



**Committee on Community Resources
and the Northampton City Council**

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Garrick Perry

Vice Chair: Councilor Marissa Elkins

Councilor Alex Jarrett

Councilor Rachel Maiore

Meeting Agenda

Date: October 16, 2023

Time: 5:30 p.m.

Council Chambers, 212 Main Street

The October 16, 2023 Community Resources Committee meeting will be held in hybrid format. The public can follow the committee's deliberations by attending in person or joining the virtual meeting by phone or computer. The meeting will be recorded for later broadcast and uploaded to the Northampton Government Video Archive on YouTube.

Live public comment will be available in Council Chambers or using telephone call-in or video conferencing technology at 5:30 p.m.

"Jurisdiction. Matters affecting the community including economic development, local business, tourism, the environment, the arts, planning, zoning, sustainability, land use, housing and affordability, among others"

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CALLING IN OR JOINING THE MEETING

For telephone call-in, call:

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[PUBLIC MEETING LINK](#)

MEETING ID: 897 6060 4223

PARTICIPANT ID: #

PASSCODE: 216457

- 1. Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call**

- 2. Announcement re: Audio/Video Recording**
This meeting is being audio/video recorded.

- 3. Public Comment**

- 4. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

A. Minutes of April 24, 2023 and August 21, 2023

Documents:

[04-24-2023_Community Resources Committee.pdf](#)

[08-21-2023_Community Resources Committee.pdf](#)

5. Updates and Announcements from Committee Members

6. Program Topic: Legislative Overview with Senator Jo Comerford

Update on Action at the State Level/Discussion of Priority Local and Regional Issues

7. Items Referred to Committee

None

8. New Business

9. Adjourn

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Committee on Community Resources and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Garrick Perry

Vice-Chair: Councilor Marissa Elkins

Councilor Alex Jarrett

Councilor Rachel Maiore

Meeting Minutes

Date: April 24, 2023

Time: 5:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting Via Zoom

- Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call.** At 5:32 p.m. Chair Garrick Perry convened the meeting. Present were Councilors Garrick Perry, Chair; Marissa Elkins, Vice Chair, Alex Jarrett and Rachel Maiore. Also present were Leslie Laurie, a representative of the Northampton Vibrancy Project, and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.
- Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**
Councilor Perry announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded.
- Minutes of December 19, 2022**
Councilor Jarrett moved to approve the December 19, 2022 minutes. Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.
- Public Comment**
None
- Updates and Announcements from Committee Members**
None
- The Northampton Vibrancy Project**
Councilor Perry recognized Leslie Laurie.

Ms. Laurie thanked Councilor Perry for his great interest and work on the vibrancy project and thanked councilors for their interest in hearing what the project is all about. She was the founder and chief executive officer (CEO) of Tapestry Health for 40 years and, over the last seven years, helped start NETA first as a medical and then an adult use marijuana dispensary. When a multistate operator purchased it, she left.

While she has never lived in Northampton, she feels as though she has spent most of her waking days there and so has been honored to lead the economic development arm of the Chamber of Commerce for the last few years and see it grow from the vision of a nonprofit to a profit-making entity.

The Economic Development Committee is a committee of the chamber composed of about 50 individuals who meet on a monthly basis. As its vision, the committee has the goal of bringing more vibrancy to Northampton. When the pandemic started, it was faced with a real challenge and conducted a survey to determine key areas to focus on. The most dramatic need heard was from restaurants in Northampton. The chamber came up with a 413 take out program which was extremely successful and then rolled out the 413 dine in/take out program as the epidemic unfolded, adding the ability to support individuals who might not have the resources to pay for restaurant meals. Working with the survival center, Downtown Northampton Association (DNA) and businesses able to provide food, the chamber enabled patrons to not only buy dinner for themselves but also for someone else. Hundreds and hundreds of dinners were purchased that way. They were encouraged by the reaction received not only from businesses but from the Gazette, which was instrumental in promoting the program. Committee members then wanted to see if they could form a partnership so as not to be in little silos with the city, DNA and the chamber working separately. Together, they birthed a partnership they called the Northampton Vibrancy Project

Project coordinators gave the project an end date to appeal to people who weren't looking for a longer-term commitment, so it was originally conceived as a 20-month initiative ending in December. The idea was to help businesses recover from the pandemic and to revitalize Northampton as a regional destination for entertainment, shopping and dining. The goal was to restore vibrancy and economic vitality by supporting job growth, promoting events and activities and driving new business development. Four subcommittees were formed: a staffing committee, 'building buzz' committee (Councilor Perry co-chaired this committee), a new business committee and a funding and resource committee. All four have been functioning and a steering committee met on a monthly basis and now meets on an every other monthly basis to make sure communication continues.

As examples of the project's exciting accomplishments, the funding and resource committee applied for and received quite a bit of ARPA local recovery money, Ms. Laurie related. Through the vehicle of the DNA, they collectively accepted \$300,000; \$125,000 for small business support, \$75,000 for new business grants, \$50,000 for a program in conjunction with the Board of Health for ventilation in bars and restaurants and support to start a Northampton nonprofit foundation (501 © 3). Neither the chamber nor the DNA had a tax-deductible vehicle to accept donations and so were using the Northampton Survival Center for that purpose. They wanted a vehicle for not only institutional support but also individual contributions.

Building buzz was another exciting committee. Within the framework of their group they realized that Robin Goldstein, a prolific writer who grew up in Northampton and is now a professor in California, had written a book about Five College dining. As a possible promotion effort, he agreed to review a restaurant or two. The Gazette loved his work so much that it is now a regular monthly feature. Goldstein did quite a number of wonderful articles about restaurants in Northampton and its environs. Among other notable projects was a cleanup of Pulaski Park, a graffiti removal project and supporting Rediscover Downtown, a self-guided walking tour developed by Historic Northampton.

The new business committee tried to highlight the importance of Northampton as a place for business and to encourage more to come. Its members supported an effort that will kick off tomorrow night - 'Sphere Northampton,' an event at the Northampton Brewery primarily featuring women entrepreneurs. The goal is

to build community and promote networking since so many businesses in Northampton are owned by women. The committee successfully encouraged the city to apply for support for commercial space that has been vacant for an extended period. As a result, business owners are now able to apply for money to lease these spaces and some have done so already. Committee members also encouraged the city to compile an inventory of empty spaces and current and former owners - something which presently does not exist - with the goal of being able to provide a history of occupancy for different locations. In related news, Mass-Live did a map of Northampton over the weekend plotting all the venues Eric Suher owns and noting which are open and which are not. It's an eye opener. They are also working on marketing materials.

With staffing, they were finding that retail stores and especially restaurants were having a very hard time finding staff. Some of the restaurants are no longer open for lunch because they can't get adequate help. Similarly, some are not open as many days as they would like because they don't have enough workers. The committee worked with Franklin/Hampshire MassHire and its pathways for new hires for restaurants and hospitality. A number of small funding grants are available. They have been working with HCC with its free line cook training and some HCC students were recruited to work for the day to support the Taste of Northampton. Similarly, they have been working with a Five College internship program.

With regard to events, the goal is to try to make Northampton once again the premier place for events. They have been encouraging the city to make sure it does what it can to open up some of the venues that have been closed. There have been people who have tried to purchase Eric Suher's properties with good amounts of money and he wasn't interested in following through. When the city was able to take away one liquor license she thinks that really put a fire under Suher and they are encouraging of that. They really need the Calvin, Iron Horse and Pearl Street to be open as venues for the great musicians in this area. A marketing campaign funded by a Travel and Tourism Recovery Grant was used to support 27 festivals. They have been supportive of the city's opening up Masonic Street Live and 'Summer on Strong' and basically bringing life back into the city. They were very supportive of the Ice Art Festival, the Back Porch Festival and couldn't be more proud that Hampshire Pride will be back at the beginning of May. Working to revitalize the city that they all love has been a great morale booster.

Councilor Perry thanked Ms. Laurie for the overview. One of the reasons he wanted to bring her here was to get the word out about their activities. He personally has felt he has been so focused on what they are doing that he hasn't had a chance to get the word out. What has really struck him is the collaboration between the city and its stakeholders.

The entertainment committee has focused on projects to activate Northampton's restaurants and retailers in a lot of different ways, Councilor Perry shared. The group received a grant to host a content creator's convention in 2024 and has been working with the Arts Council, 33 Hawley and other businesses. Among other things, they came up with the idea of hosting food podcasts at various restaurants and creating high-light reels of the podcast events. They also requested funding to create a memorial to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, a popular comic book series created by Northampton-based Mirage Studios.

He was thinking about things unique to Northampton and the teenage mutant turtles were at the top of his list. As a tribute to this cultural icon and way to motivate people to move around the city, four engraved manhole covers will be embedded into the sidewalk in various locations. They also have plans to go for the Guinness Book of World Records for the biggest pizza party. Generally, they are looking at ways to generate excitement about their city and work around the fact that a lot of the city's venues are closed by activating alternative places like Masonic Street Live, Summer on Strong and now a third place, Garage

Band. Committee members are also looking for ways to bolster existing events by getting people from the Three County Fairgrounds into downtown, etc. He was lucky to put together a crack team of local residents from all sorts of entertainment backgrounds; DJ's, theater, comedy, etc. He has been letting the creatives go crazy. It has been really inspiring to see that the city is looking toward the future and giving creatives a chance to help shape it, he observed. The goal is to celebrate some of the things Northampton has to offer. A lot of what they have done is just be there to support businesses, he commented.

With the vibrancy project ending in December, Councilor Jarrett asked how the chamber and others see the city moving forward, especially with Picture Main Street construction and the disruption it is expected to bring. How can they make sure that people will still come downtown and businesses can make it through that time period?

He also asked them to comment on the 'multiplier effect' of city investment in economic development; i.e. that a small amount of money invested by the city can often leverage additional investment.

The economic development committee and leaders of the vibrancy project are educating themselves now about the Main Street design project and will be looking at it in more depth this month, Ms. Laurie reported. An important goal is to make sure there is good communication with downtown businesses about timing. They are hoping to get a running start with this in that people will get used to coming downtown because there are so many fun things to do, she suggested.

They have a few more months before they will be spinning these committees off. It could be that they will still have some oversight but not as intensively as three of them have been meeting on a weekly basis to coordinate the project. She thinks they need to step back and make sure what has been set in motion is solid enough to continue. People are obviously anxious about the Main Street redesign; its timing, what it's going to look like and what effect it's going to have. EDC members need to try to know what's happening so they can talk about it in a way that makes sense. It's a work in progress.

With all the effort and work people have put into this and what a joy it has been, she doesn't think people are just going to say goodbye in December.

It's a good question that he has been thinking about a lot, Councilor Perry said. The overarching mission of the vibrancy project was very large so a lot of their first meetings were spent figuring out how to narrow it down to actionable items. A lot of the discussion was how to get the word out and disseminate information. The chamber director (Vince) spearheaded a website to support the outdoor music festivals. They are hoping to develop other landing places for information to help guide them through this transition period.

Councilors asked questions and offered comments. Councilor Maiore noted that it was good to see Leslie Laurie, who is always behind good and interesting things. She thinks Northampton in particular has a lot of contributing stakeholders who don't actually live in the city; folks who are invested in the city who don't necessarily live here, she pointed out. Community means more than who sleeps here at night.

As far as the teenage mutant turtle manhole covers, Councilor Maiore said they shouldn't underestimate the entertainment value of such a novelty to a desperate parent looking for an activity with a carload of kids.

Ms. Laurie praised the collaborative efforts of the city, nonprofit and profit-making sector for working hard to keep Northampton the cultural and entertainment center it has always been. She said she is happy to let

them know when committees are meeting in case their constituents or councilors themselves are interested in attending.

Publicity about the Ninja Turtles was all over the place, including in the Wall Street Journal, NY Times and Boston Globe, members noted.

7. **New Business**

None

8. **Adjourn.** Councilor Elkins moved to adjourn; Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Jarrett absent. The meeting was adjourned at 6:21 p.m.

Prepared By:

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Committee on Community Resources and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Garrick Perry

Vice-Chair: Councilor Marissa Elkins

Councilor Alex Jarrett

Councilor Rachel Maiore

Meeting Minutes

Date: August 21, 2023

Time: 5:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting Via Zoom

- Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call.** At 5:32 p.m. Chair Garrick Perry convened the meeting. Present were Councilors Garrick Perry, Chair; Councilor Marissa Elkins, Vice Chair, Councilor Alex Jarrett and Councilor Rachel Maiore. Also present were Agricultural Commission members Earle (Chip) Parsons, Richard Jaeske and John O'Masta, Land Planning Assistant Tom Annese (staff assistant to the Ag. Commission) and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.
- Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**
Councilor Perry announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded.
- Minutes of December 19, 2022 and January 23, 2023**
Councilor Elkins moved to approve the December 19, 2022 and January 23, 2023 minutes as a group. Councilor Jarrett seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.
- Public Comment**
None
- Updates and Announcements from Committee Members**
Due to the hard work of Councilor Elkins, the Commission to Investigate Racialized Harms will have its 1st meeting this Thursday, Councilor Perry announced.
- State of the Northampton Farm Presentation**
With two farmers calling in from tractors in their fields, Agricultural Commissioners John O'Masta, Earle (Chip) Parsons and Richard Jaescke reported to the Community Resources Committee on the status of local farms following recent heavy rains that led to flooding and property damage to crops throughout the Pioneer Valley.

His farmland in the western part of the city was spared since it is up in gravel and the rain has actually been beneficial for him, John O'Masta reported. "The people in the Meadows are the ones who got hammered," he shared.

In quantifiable losses, Earle Parsons said he probably lost 80 acres of corn and 10 acres of oats while Richard Jaescke said he lost 3 and ½ acres of hay which he doesn't know if he can harvest because of pathogens from the river from sewage treatment plants above his land. Losses up and down the valley for farmers are estimated at \$15 million, Jaescke advised. Regardless of farm size, there has been a tremendous amount of water damage this year.

Jaescke used the opportunity to impress upon councilors his opposition to the stormwater management fee being imposed upon agricultural land, especially in light of farmers' recent losses.

Councilor Elkins asked if there had been any discussions with the mayor's office about relief from this fee being part of the city's response, and he said he would be meeting with the Mayor September 12th.

In response to a question from Councilor Elkins, Chip Parsons reported on resources and response to flooding at the state level. There is \$20 million in state funding available and a meeting is scheduled tonight at the Brewery to discuss the use of the Massachusetts Farm Resiliency Fund created by the United Way of Central Massachusetts. The Grinspoon Foundation took applications from local farmers for small grants and awarded small amounts very quickly. "They did a lot in a short time," he related.

There are still plenty of people big and small who can use some help. Sweet corn growers in the Aqua Vitae area of Hadley were really devastated and, on the other side of the river, Barstow farm lost a huge amount of its corn. Regardless of fields' proximity to the river, standing water covering the roots of corn stalks for extended periods prevented them from getting oxygen.

Jaescke said he thinks that with the loss of revenue from crop sales, there will be a need for seed money to replant come spring.

Crops with contaminants from untreated sewage will obviously not be harvested because of the risk of the contaminants getting into the food chain, Jaescke said. If plants absorb contaminated water, it is possible for the water to go up into the kernel. Contaminants in corn products used for feed could end up in the food chain if eaten by milk-producing cows, he explained.

Members discussed general issues associated with the stormwater fee, including complaints about the current fee structure. As announced last fall, the DPW director commissioned a consultant to review the fee in comparison with surrounding communities so they have been waiting for that report, Councilor Maiore reminded. One requirement for a fee as opposed to a tax is that those charged receive some kind of service or benefit, Councilor Jarrett noted.

Councilors encouraged farmers to let them know if they are not getting clear information from state and federal sources about programs and resources available. They have relationships with local legislators and they are interested and want to help.

Land Planning Assistant Tom Annese confirmed that Councilor Maiore and Councilor Moulton came to an Agricultural Commission meeting last fall. It was Councilor Maiore's idea that there be at least an annual 'State of the Northampton Farm' presentation so the council would be aware of how it's going.

Farmers feel the farms themselves provide stormwater services as some roads drain onto fields instead of into the stormwater drainage system, he advised.

Her residents on Sylvester Road don't like the fee either because they feel like they're filtering stormwater, Councilor Maiore commented. Certainly, the fee is not sensitive to these things. When they get an update from the mayor they will let Tom know so he can pass it on to the farmers, she said.

7. **New Business**
None

8. **Adjourn. Councilor Maiore moved to adjourn; Councilor Elkins seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Jarrett absent. The meeting was adjourned at 6:07 p.m.**

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