



Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council

Finance Committee Members

Councilor Rachel Maiore, Chair

Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III, Vice Chair

Councilor Marissa Elkins

Councilor Marianne LaBarge

Meeting Date: June 16, 2025

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Council Chambers, 212 Main Street

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 6:31 p.m. Councilor Rachel Maiore convened the meeting.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were Finance Committee members Rachel Maiore, Chair; Stanley W. Moulton, III, Vice Chair, Marissa Elkins and Marianne L. LaBarge. Also present were Office of Planning and Sustainability Assistant Director Sarah LaValley and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.

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

3. **Public Comment**
There being no one present for general public comment, Councilor Maiore moved to the next item on the agenda.

Approval of Minutes

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the April 30, 2025 and May 12, 2025 minutes. Councilor Elkins seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

The May 12, 2025 minutes were not able to be accepted since they were not yet fully transcribed.

4. **Items Referred to Committee**
A - I 2nd round of FY2025 Community Preservation Committee (CPC) Community Preservation Act (CPA) Funding Recommendations, referred to Finance by City Council - 5/21/2025

25.260 An Order to Appropriate \$17,400 in CPA Funds for Ruggles Center Accessibility Upgrades

25.261 An Order to Appropriate \$248,000 in CPA Funds for Boggy Meadow Road Trail Construction

25.262 An Order to Appropriate \$35,000 in CPA Funds to Laurel Park Documentation Project

25.263 An Order to Appropriate \$70,000 in CPA Funds for Maines Field Flood Resilience Project Phase

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25.264 An Order to Appropriate \$639,615 in CPA Funds for Leeds School Playground for All

25.265 An Order to Appropriate \$91,065 in CPA Funds for Priority Clothing Collection Restoration

Project

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25.266 An Order to Appropriate \$98,329 in CPA Funds for Priority Historic Gravestone Conservation Project

25.267 An Order to Appropriate \$3,000 in CPA Funds to Forbes Library for Textile Preservation Project

25.268 An Order to Appropriate \$316,553 in CPA Funds for 148 South Street Accessibility Upgrades

After extensive review of worthwhile applications, these were the ones selected to bring forward for funding consideration by City Council, Assistant Director LaValley shared. It will expend available funding for FY2025. She presented individual projects in greater detail.

Order 25.260, a \$17,400 award to the Ruggles Center, will provide a permanent, code-compliant ramp for ADA access to the facility. A wheelchair ramp exists but does not meet current code. An application to the National Register of Historic Places is in process for the center.

Since they are looking for ADA compliance; "how can we say 'no?'" Councilor LaBarge asked. She has been to the Ruggles Center many times. "I feel this is absolutely necessary."

As a general matter, Councilor Elkins asked Ms. LaValley to let them know if any of the funding requests were particularly controversial. It would help to understand if any public concern was raised at earlier meetings.

With this, the only issue was figuring out if the design made sense, Assistant Director LaValley said. Everything at the Ruggles Center is done by volunteers and the design also was done on a volunteer basis. There was no issue with the merits of the project.

Councilor Moulton asked if the Disability Commission was involved. Ms. LaValley said not specifically, since the design related to technical code requirements.

Councilor Elkins suggested discussing the applications individually and then voting on them as a group.

If anyone is familiar with the Cooke Avenue entrance to Fitzgerald Lake, it is a popular entrance but has a lot of rocks, roots and slope issues that make it challenging for people with mobility issues, Assistant Director LaValley explained. Boggy Meadow Road trail construction (25.261) will create an accessible trail for people to reach the beaver pond. A design was previously funded and is now ready to move forward. If the pending grant application is successful, the cost to the city will be limited to the Mass Trails grant's local match.

Councilor Moulton confirmed the entrance is very popular and heavily used. He is entirely in favor of universal access and making it easier for everyone to use.

The trail will be a soft surface, Director LaValley added.

If the city receives Mass Trails funding and the grant is not matched, the city would have to forfeit the grant, LaValley said. There is a 25% required local match.

The \$35,000 for Laurel Park documentation (Order 25.262) was a request from the Historical Commission and a recommendation of the preservation element of the Sustainable Northampton Plan completed last year, Director LaValley advised. It is the next step for a National Register of Historic Places listing. Laurel Park is an incredibly unique and important resource for the city. A lot of buildings there are threatened by having been converted from summer residences to full-time residences. Some have been taken care of perfectly and are in amazing shape and others were never intended as year-round residences and face possible demolition if conditions get too bad. It is a unique Methodist summer community founded in the 1870's, very few of which are left across the

country. The Laurel Park association and homeowners are very much in favor and are willing to open up their archives and contribute research to get the work done.

Councilor Jarrett reminded those listening that Laurel Park is both a condominium community and nonprofit organization (website: Laurelparkarts.org) that holds events for the public. He asked if there is a commitment to that continuing. He would like to think they are providing a public benefit in exchange for this benefit.

No commitment is tied to this specific request, Director LaValley said. The request to document the community came from the Historical Commission on behalf of the city as a potential springboard to a National Register of Historic Places listing, similar to what was done most recently for the Pomeroy Terrace neighborhood. Since the application is not coming from Laurel Park, they didn't think it appropriate at this point to put requirements on the condominium community itself, she explained.

As background for the Maines Field resilience project Phase 2 (25.263), Maines Field has been hit very hard in the last few years by damaging flooding, Director LaValley reminded. With its location on the Mill River and the increase in storms, the recreation department understands flooding is something that is going to continue. The department received funding in a previous round to do some analysis (H & H modeling and a topographic study) as to where flooding and the velocity of storms and floods will be. These are heavily utilized fields. Phase I data will inform how they can reimagine Maines Field in a way to minimize damage to the most actively-used areas.

The \$70,000 will continue Fuss & O'Neil's work to the next stage.

The Leeds School Playground for All (25.264) is the second accessible playground the Community Preservation Commission (CPC) has recommended, Director LaValley reminded. The council previously funded a playground at Ryan Road School currently in design stage. This is a joint project of Leeds School and Central Services. The pre-K playground is limited and not accessible to all students and residents and needs to be removed in coming years due to age and corrosion. The money will fund a new playground able to accommodate everybody, including those with physical, sensory and developmental disabilities.

They are very excited about this in Leeds, Councilor Maiore shared. The playground is actively used by the whole community in the summer and after school, so it is a community investment.

That was important for CPC members to hear, LaValley acknowledged.

Councilor Moulton recalled the statement from advocates for the Ryan Road playground that there is no similar facility for many miles. He thinks it shows Northampton's leadership.

As Councilor Maiore noted, it is specifically targeted for very young children, which might not be the case for Ryan Road, Ms. LaValley added.

Councilor Jarrett noted that the Ryan Road playground also used a loan. He wondered if she could tell them its outstanding balance and how much debt service for the two will detract from annual funding going forward.

The city has not made any payments on the first one yet, LaValley said. She would need to look at the estimated payments. The order includes an authorization to borrow \$370,000, it was noted.

Regarding the Priority Clothing Collection Restoration Project (Order 25.265), the CPC heard from Historic Northampton and others, including experts in the field, how amazing Historic Northampton's clothing collection is, with samples of both day-to-day items and clothing from historical figures such as a Robin Hood costume

made by Grace Coolidge for Calvin Coolidge, Jr., Assistant Director LaValley shared. As historic clothing, it can't just be thrown in a washing machine; wear and tear needs to be addressed in an appropriate manner.

Councilor Maiore said she's glad the clothing will be preserved. Councilor Elkins referred to it as 'a great project to preserve the stuff of lives,' saying it speaks to her theater heart.

The Priority Historic Gravestone Conservation Project (25.266) is a joint application from the DPW and the Historical Commission and will build on work done to address Priority 1 and Priority 2 gravestones, Director LaValley continued. The Historical Commission works closely with the DPW as a steward of the city's historic cemeteries, and the DPW has worked hard to do a thorough assessment of historic stones and what is needed for their treatment. The highest priority stones were able to be completed with a prior CPA award. West Farms Road and Park Street cemeteries will be the targets for the restoration.

"It's about time," Councilor LaBarge said. She is so happy this has come forth so they can do what they have to do with the stones.

The Textile Preservation Project at Forbes Library (25.267) will preserve articles of clothing on a much smaller scale, Director LaValley reported. It is the beginning of Forbes assessing what they have and figuring out how best to make it available to the public. Like Historic Northampton, Forbes has clothing from notable residents like two hats from Calvin and Grace Coolidge as well as an extensive t-shirt collection including Pride t-shirts from the '80's.

The 148 South Street accessibility funding request (25.268) came from Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Betty Allen Chapter, which owns the house at 148 South Street, one of the best preserved colonial structures in the city. It is not currently accessible at all. DAR is working hard to open its doors for more tours, historical events and genealogical research and create more inclusivity.

In 2022, there was an award for replacement of knob and tube wiring which was a hazard.

Councilor Moulton said there was also an application going back to 2008/2009, shortly after the CPA was established. LaValley confirmed there was a small award (under \$20,000) for refurbishment of a historic flag pole and custom interior storm windows.

The structure is owned by DAR but also home to the sons of the American Revolution, Councilor Moulton noted.

Noting that Northampton has some of the oldest housing stock in the country, Councilor Elkins referred to the need for balance between the goal of maintaining historic structures and updating places people live modern life and meeting current needs. She feels like they do a pretty good job, saying she knows of other communities that get really bogged down in historic preservation at the expense of growth and development and meeting current needs. She feels like it is important to get the balance right and the CPA process is a big part of that, helping identify key structures and put city skin in the game. This is a good example, she suggested.

The Historical Commission reviewed this application and was fully supportive of the sensitive way in which the improvements respected the historical nature of the house, Director LaValley said.

Councilor Jarrett said he also appreciates that it will add accessibility to this important building. It is a significant amount of money for a private non-profit, so he would appreciate hearing more about the DAR's work, he said.

One of the DAR's main focuses is historic preservation and education, Assistant Director LaValley responded. The house is open a minimum of one day a month to the general public and DAR also hosts events, such as the

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LaFayette celebration this weekend. DAR is working to be more inclusive, hold more events and teach residents about the revolution.

Councilor Maiore said people are interested in hearing how the CPA is meeting the goal of increasing attainable /affordable housing. She asked how that is going this cycle.

A minimum of 10% must be set aside for each of the four program areas: historic preservation, recreation, open space and affordable housing, Ms. Lavalley reminded. To some extent, it's driven by the timing of projects the city's affordable housing partners have in the pipeline. Through FY2025 Round 1, investment is pretty even at about 25% for each program area. Spending fluctuates but has been fairly even over time.

In his cover letter, Brian Adams noted that over 200 units of affordable housing have been created through the CPA over its 20-year existence, Councilor Moulton noted. He complimented Assistant Director LaValley on the slide show showing the exact nature of the projects being funded. People are curious about how CPA money is being used, he confirmed.

Councilor Elkins thanked the CPC for its work, noting that it is a very community-driven process.

Assistant Director LaValley commented that the CPA has served as a springboard to start a lot of projects that would not otherwise have been started. It has made a huge difference to the city.

Councilor LaBarge thanked the CPC.

Councilor Elkins moved a positive recommendation for all of the orders. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

1. **New Business**

-Reserved for topics that the Chair did not reasonably anticipate would be discussed.

2. **Adjourn:** There being no further business, **Councilor Elkins moved to adjourn. Councilor Moulton seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by voice vote. The Finance Committee adjourned at 7:18 p.m.**

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