



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: October 18, 2018

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 8:14 p.m., Councilor Murphy called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were committee members David Murphy, Maureen Carney, Marianne LaBarge & Gina-Louise Sciarra. Also present from the City Council were Bill Dwight, Jim Nash, Ryan O'Donnell, Dennis Bidwell, and Alisa Klein.
3. **Approval of Minutes From the Previous Meeting**
 - A. Minutes of October 4, 2018

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of October 4, 2018. Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion passed with 4 Yes, 0 No.

4. **FY2019 First Quarter Financial Report**

Finance Director Susan Wright presented the FY2019 1st quarter financial report. With regard to General Fund revenues, there is nothing to highlight other than that they are on track, she reported. Some of the economic indicators are a little higher than she had expected at this point. As far as enterprise funds, all four have between 24 and 27% of revenues collected as expected.

For expenditures, all General Fund accounts are where they should be on the Personnel Services (PS) side and, where they are not, it is because of known vacancies, she advised. On the Ordinary Maintenance (OM) side, the percentage isn't as useful since some departments have expenditures that are paid out all at once at the start of the fiscal year. However, all accounts are tracking as expected.

Enterprise funds are also on track as far as expenditures. Building permits are up, which is a good sign for new growth and revenue.

Councilor Bidwell wondered about parking revenues since some categories of revenue (parking lot revenue, parking garage and parking pass revenue) lag behind the 25% benchmark.

The city recently added new categories of parking revenue to the four major categories that previously existed, Ms. Wright explained. She will be realigning the revenue to divide it among the six budget categories instead of four to correct the percentages, she advised.

5. Financial Orders

A. 18.176 An Order To Reprogram AOM Capital Project Surplus To AOM Stage Door Handicapped Access Capital Project

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Sciarra seconded.

The order is pretty self-explanatory, Mayor Narkewicz suggested. The project began with trying to fix some unsafe granite steps and ended up looking into making the backstage access handicapped-accessible since this is the only access for performers. They attempted to accomplish the project with existing funds but the bids came in a little high. They are going to rebid but want to take some funds from other categories to supplement the existing appropriation, he explained.

The motion passed with 4 Yes, 0 No.

B. 18.177 An Order To Increase Senior Tax Work-Off Program Maximum Abatement

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Sciarra seconded.

The increase to the maximum allowable abatement is a result of the Municipal Modernization Act, Mayor Narkewicz advised. At the start of his second term, he proposed that the city accept state laws allowing the programs and start both the veterans and senior tax work-off programs. Originally the limit was \$1,000 and the state raised it to \$1,500. The state didn't raise the maximum abatement for the veterans program until sometime later, so the city waited until the state raised the limit for this program as well before accepting the increase.

The city had 40 to 45 tax work-off participants this year, and generally five or six are veterans. The programs are a little different in that there are no income requirements for veterans while there are income limits for seniors.

The motion passed with 4 Yes, 0 No.

C. 18.178 An Order To Increase Veterans Tax Work-Off Program Maximum Abatement

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Sciarra seconded.

Councilor LaBarge asked how many hours a week volunteers work. Under this program, 25 hours, Ms. Wright responded.

The motion passed 4 Yes, 0 No.

D. 18.180 An Order To Authorize PILOT Agreement With Syncarpha Solar, LLC

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Sciarra seconded.

This is sort of a carbon copy of the order discussed and approved in the last two council meetings (for a PILOT agreement with CED Northampton Solar, LLC), Mayor Narkewicz reminded. The City Council recently took a peripheral vote on the project because the city held a right of first refusal on this land. The owners reached out to the city to discuss a PILOT agreement.

With each pending solar project on private land, the city is obliged to negotiate a PILOT agreement with the LLC, Councilor Dwight observed. He noted that this puts the city at somewhat of a competitive disadvantage since whatever terms it locks in initially will set a precedent for future contracts. Mayor Narkewicz said he is mindful of that and is doing a lot of research on other agreements to make sure that they are consistent.

One of the major components of the analysis is what the property would be taxed if it were assessed by conventional means, Councilor Murphy noted.

Councilor Dwight rued the state's inability to accommodate or address the issue in a more reasonable way. He offered the commentary that the state "really has kind of hand-cuffed" [local officials]. There is a big mess that the state has decided not to face and, as usual, the consequences fall on the smaller communities, he observed.

His point is well-taken, Mayor Narkewicz responded.

The motion passed 4 Yes, 0 No.

E. 18.181 An Order To Approve The Purchase Of 119 Acres On Marble Brook, Leeds

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Carney seconded

This is an exciting project, Sarah LaValley related. The property includes half a mile of frontage along Marble Brook and abuts existing open space. Although it could not be developed for a single-family home or anything else, the parcel could potentially be logged, thereby eliminating the view

shed on one of the highest if not the highest peaks in the city, she indicated. The purchase is being largely funded through an already-received state grant that the city is working on in partnership with the Kestrel Land Trust. The trust will also hold a conservation restriction on the property to make double-sure it is permanently protected. The order includes borrowing authority for the required local match, but, as is typical, this will never be utilized. Instead, planners will request CPA funds and use donations for the local match, she said. Although the parcel is land-locked, it does include access from Kennedy Road. Planners hope to continue to fill in gaps with future acquisitions.

Councilor Klein wondered if there is a way to include a provision to keep this parcel from being used for hunting. Ms. LaValley said that would be up to the council since it is within the council's purview. Planners do not usually like to put language in orders regarding hunting because they like to leave that to the city for future decision-making.

The motion passed 4 Yes, 0 No.

F. 18.182 An Order Authorizing Acquisition Of Easements For Garfield Avenue Extension

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Sciarra seconded.

The requested order is to correct an order that was passed in May, Mayor Narkewicz confirmed. The order previously approved didn't have the proper wording, as it authorized the Mayor to take the land by eminent domain while technically only the City Council has this authority.

The motion passed 4 Yes, 0 No.

G. 18.185 An Order To Reprogram Radio Hardware Funds For Radio Hardware And Radio Consulting

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Sciarra seconded.

The plain language of the order was just to purchase equipment but, as part of the larger upgrade of the public safety radio system, city officials need some technical assistance with the acquisition. Therefore, they'd like to expand the authorization to be able to hire consulting services as well as purchase the radio hardware, Mayor Narkewicz explained.

The motion passed 4 Yes, 0 No.

H. 18.188 An Order To Appropriate \$75,000 In CPA Funds For Housing For Homeless Youth Project

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor Sciarra moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Carney seconded.

The .10 in the \$75,000.10 figure is a typo, Ms. LaValley advised.

The project is under construction on Hatfield Street, she confirmed. She came before them two years ago to locate initial funding for the purchase of the parcel. At the time there were a lot of unknowns. As details started to get fleshed out, Dial-self realized it had a gap in funding and came before the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) to request expedited funding. CPC is requesting two readings to accommodate that request.

As Councilor Murphy noted, the foundation is already poured, Councilor Dwight volunteered. He talked to Rick Hart, and [project proponents] are anxious to get started.

These funds will allow construction to get started, Ms. LaValley confirmed.

Councilor Klein said she saw the vote by CPC to approve the project was divided 6:2. She asked if Ms. LaValley could discuss.

There was a little concern about spending money before knowing what other applications might be coming in, Ms. LaValley responded. Also, there was some concern about the way the project developed. Members unanimously agreed it is a tremendously important project. The two votes were not against the project but were against the way that it transpired, she elaborated.

Councilor O'Donnell asked why the order doesn't specify where the project is happening, and Ms. LaValley said it certainly could be added.

The motion was approved 4 Yes, 0 No.

6. **New Business**

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

7. **Adjourn:** At 8:53 p.m. Councilor Carney moved to adjourn; Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

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