



Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council

Finance Committee Members

Councilor Rachel Maiore, Chair

Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Vice Chair

Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III

Councilor Jim Nash

Virtual Meeting

Meeting Date: November 30, 2022

Time: 6 p.m.

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 6 p.m. Chair Rachel Maiore called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were Councilor Rachel Maiore, Chair; Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge, Vice Chair, Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III and Councilor Jim Nash. Also present was Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.

Councilor Maiore announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

3. **Public Comment**

Councilor Maiore opened the floor to public comment.

Adele Franks, Florence, said she wanted to say that, as they have been learning from other communities around Massachusetts, there are some very good ideas out there that Northampton should be emulating; for example, energy coach positions and coordinators for climate action that involve not only municipal but non municipal buildings. She is really hopeful that this committee will be taking on this issue and supporting such endeavors for Northampton in a proactive way.

In terms of reasons for the council to support this, **Eric Broadbent** said they believe that more funding will be available at some point to support some of this work. One thing people are not always able to consider are the avoided costs of future risks that may befall either a building or a street from a flooded area or any number of other hazards. They haven't been touched by fire here lately but they have had a serious drought. Having the ability to think about these things beforehand and work with departments to plan for them should really help avoid additional municipal outlays for damages down the road. He knows the challenge is figuring out how to finance it and they would like to support that.

4. **Approval Of Minutes From The Previous Meeting**

- A. **May 5, 2022, May 11, 2022 and May 31, 2022 (FY2023 Budget Hearing)**

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of May 5, 2022, May 11, 2022 and May 31, 2022.

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

City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for November 30, 2022

B. Minutes Of September 21, 2022

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of September 21, 2022. Councilor Moulton seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

5. Municipal, State, And Federal Funding Possibilities For Potential Climate Crisis Director Position In The City Of Northampton

Councilor Maiore took this agenda item out of order since members of the public were present for its discussion. The possibility of creating a Climate Crisis Director position in Northampton has come up for discussion in Northampton Energy and Sustainability Commission (NESC) meetings, and NESC is really behind this, she reported. The city is in an interesting transition time with the recent loss of energy and sustainability officer Chris Mason.

NESC members have been talking to the Northampton Climate Emergency Coalition about what this position could look like. At a roundtable organized by the coalition, city officials got to meet folks who play this role all over the state. Other cities in the commonwealth have already gotten this going and seen the need for this at this time.

Over the next hour, Northampton Climate Emergency Coalition members Adele Franks, Susan Theberge, Eric Broadbent and Joyce Rosenfeld made the case for why a new Climate Crisis Director should be an executive-level department head position.

In talking to people in similar positions across the state, they learned they all earn roughly \$90,000 a year, Adele Franks reported. She was shocked because Chris Mason was making way less than that and now he has taken a larger job with a much higher salary. It is a very pertinent topic for the budget because creating a position with a low salary is not going to attract the kind of people they need.

When they found out Chris Mason was leaving, one of their fears was that Chris's position and this proposed director position would be squeezed into one, which they think would be a disaster, Joyce Rosenfeld shared.

One of the reasons they don't want to combine the positions is that, right now, the energy and sustainability officer position is in Central Services, Eric Broadbent explained. It might move into planning but that would still be under a director. They feel a director-level position is important in order for people to understand it as a high-level role working with other directors rather than reporting to a director.

Beyond taking care of Northampton's municipal resources and assets, they want this person to be available to seek grants and interface with the community at large and the business community, he elaborated. There is a lot more to this than what Chris was doing.

They want to be crystal clear that they really think Chris has been doing a great job and has his hands more than full doing things with the schools, Susan Theberge stressed. They are very aware they need a different timeline to actually make a dent in the calamity that's coming and know they can't rely on the federal government. At the state level, they have been ramping up and working as hard as they can but they haven't had a very responsive administration in the last few years, so local cities and towns are key in addressing the climate emergency; that's where they feel like they can make things happen.

There's a sense of time urgency in which they need to act on in Northampton. They have been talking about having their public schools make some changes to be more energy efficient in 2030 but that's not going to keep up with the needed pace. "We need to work on a lot of different levels," Theberge asserted.

She referred to taking a 'systems approach' to the situation; working in collaboration across all departments to use the lens of climate and equity to establish priorities and make decisions from purchasing to hiring.

There are so many developments happening statewide; money is out there but it is difficult to access the information. She spoke of having someone knowledgeable about the sources of money and resources available and possibly setting up some kind of energy coaching system to help residents figure out how to put solar on their roofs and insulate their houses.

"We need to be doing everything we can to be slowing down this looming catastrophe," she observed.

Adele Franks voiced the coalition's agreement with Susan Theberge's comment that Chris Mason has been doing a fabulous job with municipal buildings. However, the majority of buildings in Northampton are not municipally-owned and it would not be fair to ask someone in his position to take on this broader scope of responsibility.

The Green Communities program in Massachusetts recently floated a proposal to create a 'climate leader program' for communities, she added. One of the many benefits of this program would be access to funding for this type of position.

Councilors commented favorably on the proposal to create an executive-level position. Chris Mason's departure provides an opportunity for the city to rethink where this position should be situated, Councilor Moulton observed. He agreed the position should have executive-level authority, report directly to the mayor and be analogous to other department heads. It would seem to him that Chris's position should be newly defined and report directly to the new director.

What came from department heads in NESC was the observation that departments are somewhat siloed in Northampton and that someone who is autonomous and could move between departments would be really advantageous, Councilor Maiore related. Another thing discussed was the need to establish metrics for the Climate Resilience and Regeneration Plan and to have a person in charge of tracking them. They have this great climate regeneration plan but are still trying to figure out how to adhere to it and measure it.

The climate crisis director would be in a position to create measurable goals, objectives and timelines for the climate regeneration plan which they don't have now, Joyce Rosenfeld agreed.

With regard to the need to encompass residential and commercial sectors, several towns at the roundtable noted that the municipal contribution to greenhouse gases is only 10%, Eric Broadbent shared. Folks on the panel all said they really see the challenge of the residential building stock being out of date and at risk for failure. "It is imperative that we begin that work," he asserted.

Councilor Nash thanked everyone for sharing their thoughts. He views this as a preview of the budget listening session the Finance Committee will hold next week. Residents are invited to come in and tell them their dreams for the budget. He hears folks asking for an enhanced commitment to addressing the climate crisis.

Councilor Nash clarified that, as city councilors, they don't have the authority to create positions and departments but that their job is to work with the mayor and let her know what they hear from residents.

They know the mayor has been listening and are appreciative of her hearing, Mrs. Rosenfeld confirmed. They've had two meetings with the mayor and have submitted a job description for her review. They have been assured that the mayor will meet with them again when she has gone through the material and done her own work.

Councilor Maiore thanked coalition members for their input and said she hoped they would see them at their listening session next week.

6. **Set Format and Date Of Finance Committee Budget Listening Session (Follow-Up Discussion)**

The budget listening session will be December 7th at 6 p.m., Councilor Maiore announced. She proposed a public comment format with councilors and anyone present from the mayor's office in a listening position and speaking time limits of three to five minutes per person. They could do what they have done before and write up a synopsis to share with the mayor's office, she suggested.

Members agreed.

7. **Set Future Meeting Dates**

In addition to 12/7, members agreed to meet December 21st and January 11th only if something is referred. Councilor Maiore said she will check in January 11th on future dates.

Councilor LaBarge requested regular updates on the ARPA grant proposal review process from Councilor Moulton. Councilor Nash suggested he give a brief update under "Announcements" at the council meeting tomorrow night. The goal of the review committee is to get their recommendations to the Mayor by December 12th, Councilor Moulton advised.

8. **New Business**

-Reserved for topics that the Chair did not reasonably anticipate would be discussed.
None.

9. **Adjourn:** There being no further business, **Councilor LaBarge** moved to adjourn. **Councilor Maiore** seconded. The motion carried on a roll call vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting was adjourned at 7:04 p.m.

Contact: *Rachel Maiore @rmaiore@northamptonma.gov or (413) 923-4318*