



Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council

Councilor Rachel Maiore, Chair
Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge, Vice Chair
Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III
Councilor Jim Nash

Online Meeting via Teleconference

Meeting Date: January 3, 2023

Time: 6 p.m.

Virtual meeting

The January 3, 2023 Finance Committee meeting will be held by remote participation.

The public can follow the committee's deliberations by watching the meeting live on Comcast Channel 15, live-streaming it on YouTube or by joining the virtual meeting by phone or computer. For the live YouTube link, please see Northampton Open Media's website at <http://northamptonopenmedia.org>.

Live public comment will be available using telephone call-in or video conferencing technology beginning at 6 p.m.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CALLING IN OR JOINING THE MEETING

[Join virtual meeting](#)

MEETING ID: 820 8929 6339

PARTICIPANT #: #

PASSCODE: 572251

1. Meeting Called To Order
2. Roll Call
3. Approval Of Minutes From The Previous Meeting
 - A. Minutes Of October 26, 2022 And December 7, 2022

Documents:

[12-07-2022_finance committee minutes.pdf](#)

4. Financial Orders
 - A. 22.219 An Order To Appropriate \$3 Million Free Cash To Establish Climate Change Mitigation Stabilization Fund
History:
- Referred to Finance Committee - 12/15/2022

Documents:

[22.219 an order to appropriate 3 million free cash to establish climate change mitigation stabilization fund.pdf](#)

5. Recap Of Budget Listening Session

Documents:

[summary of listening session.pdf](#)

6. New Business

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

7. Adjourn

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Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council

Finance Committee Members

Councilor Rachel Maiore, Chair

Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Vice Chair

Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III

Councilor Jim Nash

Virtual Meeting

Meeting Date: December 7, 2022

Time: 6 p.m.

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 6:02 p.m. Chair Rachel Maiore called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were Councilor Rachel Maiore, Chair; Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge, Vice Chair, Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III and Councilor Jim Nash. Also present were Finance Director Charlene Nardi and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.

Councilor Maiore announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

3. **Approval Of Minutes From The Previous Meeting**
 - A. **October 6, 2022 Minutes**

Councilor Moulton moved to approve the minutes of October 6, 2022. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.
4. **Listening Session - Community Spending Priorities For FY2024**

Councilor Maiore framed the discussion by saying that the Finance Committee and Finance Director Charlene Nardi are here tonight to listen and take notes to share with the rest of the council and the Mayor. As background, councilors have wanted to do this for a while; former Councilor Dennis Bidwell emailed her today saying he had long wanted a more participatory way for community members to be involved in a 'broad strokes,' aspirational conversation to let councilors know what they should be thinking about as they go into the budget season, which begins in January. The budget process is outlined by charter and they are not trying to be part of that but are viewing this as additional information to inform the budget process.

The City Council approves school funding but does not oversee the school budget, since this is the role of the school Committee, she reminded.

Almost universally, those who spoke began by thanking committee members profusely for giving them an opportunity to participate in a conversation about the budget.

Josh Feldman from Ward 3 in Northampton said he is on the school council for Bridge Street School where he currently has three kids enrolled. He is the CEO of a small nonprofit so he is in budget season
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right now too. He sent high fives and expressed gratitude to the committee for its work on what are ultimately hard decisions.

He wanted to advocate for the way the city funds education locally moving into this budget season, he shared. Statewide reform is necessary to fix some of the challenges they come up against year after year and some of that is underway with the fair share act passed and the potential for a different budget equation, but they're are not quite there yet. This means that the way they look at education spending this year is going to be extremely important.

He is advocating that the city does not cut education funding from the level it is now. The schools are doing fantastic with their limited resources as it is and student achievement is really tied to those dollars. Money really matters with education, he suggested. Every dollar put in exponentially affects the community because they are training the next generation of leaders who, hopefully, will ultimately be able to transform society. Connected, funding education is a core part of the way they can put equity into action and equalize the playing field regardless of the resources the next generation is growing from. When they cut funding to education, it disproportionately affects those that need it the most.

Children who cannot yet vote in their education process have a difficult time advocating for the exact resources they need in processes like these so he feels lucky to be a voice for how important that is.

Lastly, as they go through a permanent superintendent search with a great interim superintendent, prioritizing school funding is a great way to create long-term retention within the leadership of their school system. He thanked them for prioritizing education within this year's budget process.

Tina Ingmann of Park Hill Road said she is here to advocate for the idea of making one or two of their new positions dedicated to the transition to clean energy. This covers a lot of ground, including efficiency and electrification. She believes paying attention to this transition will save taxpayers all kinds of money in the long run and probably in the very short run as well. Innovation in the de-carbonization space is accelerating and prices are coming down very quickly. They have no idea what the next game changer will be; for example, cheap full house batteries. They need someone in city government who can keep up with the ever-changing landscape and quickly react to opportunities such as grants and pilot programs at the state and federal levels and perhaps form partnerships with nonprofits and corporations.

We need someone who can sort out and promote the complex set of de-carbonization incentives available to individuals and business owners, she suggested. For example, new federal programs include huge incentives for switching from gas stoves to electric induction stoves. A person or position in the city might help orchestrate a program with other departments to get the word out to everybody eligible. It is a win/win because they now know chemicals from gas stoves can cause asthma. And maybe this person could assist with a promotion for volunteers to help others, because there are many who would like to assist if they knew what to do. In order to decarbonize, which means reducing demand with efficiencies and switching fuel sources, they are going to need many more electricians, plumbers, etc. Perhaps the person in this position could help facilitate grants for an expansion at Smith Vocational. Her family had a long wait to get an electric hybrid, heat pump hot water heater. The demand is only going to increase with all the incentives so a jobs program would help everybody electrify more quickly. They're in an age of great change and she wants their city to be ready and nimble in order to take advantage of these changes to help save taxpayers money, help the city do the right thing in the face of dangerous climate change and make safer, better conditions for everyone.

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Susan Theberge of 319 Rocky Hill Road said she appreciates councilors inviting them to speak and thinks this is a wonderful and democratic idea. She works with Climate Action Now and the Springfield Climate Justice Coalition. Climate Action Now is involved in putting together a new coalition they are calling the Northampton Climate Emergency Coalition. The main thing they decided to work on given the extreme urgency in addressing the climate crisis is they think Northampton really needs to have a climate crisis director. Lots of cities and towns across the state and in the country have one and the governor elect has promised to have a climate director at the state level. They know there is funding at the federal and state level as well as grant money to pay for this kind of position. They need a person with the time, connections and resources to be researching all of that. They have an exciting vision that the person would come into the job and they would ask the person to create a systemic, just and equitable approach to the climate emergency in their city. This person would bring the city together in addressing the climate emergency. They are picturing this person would generate this very rich campaign. They would go for maximizing energy efficiency and transitioning to clean renewable energy in city buildings but also in the entire city landscape. The equity piece is crucial because they know there is money and support out there, but it's really confusing and hard to know how to access it. They want to get everybody involved, including working with schools and teachers and children.

Not only do they see that they have to address the built environment (every building in the city) but they need to amplify all the good work that's already going on to sequester carbon by protecting their open land and forests. There's no technology anybody has developed like a tree to sequester carbon. They envision both the drawing down of carbon and the putting an end to the use of dirty fuels throughout the city.

They've been so saddened that Chris Mason is leaving the city; he's done incredible work. He's led all the efforts to make their schools greener places. As they reflect on his leaving, the best thing would be if they actually had a whole department in the city, including a climate crisis person and a person to replace Chris. This would be a way to maximize the opportunity to rise to the moment they're in, and it is an incredibly urgent moment. It's hard to wrap their brains around the fact that they are reaching a tipping point. They do want this to be considered in the budget.

She gave a special shout out to Councilor Maiore and other city councilors who've been so supportive.

Terese Hammerle, a resident of Ward 7 at **24 Hillcrest Drive**, said she feels it's very important to fund a climate emergency director position. She feels the town should be generous with the position so they get a really talented person because it's a tough job. Being a frugal person, it occurred to her that somebody might consider collapsing Chris Mason's job and the climate director into one position, and she would like to ask them *not* to do that but to fund at least two full-time positions for this very important work. There is federal and state money. Fortune favors the municipalities that are prepared and they need a plan in place to receive that money and use it as effectively as possible. That takes staff. She thinks it would be a loss if they let that go by.

Adele Franks said she would like to amplify some of the points made by Susan Theberge and give a wider perspective. Those who live in Northampton think of themselves as really progressive and as a model for everybody else but what they're learning as they look around the state is that they're actually not all that progressive on climate issues; they are kind of behind other communities. She thinks it's imperative that they correct that. They certainly have established some lofty goals under the previous mayor but she would like to see their current mayor become a climate hero and actually implement these goals, create timelines and set measurable goals to be used to assess progress. She would like to see them regain the position they think of themselves as having as leaders in this field. Other communities are not just focusing on

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municipal buildings as their community is. She fully appreciates all the efforts Chris Mason has been putting forward but she would also like to see them branch out and consider all the non-municipal buildings in the city that are just begging for retrofitting to make them more energy efficient and to remove fossil fuel use so they can actually reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The climate energy coalition has been proposing a climate emergency director position in Northampton. With the departure of Chris Mason it gives them an opportunity to reconsider how they are approaching all this. She reiterated that, at a minimum, they feel that two full-time positions need to be accounted for in the budget at salaries high enough to attract the kind of people they hope to attract; further, that this be included in the mayor's budget for the City Council to approve and that the City Council do everything in its power to make sure those positions are included in the coming budget.

George Kohout, 234 State Street, said he was representing the Friends of Northampton Trails. He is moving away a little from the last three speakers but there is definitely a connection to climate change in his ask around the budget. He liked the message that the city budget is an expression of the city's values and aspirations. One of the most valued physical elements of their city is the 11-mile network of bike paths used by both residents and visitors on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis. Beginning in 1982, 40 years ago, the rail trail has grown to be a really critical component of their city's transportation network, allowing people to get safety to jobs, school, shopping and more, all the while reducing carbon output, moving them closer to their carbon reduction goals set out in the recent Climate Resilience and Regeneration Plan. The bad news is that one of the most critical sections of the trail from King Street west of Florence Center has been drastically deteriorating for the last seven to ten years. Built in 1982, this original section has done its job and now needs a major rehab in order to continue to serve the city as a critical transportation artery. He doesn't have a dollar figure for this overhaul and realizes it will be a multi-step, multi-year project but he knows they need to begin the work now. He is asking the City Council to prioritize and advocate for this funding whether through the annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP) or a line item in the city budget. Friends of Northampton Trails and many other users stand ready to assist with matching funds, fundraising and other means. They know the city budget can't do it by itself. Throughout the region and the state, Northampton is readily identified as that place with the great trail system as much as for its progressive politics, vibrant arts scene and restaurants. "We need to keep this city treasure in top shape," he enjoined.

Jackie Ballance of Florence commented that residents have pretty good priorities, but she can't amplify enough what Adele Franks said. If they don't survive the impending climate crisis, school budgets won't matter, rail trails won't matter; nothing will matter. She named two priorities, one to replace Chris Mason and one to name a climate czar, the top of the climate chain. The City Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and again in 2021. "I haven't seen a lot of emergency actions yet," she noted. A climate officer in the city will move them in the right direction.

Joyce Rosenfeld said she was very moved that Josh Feldman opened this meeting by talking about interconnected priorities. "We have interconnected priorities and truly none of those priorities will have any significance if we do not fund a powerful position of a climate crisis director," she asserted. It would be very hard for her if the City Council approved a budget that did not give high priority in the budget to such a position. Without taking those measures, nothing else matters. And her heart then breaks for Josh's children because 'that is our future.'

Saul Perlmutter of Meadow Street echoed the importance of what sustainable staff positions can mean for their city. About eight years ago, there was a wonderful program - 'Go Solar' in Northampton - that was an initiative of the city. He joined it then and in his little home they've generated over 40,000 kilowatts of electricity from solar, cleanly generated electricity. There was another city program around mini splits that

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enabled them to put that in their home as well. The city has done some wonderful things already around the environment and clean energy. As he looks around, he sees plenty of roofs that could be wonderful for solar and it's not happening. There is much more potential and it's urgent that they do it, not only for city buildings but for homeowners. In terms of transportation, a major source of greenhouse gases, they need to address those kinds of issues as well. These wonderful things happened in the past because of staff on city payroll. He echoed the thought that if they had a whole department with budgetary support, it would make a tremendous difference for everyone in their city. They could breathe cleaner air and have electric charging systems. Maybe they could even work with folks like him and ask them to chip in so that folks with lower incomes could also benefit from cleanly generated energy in all kinds of ways. He thinks others that benefitted like him would want to help as well. Please, let's get a department of sustainable energy, give it a good budget and help out the folks who can't afford to do it on their own, he urged.

Wendy Foxmyn of Ward 7 thanked the committee for allowing community residents to engage in a budget conversation. It occurred to her as people were talking that one of the programs they used to have was the City School project under former Mayor Clare Higgins. Her assistant put that program together. Something like that would be a great thing to do to carry on this tradition of having public engagement as well as bring more people in to serve on committees and boards. She finds the comments tonight about energy very compelling. She felt their energy office had a fairly low profile for quite a long time. Another thing with a very low profile is broadband, she never hears anything about it. She would really love to see that move along. Lastly, she has real concerns about the city cemeteries and would really like to see a small volunteer advisory committee for the cemeteries. They have a department director with many things on her plate and, in many communities, if there isn't a very active, concerted community group to watch over cemeteries, they can be low on the priority list.

Jacqueline's iPhone of 124 North Street commented that, taking a look at the budget, it seemed like the school portion of the budget is a hefty portion. She is hoping the state can step up its funding to contribute to that important aspect of their community that requires so much funding and that hopefully that can alleviate some of the pressure on property taxes or free up sources of funding to go to other areas. She is also hoping historic preservation (sic) can be a priority. She thinks they are currently at 21% of land being conserved. Like others expressing themselves, she is really interested in Northampton prioritizing sustainability and being able to respond effectively to intensifying climate crises, deep energy retrofits, renewable energy and energy efficiency in existing buildings both historic and not historic and new construction. This forum is wonderful because, as citizens, they don't have a lot of opportunity to engage with city staff. A lot of residents are concerned about excessive and inappropriate infill and want to establish Neighborhood Conservation Districts. If they can work effectively with city staff in meetings such as this they could even not need those if the lines of communication were more open.

Sharon Moulton, Ward 7B, Leeds, said she is here because she is part of Climate Action Now and the Climate Emergency Coalition and hopes that the people making the budget will show that they are prioritizing the climate emergency they are in.

With a lull in public comments, Finance Committee members thanked members of the public for participating and reflected back some of the priorities they had heard; specifically, supporting education, expanding the city's climate crisis abilities and taking care of the bike path network.

Councilor LaBarge expressed support for the idea of creating an executive-level staff position to oversee climate-related programs and initiatives. She tentatively suggested the possibility of forming a commission

on climate change like they did for the policing review commission. She pointed out that, in the latter case, the process resulted in the creation of a new department.

"We have so little time in the climate crisis so I hope we can skip the commission and go right to the department," Joyce Rosenfeld commented facetiously.

Finance Director Nardi addressed questions from councilors related to several of the items mentioned, including rail trail improvements, the Fair Share amendment and the status of the broadband feasibility study.

No specific CIP project addresses rail trail projects that she's aware of. They are generally funded through grants and she believes this would fall under capital improvements, Director Nardi said.

She has no news on how the state is going to implement the Fair Share amendment or how it will be directed towards cities and towns, she added. She doesn't think they will see much change for FY2024. For the coming budget year, it looks like they will probably be on their own again with the current funding level from the Commonwealth, she confirmed.

With regard to broadband, she expressed her understanding that a consultant is working on a feasibility study for a municipally-owned broadband network. She knows a report is being generated but has not seen the final version of it. She believes it is coming out of the ITS department.

On behalf of Mayor Sciarra, Director Nardi thanked everyone for coming and sharing their ideas and priorities for the budget. She has been taking detailed notes and will bring them forward to the mayor.

Jackie Balance said, "This feels like democracy. Thank you."

Benjamin Weil shared two ideas, one on the spending side and one on the potential revenue side. On the spending side, he advocated for more money in the DPW's operating budget for line striping. It is one of the key tools available to them to deal with traffic calming and to increase pedestrian and bicycle safety. He would like to see more cash capital for this purpose.

He thinks he also has a way to pay for it, he continued. There has been a lot of discussion about how to allocate parking in downtown and one of the mechanism is to use pricing as a way to allocate it. They have plenty of parking, but the city undercharges for it and doesn't enforce parking at the right time; in other words, it doesn't anticipate peak demand. They have had a few consultants all driving toward the idea that they can use parking pricing to better allocate parking. Now, Northampton gives the first hour of parking in the garage away for free. To motivate people to park in the garage, all they have to do is make it cost less. Instead of having parking for the first hour be free, he suggested reducing the parking rate to 50 cents but charging for the first hour since many people leave before that hour is up. Shifting enforcement to later in the day, changing the rates to what consultants recommend and adding the component of charging for all hours in the parking garage results in about a 40% increase in revenues for parking, from a projected \$1.2 million to about \$1.7 million according to his model. This gives about half a million that could be put towards traffic safety.

Councilor Nash agreed line striping is a cheap way to improve roadway safety. City officials are in the process of shifting enforcement hours until 8 o'clock at night and having a fee structure that goes up and

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down, he advised. They are waiting for the mayor's office to get back to them with final details because it involves staffing. That is on the way, he confirmed.

Jacqueline said it is wonderful that the city might be able to purchase the First Baptist Church, one of Eric Suher's longstanding vacant properties. Another resident mentioned the city somehow encouraging downtown building owners not to let their buildings sit vacant and even imposing a fine or fee if a property sits vacant too long since that could be a detriment for the downtown.

He talked about this with Attorney Seewald and there are limitations to how much the city can fine somebody for not occupying their space, Councilor Nash shared. When somebody is not renting their space downtown, they are already taking a huge financial hit - hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Part of what's going on for their downtown is kind of a mystery. In terms of the First Baptist Church it is a really wonderful opportunity in terms of the resilience hub starting up but also in terms of taking one of those properties that has been underutilized for over 30 years.

What a property owner is doing to themselves by not renting even at a lower rent is kind of self-imposed and a fine of a couple hundred dollars is nothing in comparison, he suggested.

Councilor Maire said she thinks there is some amount of write off for the losses.

Participants talked about empty storefronts such as Serio's.

Denise Lello, 35 Woodlawn, lent her voice to those requesting that the budget reflect a priority to fund a sustainability office for the city. The departure of Chris Mason is a big loss. Hopefully they will find someone who can fill his position. He has done an outstanding job leading the city on its path to sustainability, but his job has mostly been city buildings and procurement. Now they need someone who can help the rest of the city; i.e. – business owners and residents – to continue the work that needs to happen on a larger scale in order to address the climate crisis they're in. They currently have a landscape of opportunity but it's very confusing to them all. They will have opportunities to avail themselves of funding but they need somebody to understand what things are important to apply for. If they don't have somebody in that position they will lose out. She thinks a department would more than pay for itself with the advantage of having somebody whose focus can remain on moving them forward toward a fossil fuel future. Some changes are coming down from the state: the Massachusetts Commission on Clean Heat issued a report November 30th and will be asking local governments to keep records and track their progress. Someone will need to be assigned that task. The net zero building code will be released at the end of December and that is something she hopes the city of Northampton will adopt as soon as possible so they can begin requiring net zero new construction by January of 2023, which also will require coordination and effort. Delaying even by a month to opt into the net zero code could mean six months or a year's delay and many more buildings that will need to be retrofitted later at a far higher cost than being built properly from the start.

Finally, Northampton's Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) application will hopefully be going to the DPU soon but the DPU has not been acting on applications received from other communities. The delay has cost city residents a lot. Other communities that have been in the CCA for a while are paying a third of the cost that Eversource and National Grid are charging. They need to make sure they are at the front of the line, and that takes people and coordination among city offices. She hopes this will be a priority of the next budget because the future of the city depends on it.

5. New Business

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

None.

6. **Adjourn:** There being no further business, **Councilor Nash** moved to adjourn. **Councilor LaBarge** seconded. The motion carried on a roll call vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

Contact: Rachel Maiore @rmaiore@northamptonma.gov or (413) 923-4318

City of Northampton
MASSACHUSETTS

In City Council

December 15, 2022

Upon recommendation of Mayor Sciarra

22.219 An Order to Appropriate \$3 Million Free Cash to Establish Climate Change Mitigation Stabilization Fund

WHEREAS, in 2018 Mayor Narkewicz committed the City of Northampton to becoming a net carbon neutral city by 2050 and City Council endorsed this goal; and

WHEREAS, in 2021, the Resilience and Regeneration Plan was adopted by the Northampton Planning Board and endorsed by City Council to further signify the City's commitment to addressing and mitigating climate change; and

WHEREAS, the decisions we make should increase our ability to anticipate, adapt and thrive in a changing climate and, reduce our carbon foot print and our impact on climate change; and

WHEREAS, the City needs to plan for the costs to implement changes to address our resilience and regeneration plans; and

WHEREAS, Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40 § 5B provides that City Council may create a stabilization fund for any lawful purpose; and

WHEREAS, the City received \$21.7 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and allocated \$10 million as Loss Revenue in FY2022 which has been certified to the FY2023 General Fund Undesignated Fund Balance (Free Cash).

Now, Therefore be it Ordered, that

Pursuant to Chapter 40, § 5B of the Mass. General Laws, the City Council hereby authorizes the creation of a Climate Change Mitigation Stabilization Fund for the purpose of funding expenditures relative to the City's operations and capital needs to mitigate the impacts of climate change and to support the City's net carbon neutral goals, and vote to transfer from FY23

Undesignated General Fund (Free Cash) the sum of \$ 3,000,000 into the Climate Change Mitigation Stabilization Fund.

Summary of 12/7/2022 Listening Session:

- 11 of the 14 speakers (**Tina Ingmann, Susan Theberge, Terese Hammerle, Adele Franks, Jackie Ballance, Joyce Rosenfeld, Saul Perlmutter, Wendy Foxmyn, Jacqueline's Iphone, Sharon Moulton, Denise Lello**) advocated for creation of a Climate Crisis Director position
- 1 speaker (**George Kohout**) advocated for reconstruction of the original section of the bike path leading from King Street to Florence Center
- 1 speaker (**Benjamin Weil**) advocated for additional money for line striping
- 1 speaker (**Josh Feldman**) advocated for maintaining the funding for education at its current level