



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: November 12, 2020

Note: The Finance Committee Meeting took place during a special City Council Meeting as announced. The City Council Meeting began at 5:30 p.m.

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 5:32 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, Rachel Maiore and Jim Nash. (Karen Foster was absent.) In attendance were Mayor David Narkewicz and Executive Director of Downtown Northampton Association (DNA) Amy Wilson Cahillane.
3. **Financial Orders**
 - A. **20.148 An Order To Suspend Parking Fees On Certain Days**
Councilor Sciarra read the order.

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

He typically brings an order suspending parking fees forward for the end of November and December, Mayor Narkewicz reminded. The city has not traditionally suspended parking fees on Bag Day. This year, given the circumstances and challenges facing downtown businesses, when the decision was made to hold Yule Days, he decided to bring forward a request to suspend parking fees. It was made too late for the regularly-scheduled council meeting, thus necessitating the special meeting.

The four days at the end of the order have been enacted the past five, six or seven years, so the only difference is Yule days (Thursday, November 19, 2020 to Saturday, November 21, 2020). This is a onetime change.

Councilor LaBarge made a motion to recognize Downtown Northampton Association (DNA) Executive Director Amy Cahillane. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion passed unanimously 8:0 (Councilor Foster absent).

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She appreciates the mayor bringing the order forward and councilors considering it, Director Cahillane said. Even though parking is available, they would like to give the marketing community another tool to draw people downtown. This gives businesses the opportunity to tell their customers parking is free.

Councilor Dwight noted that emergency orders are still in place to monitor the behavior of customers. If past experience is an indication, he imagines they will see a lot of people jamming into stores and the like. With the documented increase in COVID cases in Massachusetts, even though they're on the low end, he is wondering how they will maintain that level of vigilance amidst pandemic shopping enthusiasm.

Director Cahillane said she could share what some of the stores are doing but would defer to the mayor. All of the stores have social distancing requirements in place and many, because of concerns over holiday congestion, are doing shopping by appointment to avoid big crowds. All of the Bag Day discounts are being extended to on-line shopping as well. All of the businesses recognize necessary health measures and are taking steps to mitigate risk.

The idea of spreading it over four days was to reduce crowding, Mayor Narkewicz advised. There is no bag, Director Cahillane added.

All of the regulations remain in place, Mayor Narkewicz assured. The health department will have its downtown ambassadors out and he assumes the DNA will have its ambassadors out as well. Public health enforcement continues to be active and this doesn't obviate any of the rules in place. They are expecting masks and hand sanitizer to be in use.

In response to a question about whether the discount is uniform, Director Cahillane said it is not because it was too much to ask stores to offer 20% discounts uniformly in this climate.

Councilor Sciarra asked where people could find more information.

It will be on the DNA and Gazette website and Northampton.live.

Director Cahillane referred to the lack of consensus on discounts, Councilor Nash noted. He sat in on some of the DNA meetings and wanted to recognize Cahillane's leadership in bringing downtown businesses into consensus on holding "Yule Days" to replace Bag Days. She was against the idea of bringing back Bag Days and led the downtown businesses to adopt this alternative. He commended her skill in navigating this particularly thorny issue during the pandemic.

There being no further questions, Councilor Sciarra called the motion to a vote, and it passed with 4 Yes, 0 No by roll call vote.

4. **New Business**

None.

5. **Adjourn:** There being no further business, Councilor Quinlan moved to adjourn. Councilor Thorpe seconded. The motion carried on a roll call vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting adjourned at 5:42 p.m.

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