



*CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
CONDUCTED AS AN ON-LINE ZOOM MEETING  
Northampton, MA*

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**Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**

A regular meeting of the City Council was called to order by City Council President Jim Nash at 7:02 p.m.

At 7:02 p.m. on a roll call the following City Councilors were present:

**Roll Call**

At-Large Councilor Marissa Elkins	At-Large Councilor Jamila Gore
Ward 1 Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III	Ward 5 Councilor Alex Jarrett
Ward 2 Councilor Karen Foster	Ward 6 Councilor Marianne LaBarge
Ward 3 Councilor James B. Nash	Ward 7 Councilor Rachel Maiore
Ward 4 Councilor Garrick Perry	

**Public Hearings**

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None

**Public Comment**

Councilor Nash announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded. He explained the procedure he would use in conducting public comment and opened the floor to public comment.

**Meg Bandarra of Northampton** thanked those councilors who voted in December to approve the unpaved universally accessible trail and particularly acknowledged Councilor Foster's efforts. Her advocacy was instrumental in making this happen and she went above and beyond the call of duty.

**Announcements from Councilors and the Mayor**

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Councilor Nash informed councilors that he has settled on committee appointments and will be sharing them with everybody first thing in the morning. He thanked everyone for taking the time to think thoughtfully about their preferences and said they all are going to get at least two of their first three choices. He appreciated the range of interests; it really helped in making assignments. There was a broad spectrum of interest in participating in many different ways.

Councilor LaBarge commended Board of Health Director Merridith O'Leary and the Board of Health for holding an open public session December 28<sup>th</sup> and accepting a large volume of public comment. 275 to 300 people participated remotely, she noted. She knows some really hard decisions have to be made and that they will make decisions that are going to be right for their city and for the safety of every resident. She also thanked the volunteers who have been giving shots.

Four other councilors went on to publicly express support for the Board of Health and its director and to denounce Anti-Semitic comments that were heard during public comment at the recent meeting. Councilor Foster said it was important for her to state publicly that she supports the board's work and what they're doing. "There were public comments that expressed anti-Semitism as well as some patently false information," she reported. There's no room in their city for that type of speech, she stressed. She thanked the mayor for her statement released this evening condemning the rhetoric. That can't happen in Northampton without a response from their leadership, she asserted.

Councilor Maiore acknowledged today's anniversary of the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection, saying she has a feeling there is a connection between that and the flagrant anti-Semitic comments and misinformation heard. In today's paper, Representative Jim McGovern was quoted as saying, "the coup is ongoing." They have to acknowledge this as an ongoing attack on voting rights. She is very proud of their city and the historic and present council for its support of expanding and securing voting rights. She also commended residents for

their active participation in city governance, their public comments and for getting out there and voting. "That's what's going to be the antidote for this ongoing coup and for the attack on our democracy," she suggested.

Councilor Jarrett thanked the councilors who spoke and the mayor for the stand she took today in speaking out against anti-Semitism. Historically, Jewish people have been used as a scapegoat when those in power are threatened, he noted. Councilor Moulton said he too stood with the four councilors who spoke before him and the mayor and commended the Board of Health for all the work they have done for the past four years. The anti-Semitism expressed on December 28th was unconscionable and shocking. He is an ardent supporter of free speech but that kind of hate speech cannot be tolerated, he agreed.

In an unrelated announcement, Councilor Moulton made his colleagues and those listening aware of the proposed redevelopment of the former Northampton Nursing Home site on Bridge Road, which has been vacant/unused for more than a decade. Valley CDC is in the final stages of negotiating its purchase and hopes to redevelop it as 60 units of affordable housing, he related. The first formal discussion of these plans will be at the Northampton Housing Partnership meeting Monday at 5:30 p.m.

Mayor Sciarra thanked councilors for joining her in taking a stand against the types of comments that were made. They recognize the importance of free speech and protected speech in a public space but that doesn't mean they have to just let comments go by and not address them. Just because they can't stop them doesn't mean that they can't answer them. She is honored to be with them tonight and to start this term with this newly-seated council.

Councilor Nash added his thanks to the mayor for her clear and concise statement.

<p><u>Presentations</u></p>	<p><u>Presentations</u> None.</p>
<p><u>Consent Agenda</u></p>	<p><u>Consent Agenda</u> Councilor Nash reviewed the items on the consent agenda, offering to remove any item for separate consideration upon request.</p> <p><b>Councilor LaBarge moved approval of the consent agenda as presented. Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.</b></p> <p>The following item was approved as part of the consent agenda: A. Minutes of December 16, 2021 regular meeting</p>
<p><u>Financial Orders (On 1st reading)</u> <u>22.006 An Order to Authorize Fire Department to Accept Gifts of Tangible Personal Property - 1st reading</u></p>	<p><u>Financial Orders (On 1st reading)</u> <u>22.006 An Order to Authorize Fire Department to Accept Gifts of Tangible Personal Property - 1st reading</u> Councilor Nash read the order.</p> <p>The council has done this for other departments like the police department, senior center and parks and recreation, Mayor Sciarra advised. This allows them to receive gifts of up to \$5,000 without going through this process. It was prompted by someone's offer to donate a washer and dryer to the fire station. Mayor's office staff thought they had already passed this for the fire department but they hadn't and so are coming to the council. Going forward, they are asking for the department to be able to accept similar gifts without coming to the council.</p> <p>Councilor Nash asked for examples of other types of gifts this might involve. In reviewing records, Director Nardi said she saw that items such as a refrigerator for the employee lounge and a microwave have been donated in the past.</p>

Councilor Foster moved to refer the order to the consent agenda. Councilor Jarrett seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.

See minutes of January 20, 2022 for second reading.

22.007 An Order to Reprogram Funds for Central Services Projects - 1st reading

22.007 An Order to Reprogram Funds for Central Services Projects - 1st reading  
Councilor Nash read the order.

This is another example of a type of order they will see fairly often - the transfer of unspent money in one project to another ongoing project, Mayor Sciarra explained. The first two items are remaining funds from the senior center space design project being reprogrammed to different needs. With regard to the transfer of funds from one Forbes Library HVAC account to another, funds are being transferred to HVAC work in the children’s section of the library to improve air circulation there, she presented.

Councilor LaBarge asked her to explain the senior center space design for the benefit of the new councilors.

She knows some work was done in the senior center while it was closed, Mayor Sciarra said. The counter was changed to make it more user-friendly and some other cosmetic work was done to make the space more welcoming and friendly.

Councilor Jarrett moved to refer the order to the consent agenda. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.

See minutes of January 20, 2022 for second reading.

22.008 An Order to Appropriate Free Cash to NPS for Federal Foster Care Transportation Reimbursement - 1st reading

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Councilor Nash read the order.

This and the next financial order are ones they are going to see every year early on, Mayor Sciarra noted. The cost for transporting students in foster care gets reimbursed to the city by the state. It gets deposited into the general fund and becomes part of free cash. In Northampton, the city then chooses to transfer it back to the school, which then uses the money for transporting students in foster care the next year.

Councilor LaBarge asked how many foster children are involved.

Mayor Sciarra said they don’t have that level of detail.

Councilor Moulton questioned the two-year lag in reimbursement, since the reimbursement is for spending that took place two fiscal years ago (FY2020).

When the city gets state reimbursement for school expenses, the amount isn’t calculated until the end of the school year in which it is expended, Director Nardi explained. The city will then receive the money the next fiscal year, but financial officers have to wait until free cash is certified to appropriate money from this source. The fiscal year ends June 30<sup>th</sup> and free cash is certified by the state in November. So it does not necessarily take that long to receive reimbursement, but waiting for the fiscal years to end is what causes the delay, so it is not uncommon.

Councilor LaBarge moved to refer the order to the consent agenda. Councilor Elkins seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.

See minutes of January 20, 2022 for second reading.

22.009 An Order to Appropriate Free Cash to NPS for McKinney Vento Transportation

22.009 An Order to Appropriate Free Cash to NPS for McKinney Vento Transportation Reimbursement - 1st reading  
Councilor Nash read the order.

Very similar to foster care transportation, the Northampton Public Schools have students

Reimbursement - 1st reading

who are houseless and need to provide transportation to school for them, Mayor Sciarra presented. This is the same process where the city is reimbursed by the state and they then transfer this money back to the school for transportation for houseless students the following year.

Councilor Foster asked if the transportation follows the student so they can remain in their zoned school.

Mayor Sciarra said she didn't know. She said she could find out and let her know.

Councilor Elkins moved to refer the order to the consent agenda. Councilor Moulton seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.

See minutes of January 20, 2022 for second reading.

22.010 An Order to Appropriate Free Cash for Furniture and Acoustical Panels - 1st reading

22.010 An Order to Appropriate Free Cash for Furniture and Acoustical Panels - 1st reading

Councilor Nash read the order.

This is the transfer of remaining funds from an annual grant from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs to be used for the purchase of furniture and acoustical panels, which is a need that has been identified by the senior center, Mayor Sciarra said.

Councilor LaBarge moved to refer the item to the consent agenda. Councilor Gore seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.

See minutes of January 20, 2022 for second reading.

22.111 An Order to Appropriate \$1.5 Million Free Cash to Various Stabilization Accounts - 1st reading

22.111 An Order to Appropriate \$1.5 Million Free Cash to Various Stabilization Accounts - 1st reading

Councilor Nash read the order.

It has been the city's practice and a policy which she intends to continue to maintain the city's stabilization accounts, Mayor Sciarra advised. One way to do this is to take a portion of the undesignated fund balance (free cash) each year and transfer it to the various stabilization accounts. This is an annual request.

The city operates on a fiscal year, which begins July 1<sup>st</sup> and ends June 30<sup>th</sup>, Director Nardi continued. Free cash is excess and unanticipated revenue that they get from the previous budget year which is generated in two ways: revenue in excess of budget projections or expenditures less than budgeted. The difference between what was budgeted and what was received is excess revenue and becomes next year's free cash. The other source is budget lines that are underspent. She cited the snow and ice account as a line item that is regularly over- or under-spent based on annual snowfall.

Free cash is one of the city's reserves but is unreliable, she elaborated. Since the city can't count on it, it is used towards one-time expenses rather than regular expenses such as someone's salary. It can be used for one-time projects such as buying a vehicle and also to support other reserve accounts.

She described the purpose and use of the city's various reserve accounts – stabilization, capital stabilization and the fiscal stability stabilization account. Capital stabilization is intended to be used for infrastructure needs within the city, while regular stabilization is generally used for large emergencies the city didn't plan on. The fiscal stability stabilization fund is intended to make sure the city is able to maintain activities and programs on an annual basis without asking taxpayers for an override. It allows them to maintain the general o

Stabilization funds help the city's bond rating, since adequate reserves are one of the things bond companies look for in setting the bond rate, Mayor Sciarra added. A higher bond rating has the positive effect of allowing the city to borrow at lower interest rates.

	<p>Councilor Jarrett asked which funds the city drew from in FY2021.</p> <p>The city drew from the fiscal stability stabilization fund (FSSF) to support the general fund budget since revenues were much lower last year, as expected, Director Nardi confirmed.</p> <p>In response to another question, she said that any budget line that is overspent is trued up from free cash at the end of the year.</p> <p>Councilor Moulton asked what the total amount in each of the three funds will be with the \$500,000 added to each.</p> <p>Director Nardi apologized that she didn't have those numbers on hand tonight but said she would send them out after the meeting.</p> <p><b>Councilor Perry moved to refer the order to the consent agenda. Councilor Moulton seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.</b></p> <p><u>See minutes of January 20, 2022 for second reading.</u></p>
	<p><u>Financial Orders (On 2<sup>nd</sup> reading)</u> None.</p>
<p><u>Orders</u></p>	<p><u>Orders</u> None.</p>
<p><u>Ordinances (Not yet Referred)</u></p>	<p><u>Ordinances (Not yet Referred)</u> None.</p>
<p><u>Ordinances</u> <u>22.003 Ordinance Relative to Parking Areas Reserved for Municipal Use</u></p> <p><u>22.004 Ordinance Relative to Prohibited U-Turns</u></p>	<p><u>Ordinances</u> <u>22.003 An Ordinance Relative to Parking Areas Reserved for Municipal Use</u> The pertinent change is the addition of 10 spaces in the Roundhouse lot for municipal use, Councilor Nash explained.</p> <p>This is a recommendation that came out of the Transportation &amp; Parking Commission (TPC), Councilor Foster elaborated. The parking spaces are needed for municipal use but only during the daytime, so they will be available for public use after 6 p.m. The ordinance is intended to codify what is currently happening.</p> <p>Councilor Jarrett reminded fellow councilors that, under the new council rules, they will just have one vote on this when it comes back to them and that they are allowed to have a full discussion now.</p> <p><b>Councilor Jarrett moved to refer the ordinance to Legislative Matters. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.</b></p> <p>Councilor Moulton asked whether the parking spaces were designated for specific departments or were for use by any municipal employee.</p> <p>Councilor Foster said she didn't remember discussing which departments they were for at TPC. Nanci Forestall said they were intended to codify what is currently happening. Councilor Nash said they could find out.</p> <p><u>See minutes of January 20, 2022 for second reading.</u></p> <p><u>22.004 An Ordinance Relative to Prohibited U-Turns</u> This ordinance pertains to the intersection at Northampton High School where North Elm Street (Route 9) and Elm Street intersect, Councilor Nash explained. This is the first of what he is expecting to be several steps to look at traffic patterns around the high school</p>

following the recent fatality there. This will prohibit vehicles heading towards Florence from taking a U-turn to head back down North Elm Street toward town.

Left turns off Woodlawn are prohibited, so that's why people end up turning around here, Councilor Foster said. Megan Paik of the PTO did an extensive survey of families using the high school to collect feedback from people who use that intersection regularly and Director LaScaleia proposed this as a change that could be made to improve safety there. The proposal received a positive recommendation from the TPC.

Councilor Gore asked where people would otherwise turn around when they take a right coming out of Woodlawn.

There's not a great answer to that question, Councilor Foster acknowledged. That's something they will need to look into as it can end up pushing those turns deeper into the neighborhoods. This will at least address the immediate safety issue of the crosswalk in front of the high school.

Councilor Nash said they might want to consider whether there was enough outreach around this particular item. There weren't that many people at that particular TPC meeting, although he thinks a lot of people were aware that the topic of traffic at the high school would be on the agenda.

There were about 400 responses to the PTO survey and information about the TPC meeting was shared really broadly, Councilor Foster responded. There was a robo call and it was shared in newsletters.

**Councilor Moulton moved to refer the order to the consent agenda. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.**

See minutes of January 20, 2022 for second reading.

22.005 Ordinance  
Relative to Off-  
Street Service  
Areas

22.005 An Ordinance Relative to Off-Street Service Areas

This came out of the TPC with a positive recommendation, Councilor Nash explained. This area has been used in practice as a loading/drop-off zone and this will codify that use.

Councilor Moulton asked if it would have any impact on Tuesday's Farmer's Market.

Councilor Nash said he didn't think vendors use this area.

Councilor Jarrett said he has always assumed this area was the property of Thorne's marketplace. He agreed Tuesday market people might be able to use it as well.

**Councilor Foster moved to refer the order to the consent agenda. Councilor Perry seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.**

See minutes of January 20, 2022 for second reading.

<p><u>Zoning Ordinances (Not yet Referred)</u></p>	<p><u>Zoning Ordinances (Not yet Referred)</u> None.</p>
<p><u>Zoning Ordinances</u></p>	<p><u>Zoning Ordinances</u> None.</p>
<p><u>New Business</u></p>	<p><u>New Business</u> None.</p>

Motion to Adjourn

Upon motion made by Councilor LaBarge and seconded by Councilor Maiore the meeting was adjourned at 8:32 p.m. The motion passed 9:0 by roll call vote.

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ Administrative Assistant to the City Council