



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
Northampton, Massachusetts

Roll Call

A special meeting of the City Council (FY2024 Budget Hearing) was called to order by Council President Jim Nash at 6:01 p.m. Upon a roll call, the following City Councilors were physically present:

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

Announcement that Meeting Audio/Video Recorded

Council President Nash announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

Recess for Committee on Finance Meeting

At 6:01 p.m., the City Council recessed for the City Council Committee on Finance to conduct the FY2024 Budget Hearing.

Public Hearing on FY2024 Budget

Councilor Maiore opened the Finance Committee meeting and explained the procedure she would use in conducting the public hearing.

Councilor Nash moved to reopen the public hearing. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

Northampton Public Schools

Northampton Public Schools

Northampton Public Schools Interim Superintendent Jannell Pearson Campbell presented the FY2024 budget. She is standing before them with a new team, she shared. She started serving as interim superintendent July 26th and, within the first 15 minutes, two principals moved on in different directions and she had to hire a business manager and director of curriculum instruction.

As a classroom teacher, she always puts together a plan, so the first thing they did was put together a protocol identifying priorities and strategies for each school as well as expected retirements. Over the past few months they worked to figure out how to balance the budget. Thanks to a one-time \$1.2 million infusion from stabilization, they did not have to have a large reduction in staffing, maybe six or seven positions over all. The total \$37,765,747 budget represents an increase of \$2,606,375.

She described the budget process she and School Business Administrator Roberta (Bobbie) Jones followed. They implemented a budget freeze in November/December because they knew that, if they didn't, they would have to decrease the number of staff. Between the School Committee, the union and herself, they talked about how to retain people. The presentation provided shows how they both balanced the budget with additions and reductions and how they balanced class sizes. Along with reductions they also added new things based on instructional priorities including increasing literacy, science and math. They tried to have a limited impact on the classroom and looked at how to go about reducing spending line by line.

She offered to entertain questions.

Councilor Nash said he wanted to be clear about the big picture for funding the schools for the next year and the year beyond. The mayor is asking the City Council to pull \$1.2 million out of reserves. Because they are trying to address a \$2.4 million budget gap, he asked how the other half of the budget gap is going to be handled over the next two years.

School officials looked at ESSER funds and applied \$400,000 that was supposed to be for gazebos to operational expenses and also moved \$615,000 from school choice funds, Superintendent Campbell explained. This reduced the \$2.4 million gap by \$2.2 million (\$1 million plus

\$1.2 million), leaving a \$649,000 deficit. The presentation shows how they reduced staffing primarily by attrition (retirements) to make that up.

They will also take tailings from this year (whatever is preserved by the budget freeze, which they won't have until July 1st), and apply it to next year's budget, she added.

In response to a question from Councilor Nash, Superintendent Campbell confirmed that the \$1.2 million from stabilization will not be part of the budget going forward. She and Bobbie have already started planning for next year but the new superintendent, Dr. Bonner, will take over the reins July 1st. By September the city will have the first round of numbers for FY2025 and will work with Dr. Bonner to create a plan for next year.

She showed the School Committee that, yes, \$1.2 million was provided but it didn't take away the deficit. ESSER funds also end next year, so they will have to figure out how to move expenses paid by ESSER money to the General Fund. This will all have to be part of the conversation.

She understands that Northampton is known for its schools and it is going to be a hard conversation, she acknowledged. State funding is not what it needs to be so there is also a legislative piece. She invited councilors to begin to work with Bobbie and Director Nardi on how to fund the budget for the next few years since there will be some difficult conversations.

Councilor Nash expressed his understanding that nobody is getting pink slips.

There may be five or six pink slips, Superintendent Campbell clarified. Thankfully, with the \$1.2 from stabilization, \$400,000 from ESSER funds and the movement of \$615,000 from school choice funds, it allows them to close the gap so there are not more.

Councilor LaBarge asked the number of retirees.

Superintendent Pearson Campbell estimated nine.

Mayor Sciarra pointed out that sometimes positions may change since they may not always need three third grades. If someone is pink-slipped they may be able to take another position in the district.

Councilor Moulton thanked Superintendent Campbell for serving this year. It is a challenging time to be an educator as they continue to deal with the effects of the pandemic on students. With regard to the ESSER funds, he asked about the decision to maintain 1st grade para-educators at the elementary schools but to lose some other positions. (He mentioned a math interventionist at JFK and full-time counselor.)

Superintendent Pearson Campbell said they realize that literacy is very important. There are grants coming out to support the math. They tried to work with the middle school principal so that it would be included into various positions at the middle school.

Both math interventionists will have one more year. For this year (FY24), they will have both interventionists, she clarified. ESSER funds end in FY25 so that's when the positions end. The schools received a grant for a math initiative and for EL (Early Literacy).

Councilor Maiore asked how many positions were lost through attrition.

Right now, nine people have left but other positions are open in the school system, the superintendent said. She referred to a slide in the presentation that illustrates this in greater detail.

It is worth naming that they are talking about this year's deficit but yet, although ESSER funds are ending next year, the learning loss and social-emotional needs from the pandemic will continue well beyond that, Councilor Foster observed. It has been a boon to have these funds yet the need will continue as these students move through the schools.

She asked about efforts the district is making to recruit and retain teachers.

Superintendent Pearson Campbell referred to an exit subcommittee that is compiling a report about why a lot of minority teachers are leaving the district and a Collaborative for Educational Services (CES) grant for paraprofessionals who would like to become teachers. Under this program, the principal nominates a para who has a bachelor's degree to receive a teaching license. The state is also offering a diversification grant.

When she first arrived they had seventy-five teachers who left the district. It was a social-emotional time not just for students but also for staff. Right now, it's calm. A lot of people who left want to come back so it is a great testimony to their community.

She has two kids at Bridge Street Elementary School and when they talk about their school experience, it is the teachers and para educators (interventionists, psychologists, etc.) who they're connected to, Councilor Foster shared. Her 2nd and 5th grader have had a pretty spectacular experience.

Councilor Maiore opened the floor to questions from the public.

Quaverly, Northampton, said she had questions about state funding. She asked if the interim superintendent could share any conversations she might be privy to about how special education needs might be able to be funded through the state and where they are with the millionaire's tax and whether they have any chance of recouping that for grades K-12.

Gwen Nabad, Northampton, the parent of an adult child who was a special needs student and resident of a low income community, said she has seen many challenges with children in her community who are on special needs programming. She wondered how much of ARPA funding is going to special education. She is seeing a lot of children who can't read and it worries her a lot.

Josh Feldman, a dad with three kids at Bridge Street school, expressed 'lots of gratitude' to the superintendent, the mayor's office and the city itself for its support of public education. The way he is reading the narrative of where they are for public school next year is that they are averting a crisis temporarily but are essentially a boat approaching an iceberg with a fiscal cliff looming. Long-term, there seems to be a bit of an intractable problem coming. He is curious about the multi-year thoughts from the superintendent's office and more broadly and said he would encourage [city officials] to prioritize school funding at a fiscal level. State funding is the reason they are in this intractable position, yet they need to support the next leaders for their city and their country.

Katri Shoeder, Ward 4 asked if it was time to make a general comment.

Councilor Maiore advised her that, since it is a public hearing, comments should be pertinent to the subject at hand.

Councilor Moulton summarized the questions for response by the superintendent and the mayor.

A few weeks ago, Massachusetts Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler came to Northampton public schools and school officials advocated for more funding, Superintendent Pearson Campbell reported. Part of the conversation was how, although local expenses are rising, state funding is not matching them. In addition, the union went to the statehouse, met with Senator Comerford and spent time on the hill talking about state funding. In their district, they have been awarded a literacy grant from Director Roxanne Dorie, have two new math programs at the elementary level and are in the process of choosing either EL curriculum or 'Words of Wisdom' to help support students reading on grade level. In addition, per new Department of Education guidelines, they are putting a screener in place to screen kids between PreK and 3rd grade for dyslexia. She referred to other initiatives outlined in the school newsletter and on the school's webpage. When she arrived here they had Ames Web as a screener, but it is no longer on the list so they had to choose a new screener.

They have made a lot of changes from the time she arrived until now.

With regard to the budget plan for the next three years, the business manager has already started looking at numbers so they will be prepared to start an internal conversation when the new superintendent arrives July 1st, she indicated. By December, a plan will be in place so the conversation can be extended to the community. She again invited councilors to participate in the conversation about the budget and about what education in the district will look like.

Mayor Sciarra said she didn't have any news to share about the Fair Share Amendment. The Senate has now come out with its budget and it will go to conference. Initial indications from the governor's budget show a very tiny percentage (1%) of fair share revenue directed toward K-12. Most of it is directed toward early education and higher ed. Even the small amount earmarked for K-12 was directed toward new things and not existing operations. One of the reasons they fought so hard for fair share was to get more revenue toward K12.

It is something the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) has been talking about and advocating around, she confirmed.

Councilor Foster said she was listening to a story on NPR this morning about the possibility of a federal default and its potential impacts on federal aid to cities and towns that has not yet been expended. She offered the mayor a chance to address that if she would like.

What she's heard and what the MMA is hearing is that the 'clawback' more likely wouldn't be at the local level but at the state level, Mayor Sciarra said. She feels like Northampton has handled its ARPA funds well in that it has allocated them.

Councilor Moulton raised a question brought to him by someone in the community about bus monitor positions being eliminated on buses with behaviorally-challenged students. The resident's concern was how students will now be supervised on the bus.

There are still monitors, Superintendent Pearson Campbell said. "Sometimes we (administrators) have to ride the bus" to find out what's going on, she shared.

Regarding the impact of charter school sending tuition on education funding, Councilor Foster asked what grades of students are leaving the district to go to charter schools?

It usually happens when the oldest child in a family goes to kindergarten as younger children in the family tend to follow, or if someone else on a street goes to a charter school, the superintendent noted. She confirmed that many never even enter the district.

Supporters of Bridge Street School will be holding a fundraiser for a garden space Historic Northampton is making available on its property, **Quaverly** mentioned. With regard to the possibility of state funding for special education, one of their state representatives mentioned there is some dialogue about potentially getting local sped funding. She asked ballpark how much Northampton schools spend on SPED.

Superintendent Pearson Campbell said she didn't have that figure but did know that the schools had to add \$549,000 for out of district placements, representing a 14% increase. The sped director estimated it at 22% of the overall budget, Superintendent Pearson Campbell said.

Districts have been particularly advocating for the state to help bridge that 14% increase in some way, Mayor Sciarra noted.

Lemy Coffin, Ward 1, said she was pretty upset to hear about the bus monitor situation. She works with families and the amount of time she spends taking calls from families whose kids are facing bullying on the bus which escalates when they get home, sometimes leading to police intervention is pretty high. She's pretty confused because they're having a community conversation about community care, preventative measures and public health and having an adult present on the bus who is not driving the bus is a pretty basic thing that can be provided to kids to lead to less future police intervention. Funding three more police means there might be a police officer to respond, but a police officer might not even have to respond if there's a monitor on the bus. She is pretty disappointed to hear that is happening because the bus is a particular place she knows kids get triggered as a place that has little supervision, little adult allies, little place for intervention to keep them safe. It leads to suicidal ideation, abuse toward

siblings, holes in walls and houses, etc. It seems like a bus monitor would probably solve a lot of these problems

Gwen Nabad thanked those who went up to the statehouse and took the time to advocate for more state funding for education. She worked as a bus monitor and knows it brought a lot of comfort to the children she rode with and also the parents who worried every day about putting their kids on the bus.

Roy C. Martin of 81 Conz Street said his son Sam went to school in Amherst. His sister was getting bullied by some kids from the school and it seemed like nobody had time to do anything about it. Nothing much happened until her mother and former Mayor Clare Higgins went over there and had a conversation with the parents. He said he doesn't see why parents can't ride the bus and keep the kids in check. Why should we have to pay for monitors for our own children? We don't have to have monitors paid to go on a bus.

There being no further comments, the Finance Committee took a brief recess.

Recess

Recess

The Finance Committee recessed for five minutes. The Finance Committee reconvened at 7:03 p.m.

Northampton Police Department (NPD)

Northampton Police Department (NPD)

Councilor Maiore explained the procedure she would use in conducting the rest of the hearing. She stated her intention to allow two rounds of questions and comments from the public.

Police Chief Jody Kasper gave a Powerpoint presentation. (See FY24 NPD Budget Presentation, attached).

As part of her presentation, Chief Kasper showed a slide showing that city police worked 2,588 hours of overtime for shift coverage alone in the six-month period from July to December. Commenting on the toll this is taking on her department, she noted that councilors are being asked to look at a budget, but that, for her, this is about people. They are asking city workers to come in and work 16-hour shifts regularly. Most officers' partners work, so many of them get up, spend the day with their families, work 3 to 11 p.m., then find out at 10 p.m. that they're getting held over. They are in a cruiser making critical decisions for which they will be quickly judged if they make an error after they've been awake for 20 hours. This is not reasonable for them; it is dangerous for them and she thinks there's a liability issue for the city.

"I don't think we're being reasonable to our city employees in this case asking them to do this," she stated.

She also presented data showing that, for 600 police calls, Northampton had no officers available.

Her proposal to remedy this is to try to shorten the hiring process for filling vacancies due to retirements, etc. by hiring 'student officers' to begin the training process earlier. She referred to the very long time it takes to onboard a new patrol officer: the interview, fitness test, background investigation, State Physical Abilities Test, etc. takes 3 – 4 months and waiting for an academy to start takes 1 to 6 months. The police academy course is six months and field training is four months, resulting in a 14- to 20-month period from the interview to the start date. To illustrate, she noted that the current vacancy caused by a retirement May 12, 2023 will not be filled until October of 2024.

It worries her and that's why she's asking for this. Had this been in place, knowing she had two retirements coming, what she would have done is put two new hires in the April police academy, Chief Kasper advised. They still would not have been ready to hit the streets until February of 2024.

This would allow her to plan for anticipated vacancies they know are coming.

Following her presentation, Councilor Maiore opened the floor to questions from councilors.

Councilor Nash asked what it is that student officers would be doing between their hire date and the police academy.

They may use them as community service officers and have them in house at the desk, reading their policies, learning the software, etc., Chief Kasper advised. Otherwise, they would just wait for the academy to start.

Councilor LaBarge asked if this is going to increase her budget.

Yes, it is roughly \$55,000 per officer so it would increase the budget by \$166,878.

Councilor Moulton asked if she sees these three positions perpetually being in her budget.

As long as they continue to have high turnover, yes. It is a way of getting new officers in the pipeline sooner. If retention were to improve and turnover subsided, it would no longer be necessary.

To be clear, she based the request for three students on the amount of overtime hours. The fact that it matches the number of pending retirements is coincidental, she asserted.

Councilor Maiore said it is not clear why this speeds the process up or what a student officer is. She expressed her understanding that they would not be able to do the work of regular officers.

A student officer is one still in training who has not yet attended the police academy, Chief Kasper clarified.

She isn't clear how the retention of student officers would be any more effective, Councilor Maiore said. Why does she think student officers wouldn't follow the same trend of [high] turnover?

She has no reason to believe they are any more likely to stay than any other member of the NPD, Chief Kasper acknowledged. They had one person who went through four months of field training and the police academy and then resigned. They have the same likelihood of turnover as anyone else.

Councilor Maiore stated her perception that, for a problem they really don't have a parameter around, they are adding three permanent positions that each year will have cost of living increases, health insurance, retirement, etc. These three positions will grow in cost each year, she suggested.

Mayor Sciarra clarified that the line items will remain in the budget but the individuals will move into one of the officer positions. It gives them the ability to plan for vacancies they know will be happening.

What she is saying is that they are creating three new positions, Councilor Maiore said.

They are creating three budget lines, Mayor Sciarra clarified. There won't be three more officers on the street.

Councilor Moulton expressed his understanding that they are creating positions that will allow them the flexibility to bring officers on earlier than they might otherwise. In next year's budget, the new officers will fill one of the positions being vacated but the three student officer positions will remain. If at some point turnover stabilizes, they may no longer need to be used.

Chief Kasper said she would look forward to that day. She can only tell them that they have officers who are exhausted.

Councilor Maiore asked if there are other communities that have used this.

Chief Kasper said she didn't know. She knows other communities are struggling and that a lot of strategies are being tried.

Councilor Maiore said she wanted to ask about the nature of calls since it wasn't broken down and the Department of Community Care (DCC) task force will be starting to take calls in about four months. She is trying to match up the percentage of calls police are not able to get to with the fact that they have funded new responders who are expected to begin taking some of those calls.

"We're all excited to have another service," Chief Kasper stressed. She would like to see their high utilizer calls being reduced. She heard Commissioner O'Leary say they are going to be taking calls in September, but even if others are taking calls, the police will still have calls they need to respond to and some calls by policy require multiple officers.

If there is a vision that they would get to a point that they would have [only] two or three officers on, she would never recommend that, Chief Kasper advised. The thought of them handling some of the calls is exciting but they don't have the data yet for how that might impact their work. They won't know that until FY25.

In response to a question from Councilor Foster, Chief Kasper said they are way over in their overtime budget but they have money in personnel services due to vacancies so she doesn't anticipate needing to ask for a transfer.

Councilor Foster expressed her understanding that the idea of student officers is that it would reduce the amount of time there is a vacancy which, in turn, would reduce the amount of overtime but not increase the number of officers.

The goal is not for the police to have a bigger footprint which she knows is a concern, Chief Kasper said. They will have the same number of boots on the ground; it will just be someone who is awake rather than someone who has been awake for 20 hours.

"That is what you are routinely getting in this community; people who are exhausted."

She doesn't see this as having any more officers in the community.

Having an officer working toward the tail end of a shift is really concerning when thinking about the level of judgment required, Councilor Foster confirmed. She said she hears near universal support for getting mental health responses to people who need it.

Councilor Jarrett asked how many officers listed under patrol officers are currently injured.

She doesn't know that number but, right now, they have four officers in the academy, two in field training, two vacancies and one injury, Chief Kasper related. She can't recall a time in the last five years when people have come out of the academy and not had a position to step into.

Councilor Gore asked if the goal is to have student officers in the budget for the foreseeable future.

She is basing it on overtime. If they can get overtime down, she would reevaluate, Chief Kasper said. There are 60 sworn officers.

Questions and comments from councilors continued. Among other things, Councilor Nash said he reviewed the Northampton Policing Review Commission (NPRC) report earlier today and that the term 'footprint' occurs twice. It is a little confusing because it is not clear if 'footprint' is the number of officers or the range of calls and types of services police provide. It is really clear in the report that the police and broader community agree there are calls out there police officers should not be going to.

He expressed the opinion that, for what the chief is proposing, the idea of the footprint is not expanding; it is always the same.

"The problem is the number of officers available is not always there," he suggested. By having these positions having five officers on a shift is possible.

Her idea of the footprint is that it is about narrowing the calls that sworn responders are going to, Chief Kasper asserted. She sees their footprint getting smaller in September when some calls will be responded to by others and some of the calls that they've just kind of taken up because there was no one else to do them are eliminated.

"This plan doesn't have any impact on that," she stressed. The footprint will shrink as the DCC takes on calls.

She really believes they are just talking about having officers that are fresh; ones that are well-rested and not on doubles; i.e. - replacing the tired one with an awake one.

Councilor Moulton expressed his understanding that the chief doesn't see a correlation between the DCC being up and running and reducing the number of police officers. He asked if she *does* see a correlation between the DCC being up and running and reducing overtime.

Chief Kasper said she doesn't know; she is not sure how those calls are going to impact them. Upon reflection, she said it might affect holdover overtime but it shouldn't affect regular overtime because that's just them trying to fill their minimum shift strength.

After sundry additional questions, Councilor Maire opened the floor to questions from the public.

Public Comment

Quaverly wondered if it is possible to see the slide again about how many don't finish the academy. She is curious about hiring bonuses offered in other communities and whether they have considered that as an option. She also wondered about calls that by policy require multiple people; particularly, whose policy it is and whether talking with the DCC might lead to a review of that policy. She is wondering when the DCC conversations are planned to take place. With regard to patrol numbers, she asked if they have any data about the kinds of problems that are addressed and solved on patrol.

JoElla Tarbutton (Jada), Walter Salvo House, said the police have been doing an absolutely wonderful job at the Salvo House. She is actually shocked when they are telling her about the overtime. She is hoping they don't have tired cops out there.

When talking about student officers, she asked if the city pays student officers for the academy. Also, is the police station a work/study site? If so, isn't that a program where the government pays 75%?

She would think Northampton would be a great place to work.

Gwen Nabad of Hampshire Heights asked about Department of Mental Health (DMH) grants and the support available through those. She wondered if that is helping at all and how much longer it will last and if there is a possibility of continuing that grant. Also, she asked if the Child in Need of Services (CHINS) process still happens.

With regard to the NPRC's recommendation, the primary value NPRC commissioners upheld is that they wanted to reduce the footprint of policing, former NPRC chair **Dan Cannity** clarified. They looked at a ton of research across the field and found that the only thing that reduces the number of police misconduct incidents and reports of violence is literally reducing the footprint of policing, having police have fewer interactions with the public and moving out even those calls they think of as traditionally needing police intervention. That is what informed all of the recommendations, including creating the DCC. The whole point was to have that division take those calls/responsibilities out.

He looked at several years of budgets for Northampton and in every single one of them retention of police officers and poor department morale was reported, and this predated Chief Kasper. Even with three student officer positions, the officers don't start working for 14 months, so they're never going to hit the attrition rate. The broader question to councilors and the mayor is: is this reducing the footprint of policing that they all endorsed in that report? Even if they are level funding, is that reducing? What else are they thinking about doing in the city that would not require them to hire because hiring and keeping people seems to be a problem.

Mary, who said she has lived in **Florence** for 36 years, said she wanted to speak in support of the Northampton Police Department. This past year she was a student at the citizens' police academy, a series of classes which explain what the NPD does. She had absolutely no idea of the scope of the duties that officers perform, ranging from community service and traffic calls to domestic violence and accompanying social workers on mental health calls and drug overdoses. She doesn't feel like the city of Northampton can function properly without a fully-funded, fully-equipped police department. She thinks it would be really beneficial to people who don't know the duties of the police to take the citizen's academy. It was an incredibly enlightening experience.

Katri, Northampton, said she works in a domestic violence and rape crisis center in Greenfield and has lived in Northampton since 2015. She is here to implore them to reject the mayor's proposal to increase the Northampton police department's budget and add three new budget lines for student officers.

"We're seeing a police shortage because people don't want to be policed and people don't want police," she claimed. They know that more police don't keep people safe; community does. She referred to seeing survivors not protected by police and being re-victimized by police. She sees clients coming in reporting being sexually assaulted by police and not wanting to report an assault to the police because they don't feel safe with them. It is devastating but not surprising that, on a daily basis, survivors report that restraining orders do nothing. It is evident police do not keep people safe. She is sure they saw that Safe Passage just closed its shelter citing the housing crisis as a reason for the service being ineffective. At her work, they pay for hotels for people because there are no shelter vacancies. The wait list for housing vouchers is two years long even on domestic violence priority lists. They know interpersonal violence happens when people's basic needs are not being met and their people's needs are not being met. They do not need investment in more police, they need investment in social services. Cut the police budget by 10%, reallocate those funds to the DCC and freeze police hiring, she urged.

Roy C. Martin, 81 Conz Street, said he had to take offense to Katri's comment. He doesn't think the police need defunding; he thinks they need more funding. It is hard to get someone from another department if the city is not paying what other departments are paying.

When Chief Kasper first came on, Northampton used to have police officers walking the street and she was a regular foot officer walking the street. In his estimation, he thinks they need about 10 more officers. When he first ran for mayor there were 20,000 people, now they've got 30,000 and they have fewer police officers.

Lemy Coffin said she is not here to nitpick statistics or try to challenge the stronghold policing has on the public discourse about public safety. Frankly, all of Chief Kasper's concerns stem from one simple thing: they are not reducing policing and punishment at the rate they should be. They are trying to maintain policing when policing is no longer in the interests of the people. At this juncture, their representative democracy is in full swing and she has to rely on them - elected officials - to act in the interest of her communities. To quote an old basketball coach, "the true test of a man's character is what they do when no one is watching."

When the world stopped watching, when people stopped chanting 'Black lives matter' on the steps of the police station, Mayor Sciarra decided to request a 5.62% increase to policing.

John Wooden also said, "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation because your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

The question of this budget cycle is simple. How many councilors in this room will be relying on this community's reputation of progressive values rather than contributing to its progressive character?

This may sound harsh, but our character is important now more than ever. In times of crisis, all we truly have is our character to rely on. Our country and this community is bracing itself for multi-faceted crises: the housing crisis, the climate crisis, the looming economic crisis, mass incarceration crisis, mental health crisis, crisis caused by inflation, etc. In her budget message, Mayor Sciarra said residents are asking more from the city than ever before. Their community

asking more from the city is not a matter of intellectual exercise or titillating debate, it is based on a very material reality as more and more of their neighbors, friends and families face crisis after crisis. "We are becoming increasingly reliant on our local networks for support and we're inviting you, our city government, to join us in this interdependence."

It is really hard to do when your primary investment is policing and when Chief Kasper is sitting there with a gun while she makes this speech. Despite her harsh critique, she is actually here tonight because she still has hope that the character of councilors and the character of this town will come through for justice even though Mayor Sciarra is trying to increase the footprint of the NPD on the back of a progressive reputation. She urged councilors to vote 'no' to the 5.26% budget increase to the NPD and defend community care, not as a matter of reputation but as a matter of character.

Ashwin Ravikumar, Amherst, thanked everyone who spoke before him. As someone involved in a lot of the conversations with the NPRC about policing in Northampton, he is personally really, really eager to have someone he can call in a time of crisis who is not a cop. So far that doesn't exist. He is speaking to encourage the council not to increase the police department budget and approve a 5% raise but, instead, to cut the budget, since that is consistent with the NPRC's recommendation to reduce the footprint of policing and the council's commitment to honor that recommendation. The term 'footprint' is actually very clearly defined in the report; it means reducing the size of the department, reducing the scope of its responsibility and reducing its interactions with residents on a regular basis. In order to make this happen, they need to slash the NPD budget by 10%, allocate that funding to the DCC and freeze NPD hiring.

In his view, Chief Kasper's comments did not amount to a substantive justification for extending hiring in the context of the NPRC's recommendation that the council committed to honoring. While the DCC does exist, it has not been funded to the amount that would allow it to thrive. If they are a community committed to racial, economic and climate justice, does it make sense to have 60 cops (63 if student police officers are counted) in the Mayor's budget?

As a climate justice scholar, he presented the following analogy: If they wanted a green new deal that would allow them to decarbonize the economy quickly, they wouldn't create a green corps and simultaneously subsidize the fossil fuel industry. The council is in a position to pass a budget that truly reflects the values of climate justice, racial justice, economic and gender justice. He hopes they will slash the NPD budget, freeze hiring and fully reinvest in the DCC.

Raina, Easthampton, said she works in a café downtown and is involved in the local queer community. She appreciates a lot of aspects of the budget such as the Climate Action and Project Administration (CAPA) initiative and appreciates the questions councilors have asked Chief Kasper. She thinks the answers provided will require a lot of thought and contemplation from them all.

She referred to the comment in the budget package that, "the budget represents movement forward for key initiatives grounded in the values and expressed priorities of the city of Northampton and our community."

She doesn't believe the community has expressed the priority or value of increasing the police budget and that, if anything, they've expressed the complete opposite. She hopes they have been watching the news and can see the dangers of police involvement in the community and how, for some, police involvement is considered public safety but for others police involvement is considered public brutality and correlated with an increase in harm to BIPOC, impoverished, working class, queer, trans folk and folks with mental health conditions, all populations which exist in Northampton. At previous meetings they have talked about reparations and fair housing and many financial, societal and political means that prevent marginalized populations in Northampton from being able to live and work safely. She hopes that as city councilors they recognize their privileged role as politicians and people in power and, especially, their extra privilege as white politicians and white male politicians. Because they exist in these intersecting positions of power, their potential reasoning in supporting the proposed increase in the police budget could come from a perspective that many people of Northampton do not share. She asked them to please take other perspectives as to why student officers may not be beneficial and may even be harmful into account. She thinks there are other ways to support community care and promote community safety, so they can do this another way.

Luca Catala, Ward 5, echoed calls to, instead of passing the budget, think about defunding instead. He comes from a lineage of social politics and social construction that conflicts pretty heavily with this room and this space. This is a space where the movements of which he is a part come to die; it is a space where they are not really, frankly, faced with many of their constituents; a lot of them don't even know that this is happening and the memories of Ferguson, 2020, LA, etc. are erased. One of the key elephants in the room is that, as Chief Kasper stated, when they get tired officers, they get incidents. What do incidents look like? It's death or its injury to community members.

Fundamentally, he would say the problem is with the institution itself. There is no reforming of it or pretending that it is not an institution of profound social violence that, in a just society, would not need to exist. He echoed his friends' calls to defund it by 10% instead and to dedicate these funds to social care. There is no path forward by increasing police presence; it just leads to more violence; it leads to more suffering. There's an extraordinary violence behind all of it.

Shel Remickson, Hadley, echoed the sentiments to defund the police budget instead of increasing it. She thinks there are concerns around the issues of police officers being overtired and having too much work; she would suggest that part of the reason people don't want to be police officers is that they have a reputation of being violent. She would suggest the scope of what police do should be lessened and given to people who are trauma-informed and equipped to handle crises in a safe and healing way. She suggests reducing the police budget by 10% and reinvesting those funds in the DCC.

Ya Ping, Amherst, said she is speaking in the hopes the city council will listen to their pleas to please invest city resources in the kinds of programs and services that are the kinds of things that make communities thrive. As context, she shared the following statistics from an analysis performed by Northampton Abolition Now (NAN) of the last 30 years [From 1994 to (FY)2024] of city budgets:

- ❖ the police budget has grown 173%
- ❖ the DPW has grown 72%
- ❖ arts and culture - 116%
- ❖ health and human services – 145%

Health and Human Services is still at \$2,416,297 in the current proposed budget compared to the police \$6,835,289.

The DCC proposed four responders as opposed to the police which has 60 officers. For every dollar the police get, Forbes Library comes in at \$.22 (close to a quarter), health and human services gets \$.19, (within that, the DCC gets about \$.06), parks and rec, \$.06, senior services \$.05 and \$.01 for arts and culture.

She wants them to consider what it would feel like to actually throw a little more of that money toward some of the things they know create a happy community. She thinks they won't regret it.

Schuyler, Ward 1, said she has been thinking a lot about who and what keeps them safe. Personally, she doesn't feel police keep her safe. As a preschool teacher, they are going to have lockdown training Thursday. A year ago at Uvalde, police showed that they have their best interests in mind and not the community's. She has seen that time and time again across the country. They are willing to put others' lives in danger in order to protect their own. She thinks certain council members and the mayor have been challenging to have a dialogue with about this kind of stuff. There are a lot of constituents that want to see other programs funded and see defunding of the police. Today, she saw some eye rolls from the mayor and pretty intense gesticulations when she thought someone might be speaking out of turn. Her question is: how are you going to be accountable to your constituents who disagree with you? How are you going to be accountable to people of Northampton and engage with them in a dialogue about policing? They could do a lot more.

There being no further comments, the Finance Committee took a brief recess.

Recess

Recess

At 8:53 p.m., the Finance Committee recessed for five minutes. The committee reconvened at 9:03 p.m.

Response to Public Comments

Response to Public Comments

Councilor Moulton reviewed questions raised during public comment.

Councilors heard questions about whether adding three student officer positions aligns with one of the overarching recommendations of the NPRC, which was to reduce the footprint of police both in terms of the size of the department and its interactions with residents. Is it consistent with the community’s values to add more money to the police budget? Was consideration given to investing more money in social services and more to the DCC and diverting money from police for those kinds of community activities that some feel will make the community safer?

The NPRC had 12 immediate recommendations in its final report, Chief Kasper reminded. In looking at those, she believes they have met seven or eight out of 12. These include creation of the DCC, improved options for crisis response (as mentioned, in August they accepted grant funding to put two clinicians in the field), continuing to be committed to reducing the risk of substance abuse (she pointed to the DART program and DART officers and the department’s transition to embracing a harm reduction model), improving the current complaint process (since the report, the state created the POST commission, which can also take citizen complaints), establishing data-driven staffing levels for public safety (from the hours of 3 a.m. to 7 a.m., minimum staffing drops to four when call volume drops and there is a drop on Sundays, so they do use a data-driven approach to staffing), establishing safe work hour caps and continuing to provide police response to calls.

With regard to safe work hour caps, that’s what she’s here talking about. Officers are working too much and she’s telling them that. She thinks it’s extremely consistent with the NPRC’s recommendations to reduce the number of hours officers are working. She thinks it was an inadvertent outcome of the budget cuts. When the budget was cut, the same number of calls continued to come in with fewer officers available to handle the same number of calls and fill shifts.

Seventh or eighth is engaging the police union, which has been great about many of the changes that have been made, including the introduction of a community service officer as a hiring strategy. One of NPRC’s expanded recommendations was for civilian flaggers, and, in May of 2022, the police converted to using civilian flaggers. They have 11 traffic control officers who don’t have weapons and also have a restorative justice program run by C4RJ. In addition, the NPRC wanted animal control to be civilian and outside of the police department, and it is.

In looking at all the NPRC’s recommendations, they are actually doing really well in responding to a lot of them on their own, Chief Kasper suggested. She started to develop a strategic plan just before the pandemic but it got pushed back by competing priorities. She thinks they have done really well in aligning their work with some of the NPRC’s recommendations.

With regard to funding for the DCC, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is comprised of six different divisions, Mayor Sciarra reminded. The city is awaiting news as to whether an Equitable Approaches to Public Safety (EAPS) grant of \$450,000 will be part of its funding this coming year. They have fully-funded the DCC’s operations through the general fund but are very hopeful \$450,000 will be coming from EAPS.

DHHS is a very grant-heavy department so looking at the bottom line doesn’t give a full picture of all of the money that comes into the DHHS and supports the DHHS’s activities, she noted.

With regard to reflecting community values by funding other public services in addition to the police, as they know, the city is creating a resilience hub and is investing a lot of city funds in that, Mayor Sciarra advised. They’ve created the DCC and spend a lot of time working on how to create housing - particularly affordable housing - recently signing away the parcel behind city hall for affordable (SRO) housing. As a community, she feels they are investing in many ways in all sorts of human needs. One of the reasons for creating the DHHS is to really acknowledge a lot of the work the health department has been doing towards human services and to show

that they as a community are working hard to fund social services in a way that hasn't been done in the past.

They are fed up with the lack of taking responsibility for these things at the state and federal level and are taking them on at the local level. "We work incredibly hard in this community to stand by those values and are putting a lot of our resources towards trying to bolster the human services here in Northampton," she observed.

In response to specific questions about hiring bonuses, the cost of the police academy and DMH grants, Chief Kasper said she has contemplated offering hiring bonuses but has mixed feelings about them. Among other things, it doesn't recognize the work put in by existing staff. If they are spending money on people, she likes it to be earned by their own officers. They have a recruitment stipend for officers who refer successful candidates and a strategy of growing people within the agency.

In answer to other questions, the cost of the police academy is \$3,200 and the DMH grant is renewed each year and seems like a reliable funding source for now, Chief Kasper shared. As far as when discussions with the DCC will occur, their next meeting is in a week or two. CHINS petitions have changed to Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) petitions.

The question about conversations with the DCC related to policies about the number of officers required to respond to calls and whether this might change when the DCC comes on board, Councilor Moulton clarified. Another specific question was when conversations about data analysis which has been completed and how calls will be directed to the DCC would take place.

The chief discussed the types of calls that currently require multiple officers, including domestic violence, motor vehicle accidents and major disturbances. She doesn't know how the DCC will impact that, she said.

In response to additional questions, the chief confirmed that police officers patrol the city as well as respond to specific calls and described the citizens' police academy in greater detail.

Councilor Maiore said that, as promised, she would entertain a second round of questions from the public.

Public Comment

Schuyler said she wanted to pose the question to councilors but would also like to hear from the mayor how she plans to engage with members of the community who are against policing, especially some who voted to cut the budget 10%.

Gwen Nabad asked what percentage of the money the DHHS gets is going to the DCC.

Councilor Maiore said she would be happy to follow up with Schuyler after the hearing and suggested other councilors individually do the same.

They have been having a robust community conversation about this for three years and are always having conversations about it, Mayor Sciarra said. It's not like there's a lack of opportunity to hear from folks. She's always happy to be part of any conversation and feels like they are pretty regularly in conversation about these topics.

Re: Gwen's questions, Commissioner O'Leary said the funding of the various DHHS divisions are not separated out in the budget book, Councilor Maiore reminded.

\$358,234 is budgeted for the six positions in the DCC, Councilor Moulton said.

There being no further comments, **Councilor Moulton moved to close the public hearing. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.**

The public hearing was closed at 9:38 p.m.

23.316 An Order to Approve FY2024 General Fund Budget**23.317 An Order to Approve FY 2024 Sewer Enterprise Fund Budget****23.318 An Order to Approve FY 2024 Water Enterprise Fund Budget****23.319 An Order to Approve FY 2024 Solid Waste Enterprise Fund Budget****23.320 An Order to Approve FY 2024 Stormwater and Flood Control Enterprise Fund Budget****23.321 An Order to Approve FY2024 Revolving Funds**

Councilor Jarrett stated for the record that he is recusing himself as he has a conflict of interest as a member of the Pedal People cooperative with one particular part of the Central Services budget and with the solid waste enterprise fund budget because of the Locust Street transfer station.

Councilor Nash moved to refer the orders as a group with a positive recommendation back to City Council. Councilor LaBarge seconded.

Councilor Nash said this is going to be his 7th budget and he wants to say that this one is really well put together; he is impressed with the level of thought and consideration that has gone into it. The city has a lot of competing priorities which they heard about tonight and hear about all the time from constituents, and the Mayor and her staff have worked really hard to address all of those concerns in some way. With the money that they have, the mayor has put together a really wonderful comprehensive plan for how to provide services in their community for the coming year.

He is really impressed with the recommendations around the school department. Last year they were all concerned about where things were going with the budget for this year. The mayor warned them there was going to be some tough decisions, and it is evident that the mayor and the school department are working to make those tough decisions. He appreciates the mayor's approach to accessing reserve funds. Initially he was dead set against touching the reserves, but the mayor has framed what's going on with their school department as a budgetary crisis and that this is a one-time use. What is particularly encouraging to him is that the mayor is working with the School Committee and the unions and they are all together lobbying the statehouse for more funding.

He is looking forward to the DCC opening up. He wishes they had more money for public works and Director LaScaleia. By and large, this is really great work and was really well put together.

There's a lot to like in this budget, Councilor Moulton agreed. He is particularly pleased about the mayor's commitment to education at this time. He thinks it was a wise decision to provide money from the stabilization fund to reduce the need for staff cuts. The creation of the new climate action department, which has a lot of support in the community, done both by transfers of staff positions from other departments as well as creating a department head-level director he believes is very smart move. Development of the DCC has been very deliberate in that it has been created looking at models throughout the country. He is going to be very interested in seeing how calls are answered by the DCC. He thinks it is smart to start with the staff they have in the budget for next year but thinks it is important to think about gradually increasing that staff.

They heard from both the police chief and the fire chief about difficulties in retention and recruitment. The fire chief spoke last night about creating an internship program with Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School (SVAHS) as a way to bring local students into the fire department. He sees student officers in the police department as a way to provide more flexibility in getting recruits on board faster. They can't go on having so many tired cops out on the street. The amount of overtime and what that leads to is not safe. As a way to address that, he is satisfied that the new positions are needed. As they heard tonight, with a reduction in the need for forced overtime, perhaps these positions won't have to be filled. He believes it is a smart way to address the question of trying to reduce the number of vacancies and length of time it takes to fill those vacancies. He recognizes there are competing interests and different ways to view it but, overall, he thinks it is a good budget for the next fiscal year. He, too, will support it.

Councilor LaBarge thanked the mayor and her staff, pointing appreciatively to the way they found money for their schools. It was very critical because they were looking at quite a bit of layoffs and they prevented that. With the fire department, she was very pleased with what they

were told about how they are progressing. Looking at the police department; yes, they did defund them at one point. It was absolutely necessary because of the businesses that were closing in Northampton and people being stricken with COVID-19. They are now taking care of the police department in this budget. They are getting cruisers, which are needed but which they couldn't vote for last time because of COVID and what was happening in the city of Northampton. Who could afford a car at that time?

As a city councilor, she has many residents who feel they want to see more police presence which they are not seeing. She feels what happened several years ago is something councilors had to do but that now it is time to support the police budget. Now they are hearing what has happened in that department and hearing people asking where is the police presence and not being able to get police out to their wards.

She is supporting the police department because she has residents who feel they want to have police presence.

She can't think of a time when it was tougher to be a mayor, Councilor Maiore observed. At best, it's complex and challenging with concerns about equity, climate change and housing; lots of growing demands and needs and less funding. She applauds the balancing of new and exciting initiatives like the climate director and community care department in a dire time of funding. She sees that balance and really appreciates it and is happy with the way the mayor worked with the schools. She completely supports and is impressed with most of this budget.

She still has concerns about the proposed police budget. She hears the distress and is convinced of the problem; she's not convinced of the solution. She wants a healthy department but, "I'm not sure expanding in this way is the healthiest thing."

They heard from lots of departments with similar problems. As great as the mayor did for the schools, they are still cutting the schools. The chief is such a good advocate for her people but she thinks other departments are suffering and they can't throw this \$166,000 solution to every department. She needs some time to think about it. What she could do tonight is a neutral recommendation so she could get to the full council and hear what other councilors have to say and have the week to take in a lot of what they heard tonight. This is their big charge. They are not here to rush through it or not to think critically. She's not sure it's fiscally responsible to be funding the community care department and expanding the footprint of the police department. She is comfortable with a neutral recommendation for the general fund budget, she shared.

After a brief discussion of how to proceed, **Councilor Nash withdrew his original motion for a positive recommendation on all six budget orders in favor of a positive recommendation on the General Fund budget (23.316). Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed 3:1 by roll call vote with Councilor Maiore opposed.**

Councilor Nash moved to positively recommend the rest of the budget orders as a group. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion carried unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

There being no further business, Councilor Nash moved to adjourn Finance. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote.

The Finance Committee adjourned at 10:07 p.m.

Adjourn

Adjourn

Councilor Elkins moved to adjourn. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 8:0 by voice vote with Councilor Jarrett absent. The City Council meeting was adjourned at 10:07 p.m.

Attest: _____, Administrative Assistant