



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: June 4, 2020

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 10:49 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.
3. **Minutes of May 21, 2020**
Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of May 21, 2020. Councilor Thorpe seconded. The motion passed 4:0 by roll call vote.
4. **Financial Orders**
 - A. **20.053 An Order To Approve FY2021 General Fund Budget**
Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Jarrett disclosed that he has a conflict of interest on one item in the General Fund budget – Pedal People's contract with Central Services. For the discussion in full council they have made arrangements to consider this item separately but that isn't possible in Finance so he can't participate. He said he would turn off his video.

Councilor Sciarra reviewed the amounts in the budget spreadsheet.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

Councilor Dwight clarified that because of Councilor Jarrett's conflict, he is precluded from participating in discussion of the full order, which includes the Pedal People contract. To allow him to participate, it is appropriate to move discussion to the floor of the full council where removals, amendments, etc. to the order can be made. Normally, Finance Committee members would be able to have this discussion in committee with participation by the rest of the council, but because of this circumstance it is not possible.

City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for June 4, 2020

The motion to forward the order to the full council with a positive recommendation passed 4:0 by roll call vote.

B. 20.054 An Order To Approve FY 2021 Sewer Enterprise Fund Budget

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

C. 20.055 An Order To Approve FY 2021 Water Enterprise Fund Budget

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Thorpe moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

D. 20.056 An Order To Approve FY 2021 Solid Waste Enterprise Fund Budget

Councilor Jarrett announced that has a conflict of interest because of his financial interest in the Pedal People's contract and would be recusing himself from the discussion. He will also be recusing himself from discussion in the full council, he said.

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Thorpe moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Quinlan seconded.

Councilor Dwight said he would like to follow up with the mayor and finance director on the issue brought up in public comment, i.e. – paying a police officer to manage traffic within the transfer station. It does seem disproportionate and that it could be managed by somebody in an orange vest, he suggested.

The city began using traffic details following the COVID19 outbreak, Mayor Narkewicz explained. Operators needed to be able to control social distancing because of the 'fabulous ballet' of people and vehicles moving back and forth. They ended up limiting the number of vehicles that could be in line at any one time. They have always had an officer directing traffic on Saturdays when it is busiest, he reminded.

They have had a significant increase in issues related to people's behavior and complaints from gate keepers about residents being noncompliant and even abusive toward them, he continued. A couple of gatekeepers have quit because of residents being abusive toward them. The police detail has been very helpful in not only directing traffic but in reducing conflict with gatekeepers. Last Saturday, the detail officer had to leave and several incidents occurred. Director LaScaleia feels strongly that having some sort of traffic detail each day is necessary. They don't know how long the corona virus will last and how long they will need to maintain it. They've been trying the idea of just having a citizen in an orange vest and it hasn't been very successful, he concluded.

Councilor Dwight asked how this translates to the increased fee.

The solid waste enterprise fund budget has to be supplemented with money from the reserve fund because fees haven't been raised since 2009 and there has been a significant drop in the number of stickers. The

City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for June 4, 2020

transfer station is open more than any other transfer station in the area and has lower fees. The police detail does contribute to the increase but the increase would be necessary even without the detail, he asserted.

The city is using \$272,326 of retained earnings this year to supplement the solid waste budget and has been doing so for the past six or seven years, Finance Director Wright confirmed. They are not bringing in enough revenue to fully cover the cost of the service. At some point they will run out of retained earnings. At the same time, many of the fees haven't been raised in years. This seemed like a good time to recalibrate the cost of operating the transfer station.

The decision around having an officer there is more operational and behavior-based [than fiscally-driven]. They would be having this discussion regardless of the status of the solid waste enterprise fund, Mayor Narkewicz said.

Councilor Quinlan pointed out that the gatekeeper budget this fiscal year is the same at \$90,000 but they are cutting the transfer station hours by 25% next year. Given that they are reducing the service, it seems that less hours would be needed.

Minimum wage goes up every year so that's one of the reasons the line item would go up even though hours are decreasing, Mayor Narkewicz responded.

It is hard to get people to do these jobs and not easy to predict the hours because of special events, Director Wright observed. The amount of incidents and hostility the gate keepers are subject to can't be underestimated, she added. They've had people threaten gatekeepers. The director raised a lot of security concerns and that's why she felt this level of security would be appropriate. Also, they have to maintain some kind of order with the traffic flow. Because of the need to have fewer people taking things out of their car at the same time for social distancing, there has to be order. The traffic detail is not just because of COVID, it's because they have an active DPW yard with moving pieces of equipment that is also used as a transfer station with steady traffic. There are multiple reasons the director felt that increasing the traffic detail for this operation was necessary, she stressed.

Councilor Nash expressed his understanding that the need for the officer has to do with added stress from the need for social distancing, etc. If this added stress was removed, he asked if they could return to using a civilian employee.

That would be an operational question for the director to evaluate, Mayor Narkewicz said. The confounding factor is they not only have people in close contact but they're carrying trash. This will be something she'll monitor and if they don't need them, she'll move away from it.

Councilor Maire asked why a person's transfer station privileges aren't suspended if they are being abusive to a person in a vest.

The DPW Director has revoked some transfer station privileges, Mayor Narkewicz confirmed.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

E. 20.057 An Order to Approve FY 2021 Stormwater And Flood Control Enterprise Fund Budget
Councilor Sciarra read the order.

City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for June 4, 2020

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded.

He has heard from a lot of people that the formula used to calculate the storm water fee isn't fair, Councilor Jarrett said. At some point, he would like to know the process for changing the formula.

Mayor Narkewicz said he could provide that information.

Councilor Jarrett said he noticed they are using \$900,000 from the stabilization fund. He asked if that is sustainable.

All of the costs of the storm water and flood control enterprise are paid for through fees, Director Wright corrected. They will be putting \$919,566 *into* stabilization, she clarified.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

F. 20.058 An Order to Approve FY2021 Revolving Funds

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

G. 20.059 An Order Authorizing Acquisition and Establishment of a Municipal Light Plant

Councilor Sciarra read the order. She noted a scrivener's error: In the fourth 'whereas' clause, 'municipal light plan' should be 'municipal light plant.'

Councilor Thorpe moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded.

For ten to fifteen years, people have talked about the prospect of having municipal broadband for the city of Northampton, Councilor Dwight reminded. One of the things that came out of the conversation with Dr. Provost is trying to establish equity; particularly, social equity in the form of broadband access for all. He cited potential benefits as the city's ability to offer competitive if not better rates, much better access and more capacity. Now, telecoms are sanctioned monopolies that control the amount of service available and charge for any upgrades. Hopefully with municipal broadband they can offer excellent upload and download rates to both citizens and businesses. Just as importantly, municipal broadband will allow access to the cohort that's currently isolated and has to rely on wifi stations set up in subsidized housing projects or by the schools. If they're going to aspire to being a modern city carrying out modern ideals, this is one way to establish that equity, if it's viable. They need to know if it's viable first and so want a very frank and clear assessment. If consultants say 'yea,' then they go ahead with all due speed. In order to proceed, the city council has to approve establishment of a municipal light plant in two fiscal years. He expressed hope that fellow councilors would be inspired to vote affirmatively.

Mayor Narkewicz thanked Councilor Dwight for his service on an advisory committee along with several citizens that has been working on the RFP and will be helping select firms to actually carry out the

City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for June 4, 2020

marketing study. It is still in an exploratory phase but, not only do they have to have two votes of the council in two separate years, but it also has to go on a ballot. He wanted to get one vote out of the way so if they receive a positive study they could potentially get another vote in FY2021.

Councilor Thorpe said he has heard from quite a few residents in Ward 4 who are in favor and he will be supporting this.

Councilor LaBarge echoed Councilor Thorpe, saying she's received several emails in support of the project.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

H. 20.060 An Order to Approve Gift Fund Expenditures for Street and Transportation Sharing
Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

The order is fairly self-explanatory, Mayor Narkewicz noted. It is one component of the plan they've been working on with the Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) and Florence Civic and Business Association to try to stand up outdoor dining very rapidly. They've had some requests from people who would like to make donations.

They have had this gift account for 10 years and have used it for things like bike path equipment and shared streets, Office of Planning and Sustainability Director Wayne Feiden elaborated. They mentioned the project on their listserv and have received four or five donations already. The donations will allow them to supplement the work being done with the Solomon Foundation donation and work that merchants are doing themselves.

For Main Street itself, planners have hired consultants to help them with the money from the Solomon Foundation. For Florence, they are going to do the downtown side streets, bike path and alleyways on their own with lessons they learn from downtown. The idea is to let restaurants take over some of the public spaces nearby; i.e. - parts of the bike path, sections of sidewalk, portions of parking spaces, etc. The city would buy street furniture for places that are shared eating spaces and merchants would buy outdoor furniture for their businesses.

A combination of sources will be used in creating the outdoor eating areas, Mr. Feiden related. Besides the \$10,000 donation from the Solomon Foundation, as part of the city's restoration of a golf course on Old Wilson Road, DPW workers took out 102 6' x 2' x 2' concrete blocks. On the same listserv that solicited donations people came forward and offered different things to contribute to this process.

It is a grand experiment, but they know it is very needed, Mr. Feiden shared. When the governor reopens restaurants, there will be no indoor dining. FEMA says that, in most disasters, 25% of businesses do not reopen. They hope it is a fun experiment for people, but it is an economic development action above all.

The governor will announce Monday when he is going to allow restaurants to reopen, Mr. Feiden advised. The first phase will be restaurants that own their own land. As an example, Fitzwilly's and Alexander's are looking at taking over the parking lots next door. Businesses that sell alcohol will have to go before the

City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for June 4, 2020

License Commission to extend their licensed premises. Taking over red brick pavers downtown is pretty simple, moving into the street is more complex. Every department has been really involved. DPW is very excited and has committed manpower, the mayor's office and planning is doing overall coordination, etc.

Councilor LaBarge said she thinks it is a great idea. "We need to get out there and help our businesses. It's going to take them quite a long time to get back on their feet."

Councilor Dwight said he will have some comments later related to another order authorizing ordinance changes in order to accommodate the co-opting of public space. His concern is that they are now offering private businesses public space. He is a little concerned about how this will impact the public conflicts they've experienced for generations in which some people feel they have primacy over public space and try to deny other citizens who they feel conflict with their businesses. He is very much in favor of giving any of these businesses a leg up since they provide tax revenue and jobs. He is definitely conflicted but wants to express his concerns about potential points of conflict. He would be really reluctant to support any changes that would further diminish people's ability to pass on public property in favor of a private enterprise.

If it helps, one way they've looked at this is that they are actually de-privatizing some private space in the form of parking spaces. In terms of square footage, there will be more public space at the end of the day than there is today. There will be more private space as well. What there'll be less of is parking.

Councilor Dwight asked if there is consideration of reducing the road down to one lane.

In the area between City Hall and King Street where there is an extra lane, consultants are looking at that possibility, Mr. Feiden said.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

I. **20.061 An Order to Rescind Borrowing Authority - 2 Votes**

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

These are essentially borrowing authorizations that came before the council for projects for which the city also applied for grants, Mayor Narkewicz explained. In both cases, the city did receive grant funds so they now want to rescind the borrowing authority. The action is intended to take the debt off the books.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

5. **New Business**

None.

6. **Adjourn:** There being no further business, Councilor Quinlan moved to adjourn. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion carried on a roll call vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting adjourned at 12:16 a.m.

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