



## **Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council**

*Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra, Chair  
Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge, Vice Chair  
Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.  
Councilor John Thorpe*

### **Online Meeting via Teleconference**

Meeting Date: November 4, 2021

Note: The Finance Committee Meeting will take place during the City Council Meeting as announced. The City Council Meeting is scheduled to begin at 7:05 pm.

- 1. Meeting Called To Order**
- 2. Roll Call**
- 3. Approval Of Minutes From The Previous Meeting**

**A. Minutes Of October 21, 2021**

Documents:

[10-21-2021\\_finance committee minutes.pdf](#)

**4. Financial Orders**

**A. 21.350 An Order To Establish A Tax Classification For FY2022**

Documents:

[21.350 an order to establish a tax classification for fy2022.pdf](#)

**5. New Business**

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

**6. Adjourn**

*Contact: G-L Sciarra at [glsciarra@northamptonma.gov](mailto:glsciarra@northamptonma.gov)  
or 413-570-3133*



## ***Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council***

*Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra, Chair  
Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Vice Chair  
Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.  
Councilor John Thorpe*

### **On-line Zoom Meeting**

Meeting Date: October 21, 2021

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 9:04 p.m., Councilor Sciarra called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were committee members Gina-Louise Sciarra (Chair), Marianne LaBarge (Vice-Chair), Michael J. Quinlan, Jr. and John Thorpe. Also present from the City Council were William H. Dwight, Alex Jarrett, Karen Foster, Rachel Maiore and Jim Nash. Also present were Mayor David Narkewicz, Finance Director Charlene Nardi, Office of Planning and Sustainability (OPS) Director Wayne Feiden and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.
3. **Approval of Minutes of October 7, 2021**  
Councilor Thorpe moved to approve the minutes of October 7, 2021. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.
4. **FIRST QUARTER FINANCIAL REPORT**  
Finance Director Charlene Nardi presented the first quarter financial report for FY2022. Starting with the General Fund, she said she is happy to report that revenues are on track. She drew attention to the fact that, at \$205,000, hotel/motel revenue is vastly improved, almost back to pre-pandemic levels. Meals revenue is also on track; not quite as good as hotel/motel but heading in the right direction.

Marijuana revenue is the same as the last five quarters. The pandemic didn't really have an impact on this revenue source, showing that Northampton is maintaining its market share even as other retail establishments are opening in other communities, she observed.

The city took in just under \$359,000 in parking revenue, much improved from just under \$148,000 for the same quarter last year. Parking revenue is running about \$100,000 behind pre-pandemic levels. It is rebounding, just not as fast as hotel/motel and meals. She does expect it to exceed budget revenue projections.

City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for October 21, 2021

Ambulance services continues to be a significant source of revenue for the city. At 28% of original estimated revenue, collections for it are on track and in line with the three previous years.

Parking tickets on pg. 4 is in line to meet or exceed budget estimates and is almost back to pre-pandemic levels, mostly because the city offers more ways to pay for parking tickets now with the parking mobile app, Director Nardi continued.

Overall, general fund revenues are in sync with budget projections, she concluded.

In enterprise fund revenues, water and sewer revenues are coming back and are more than in the first quarter of last year, Director Nardi advised. Stormwater revenue is the same. This revenue really wasn't impacted by COVID-19 and solid waste is in line with projected revenues.

As far as expenses, she doesn't have a lot to say. It's really early in the year and the thing they look for are negative balances. General fund and enterprise fund expenses are as expected, she reported.

Councilor LaBarge said she has some concerns about tax titles. She asked how many tax accounts the city has that are not up to date.

The city's annual audit is just being completed so they will have a list of outstanding receivables as of June 30, 2021 soon, Director Nardi said. She doesn't have them tonight. Tax Collector Kris Bissell has been dealing with FY2020 delinquent accounts.

Councilor LaBarge said she was concerned that people losing their jobs due to COVID may have increased the number of delinquent accounts.

There was recently a list of FY2020 outstanding taxes in the paper, Director Nardi noted. 67 properties is still a small percentage of the city's total parcels. At this point, she doesn't think they've seen a huge outstanding balance that they can specifically attribute to COVID. She said she could certainly look into this more with Collector Bissell.

Councilor Jarrett said he noticed some departments such as parking and public safety communications have spent much less than 25%.

Not all budget expenses track evenly quarterly, Director Nardi said. She expressed her understanding that the parking department is looking to hire more parking enforcement officers. Some departments spend a greater portion of their budgets early in the year. Insurance, for example, is paid entirely up front. When councilors see high percentages that is usually the reason.

In response to the question of whether the council needs to be concerned that budgets such as Forbes and Lilly Library have exceeded 25% of their expenses, those budgets never go over, Director Nardi assured.

At this point, she doesn't see anything of concern, she presented.

## 5. FINANCIAL ORDERS

A. 21.342 An Order to Appropriate Senior Center Gift Fund Money to Financial Aid Fund  
Councilor Sciarra read the order.

**Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.**

Councilor Sciarra referred to a memo from the Senior Services director.

The memo is self-explanatory, Mayor Narkewicz noted. This is not the first time the director has brought an order like this to the city council. It has been a priority of hers to make senior services accessible to all seniors. The order is essentially asking to use gift fund money to underwrite fees for fee-based programs.

Councilor LaBarge asked if it is new having two tiers of income eligibility. This is the first time she has seen it, and she thinks it is great.

Mayor Narkewicz agreed it is important for them to stretch as far as they can to make sure low-income seniors have access to exercise programs or trips available to seniors. He is not sure if this is new.

There being no further questions, **the motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.**

**B. 21.343 An Order to Surplus City Land for Affordable Housing and a Community Resilience Hub off Crafts Avenue**

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

**Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded.**

Obviously, they have had discussions at past council meetings about their efforts to identify a community resilience hub, Mayor Narkewicz reminded. They have been working with an architect to look at retrofitting existing buildings but one of the other things they wanted to look at is whether city land is available to construct a building as well as provide much-needed single-room occupancy (SRO) units. That exploration led right outside their back door at city hall.

As a city, they have been talking about infill development and creating housing closer to downtown. This is an opportunity to take city-owned land not currently in use and potentially advance it for use as a resilience hub or, if not a hub, to provide some housing in the heart of downtown.

Unfortunately, the city's offer on St. John Cantius Church has been formally rejected in writing as of today, so that is no longer an option, he reported. Also, the viability of the roundhouse remains uncertain. He deferred to Office of Planning and Sustainability (OPS) Director Wayne Feiden for further details.

The mayor gave a great summary, Director Feiden noted. They looked at the site behind city hall and whether it could by itself be used for a resilience hub, and the cost would probably be too high. Digging into the hillside is quite expensive and it might be hard to justify the expense for just one use. For this reason, as the mayor said, they are looking at either studio apartments plus a hub or studio apartments alone. Putting them together serves two important needs and lowers the cost. They have begun the due diligence but are reluctant to spend a lot of money until they know the council supports this approach. Even if the council votes on this tonight, the site may not go anywhere, he cautioned. They are talking to Valley CDC to make sure either proposal would work for them, and they have been very supportive.

They would still prefer an existing building but St. John Cantius is no longer an option and the roundhouse is uncertain, he reiterated.

The hillside itself where the steps are has some structural problems, so if they don't do this work the city will still have to invest in the steps and retaining wall. The building inspector has four or five parking spaces in that location which they would take over. There is enough room in the nearby roundhouse parking lot so they could just move them there.

The cost of construction both downtown and in an area with hillside is more expensive, Director Feiden related. The cost per square foot would be higher but downtown is where they desperately need housing and the hub. There are some savings. Downtown doesn't require parking as a suburban location would, and he thinks it would get some excitement in Boston. "There is some opportunity to make a good story," he commented.

They would envision the entrance to the building to face the Roundhouse Plaza, Mayor Narkewicz added.

If they did a combined use, the first two stories would be the resilience hub and there would be three stories of housing on top of it. The height would be about the same as the municipal office building. If they did all housing it would be four or five stories. One of the reasons the resilience hub by itself would be expensive is because they thought it would be great to have one entrance off Crafts Avenue and one from the city hall parking lot. For this to work, the building would need higher floor plates, making it more expensive, Director Feiden elaborated.

Councilor LaBarge thanked Director Feiden for spending time talking to her about this. She asked if the road between the Roundhouse Plaza and the municipal building would be blocked off, and he said no. There will be an alleyway between the new building and the municipal office building, he said.

Councilor LaBarge said she thinks this it's a great spot for it versus having it at the church. "I really like this plan. I think it's great," she enthused.

She asked what the obstacle is to having the resilience hub in the Roundhouse building.

The Roundhouse was the site of a coal gasification plant, Director Feiden reminded. It literally was an oil tank. Owners would heat coal in the building, catch the gas coming off the coal and dispose of the sludge, which was used for various things from roofing tar to toothpaste. Columbia Gas, now Eversource and formerly Baystate Gas, spent about seven million dollars cleaning up the site. The current parking lot replacement project is partly because the utility dug up the parking lot and paid the city for it. Eversource spent some amount of money cleaning up the Roundhouse basement but some residual materials remain.

He has always been told they would want to test in January with the heating system going. Tests done in the spring and summer are inconclusive. They have done some work cleaning up since then and they hope the site will be clean when tested in January. The city's offer has expired but they believe they can get the same deal as before. There's no guarantee.

They have been very honest with the building's owner, Mr. Curran, that if the price is the same and the building is clean, they'd love to buy it. Without an option, they need to keep looking at other places.

City officials have been working on a resilience hub, but SRO's are also a critical housing need for the city, Mayor Narkewicz pointed out. There is a segment of homeless for which congregate housing is not an option. They learned from the pandemic that a way to get a lot of people into permanent housing is to get them into this kind of single-occupancy housing.

He was on a call this morning with mayors and town managers throughout the region and Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) representatives. The message of local officials was that they need the state to help them create more of these units. Typical affordable housing projects such as ones they've celebrated on Pleasant Street take two and sometimes three rounds of applications to the state through self-help grants. The big message to folks in Boston was, "if we're going to solve this crisis and don't want people sleeping rough on our streets and living in tent encampments," we need these units.

He loves the fact that Northampton will literally be putting its money and its land where its mouth is. "I just think it's an important statement for us to be making as a city," he shared.

Councilor Sciarra said she agrees this is an important statement and is glad they are thinking creatively about other options if the Roundhouse doesn't work out. The importance of creating these smaller units can't be underestimated, she indicated. She is very appreciative of this idea.

Councilor Nash said he really appreciates the urgency with which the mayor and planning office are acting and is very excited about idea of SRO housing downtown.

Councilor Foster echoed what's been said, saying she really appreciates the creative thinking around moving the resilience hub forward and addressing houselessness, all ideals they embrace as a city. There is a symbolism to city government saying, 'Yes, in my back yard. Right here.' This proposal is one she supports but she extra appreciates the location, she stressed.

There being no further comments, **the motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.**

6. **New Business**

None.

7. **Adjourn:** Councilor Thorpe moved to adjourn. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion carried on a roll call vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

*Contact: G-L Sciarra @glsciarra@northamptonma.gov or 413-570-3133*

# **City of Northampton**

MASSACHUSETTS

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**In City Council**

November 4, 2021

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Upon recommendation of Mayor David J. Narkewicz

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**21.350**

**An Order**

**To Establish a Tax Classification for FY2022**

**Ordered, that**

The Northampton City Council approves a Residential Factor of One (1) for Fiscal Year 2022.