a good segue to allowing the DPW Director to describe the current paving projects to explain what \$2.5 million will get them this year. That will give them a sense of the scope of work possible for \$2.5 million. He deferred to Ms. LaScaleia.

Director LaScaleia began by informing committee members that she hears about the condition of the roads every day and takes her job of maintaining the streets very personally and seriously, as does every member of the department. She described the projects proposed for FY2019.

6. **ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE**

A. **Adjustment of Term Length of Brian Campedelli to expire in June 2024, License Commission**

License Commission

Brian Campedelli, 223 Cardinal Way, Florence, MA
Term: July 2018-June 2024
(Reappointment)

Councilor Bidwell moved to forward the appointment of Brian Campedelli to the License Commission to 2024 with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed 3:0.

B. **18.121 Appointments to Various Boards - referred by City Council 6/7/2018**

Arts Council

Esther White, 17 Summer Street, Northampton
Term; July 2018 - June 2021

(Reappointment)

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the appointment of Esther White to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

Council on Aging

Michael Ford, 6 Massasoit Street, Northampton

Term: July 2018 - June 2020

(To fulfill the unexpired term of Lorraine Weimann)

Councilor Bidwell moved to forward the appointment of Michael Ford to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

Parks & Recreation Commission

Carol Bertrand, 65 Hastings Heights, Florence

Term: July 2018 - June 2021

(Reappointment)

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the appointment of Carol Bertrand to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

Planning Board

George Kohout (Full Member), 234 State Street, Northampton

Term: July 2018 - June 2021

(To replace the expired term of John Lutz)

Councilor Bidwell moved to forward the appointment of George Kohout to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed unanimously 3:0.

Christa Grenat (Full Member), 492 Elm Street, Northampton

Term: July 2018 - June 2019

(To replace the unexpired term of Dan Felten)

Councilor Nash moved to forward the appointment of Christa Grenat to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Bidwell seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

C. 18.129 Appointments to Various Boards - referred by City Council 6/21/2018

Agricultural Commission

John J. Bobala, 25 Old Ferry Road, Northampton

Term: July 2018-June 2021

(Reappointment)

Councilor Bidwell moved to forward the appointment of John Bobala to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

Council on Aging

Gerriann Butler, 46 Autumn Dr., Florence

Term: July 2018-June 2021

(Reappointment)

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the appointment of Gerriann Butler to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed 3:0.

Arts Council

Courtney Hummel, 320 Elm Street, Northampton

Term: July 2018-June 2019

(To fulfill the unexpired term of Joe Pesce)

Councilor Bidwell moved to forward the appointment of Courtney Hummel to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

Kristen Mara, 41 Williams St., Apt. 2RR, Northampton

Term: July 2018-June 2021

(To fill the expired second term of George Myers)

Councilor Nash moved to forward the appointment of Kristen Mara to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Bidwell seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

Lori Steiner, 18 Ridgewood Terrace, Northampton

Term: July 2018-June 2020

(To fulfill the unexpired term of Melissa-Lewis Gentry)

Councilor Nash moved to forward the appointment of Lori Steiner to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Bidwell seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

Parks and Recreation Commission

Kristin Dardano, 281 Elm St., Northampton

Term: July 2018-June 2021

(Reappointment)

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the appointment of Kristin Dardano to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed 3:0.

Public Shade Tree Commission

Robert Postel, 44 Washington Ave., Northampton

Term: July 2018-June 2021

(Reappointment)

Councilor Bidwell moved to forward the appointment of Robert Postel to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

Transportation and Parking Commission

Gary Hartwell, 419 Riverside Dr., Florence

Term: July 2018-June 2021

(Reappointment)

Councilor Bidwell moved to forward the appointment of Gary Hartwell to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion carried 3:0.

7. Adjourn

Upon motion made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned.

Prepared By:

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