



City Council Committee on Legislative Matters

Members

Councilor Rachel Maiore

Councilor Laurie Loisel

Councilor Garrick Perry

Councilor Chris Stratton

MEETING MINUTES

Date: February 9, 2026 Organizational Meeting, 4 p.m.

Council Chambers, 212 Main Street

Northampton, MA

1. **Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call:** At 4:04 p.m., Acting Chair Rachel Maiore called the meeting to order. On a roll call, the following members were present: Councilor Rachel Maiore, Acting Chair; Councilor Laurie Loisel; Councilor Garrick Perry and Councilor Chris Stratton. Also present was Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.
2. **Announcement that Meeting is Being Audio/Video Recorded**
Councilor Maiore announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.
3. **Election of Chair**
Councilor Maiore opened the floor to nominations for chair.

Councilor Perry nominated Councilor Loisel.

Councilor Stratton nominated himself.

Councilor Loisel thanked Councilor Perry for his nomination, saying this was her top choice of committee as she is deeply interested in the matters that come before it (orders, ordinances and City Council rules). She knows it is not typical to have new councilors chair committees but there are a lot of new councilors, so sharing the work is necessary. She is good at knowing what she doesn't know and getting help to figure it out so she doesn't believe she would overstep. She has had a lot of experience chairing small and large boards, some unruly, some not. She would be honored to chair this committee.

Councilor Stratton commented that a constituent of his recently reminded him that they should be "hard on the problem and soft on the people." And, in a recent public forum, it was suggested that, as a community, they need to find their way back to being able to discuss uncomfortable topics productively. He came into the job of councilor very studied on the issues and their task but less familiar than he'd realized with some of the process. He'd already understood much of their functional job as councilors as being to translate constituent expressed concerns into the proper exercise of government function. But through a number of recent wonderful conversations, he has also come to understand a similar process of translating his concerns about process into

the process by which the government deliberates. His personal task of the moment is to exercise that same moment of translation introspectively towards developing that fluency with their process.

They are convened here today to organize one of the most critical committees on the council. The task of the committee is to dig into the depth of an issue on behalf of the council. While they will ultimately vote a recommendation, in many ways, that formalized opinion is incidental to their larger task of being finders of fact. When one reads the laws by which the Commonwealth delegates a small fraction of its power back to the municipal level, it becomes clear that a prime concern of the legislature was to prevent municipal government from engaging in adventurous or capricious legislation against its neighbors. For example, they are extremely limited in the forms of taxation and, by extension, tax relief, they can employ. In this committee, they will be revealing matters of profoundly powerful impact to the lives of their neighbors; i.e. traffic regulations and zoning rules. These regulations are highly technical, requiring willingness to study the material with which they are presented in depth and to seek out and examine supporting data. When they're presented with a product of hours, weeks or months of work from other branches of government, they should respect that effort, but they need to be that second set of eyes, finding key issues that may have been overlooked or understated. Therefore, he would propose that when they evaluate matters brought to them or consider writing legislation themselves, they should do so in a structured manner; first, endeavoring to identify the problem or concern that the legislation was intended to address. Next, they should examine the proposal for government action Is it a valid exercise of authority? Does it really address the problem? What other mechanisms could be used? Are they sure this one is the most appropriate? Will the impact on lives that is the inescapable consequence of their action be in balance with the legitimate government purpose the new rule achieves?

"When we have done our research, we will vote. But, as important as our vote, we should report our findings to the council."

Many times this could be the task of the chair. But they should leave room as well for a supplemental report from a member who feels there were findings not sufficiently captured in the report of the chair.

But most of all, as they deliberate as a small body, he wants to express a commitment he hopes they can all share to make sure people speaking are truly heard and not silenced. Parliamentary procedure has incidental motions, such as points of information, which force a pause. They need to remember that these are a pause; situations where a speaker must only temporarily yield the floor to the incidental motion, after which, in most circumstances, they should be permitted to resume and continue their remarks. They will hear remarks with which they disagree. He hopes they can commit as a body to hearing the public and to hearing each other out. Being heard is not just about being allowed to speak but is ultimately about the willingness to listen and to labor to understand the speaker.

Councilor Perry and Councilor Maiore shared one reason for supporting Councilor's Loisel's nomination as being her demonstrated experience chairing other committees, such as the Human Rights Commission. Garrick noted the committee's unique position in that, of its more senior members, Councilor Maiore is council president and already has a lot on her plate, and he is chairing another subcommittee and learning to take a step back. He believes whoever chairs this committee will have assistance from all of them. Councilor Maiore agreed part of her comfort in having a new chair is that she and Councilor Perry will be there to help and support them.

Councilor Maiore said she agrees with Councilor Stratton's description of subcommittees. Subcommittees are supposed to be a place with more latitude, more back and forth, more public input and diving more deeply into issues. Whoever chairs will have to be committed to understanding the difference with a more formal council meeting in terms of letting folk fully express ideas and accepting feedback. She was a member of the Human

Rights Commission under the chairmanship of Councilor Loisel and so has the memory and comfort of that experience.

She put Councilor Stratton on this committee because she thought his analysis and 'checks and balances' view would be a great asset. Her comfort level in terms of actually chairing would go with Councilor Loisel.

Councilor Stratton noted they are a new council. They have had two and a half meetings at this point and he thinks some mistakes have been made. He is troubled by an improperly executed attempt to clarify and find information on his part and he owns that. But he also saw a lot of disinterest in exploring issues and attempts to suppress speech and he is deeply concerned by that. [In committee] is "the primary representative democracy opportunity where the voice of the people is heard in the development of our legislation," he suggested. "We really need to be willing to take the time. . .and do the work and be facilitated by a chair who has the interest in that."

Frankly, he said he has concerns at the moment.

Councilor Loisel she also feels respectful of the need to dig into information. She actually agrees with every single thing Councilor Stratton said in his remarks in the beginning. He thinks this needs to be a fact-based committee and they need to work together well. She knows how to work with people. She believes in the democratic process as well and also really wants to hear from the public. Her training in journalism really taught her to know how to kick the tires and look under the hood and look for unintended consequences. She likes the idea of being on a smaller committee where they can roll up their sleeves and work together.

Councilor Perry assured he is not taking this decision lightly. He thinks any of them here would be worthy chairs. He likes what Councilor Stratton said about identifying problems, etc. They are young, a new council, and he is looking forward to finding out about new councilors. He has seen Councilor Loisel do that portion. He is certain she will not be derelict of their duties. While the chair of a subcommittee has some power it is not like council president.

Councilor Loisel referred to other chairing experience she has had, such as serving as president of the Board of the Council of Service Agencies of Hampshire County, a large board of varying opinions, and to her experience working collaboratively in the newsroom, where everybody has their own opinion. She also feels like it is their duty as councilors to help run an efficient city and she thinks constituents do too, so she thinks process is important and getting things done. She thinks they can balance those two things.

Councilor Stratton said he would be most comfortable with one of the senior councilors chairing as facilitators of their discussions. He's deeply concerned they may end up rushing through things too quickly. His ideal would be one of the two senior councilors as chair.

Councilor Maiore said she hears that, but Councilor Loisel has publicly committed to hearing feedback. She hears the concern but is hearing commitment to deal with that concern.

There being no further discussion, **councilors voted 3:1 by roll call vote as follows:**

Councilor Maiore – Councilor Loisel

Councilor Perry – Councilor Loisel

Councilor Loisel – Councilor Loisel

Councilor Stratton – Councilor Stratton

Councilor Loisel was elected chair.

4. Election of Vice Chair

Councilor Loisel assumed the position of chair.

Councilor Loisel nominated Councilor Perry.

Councilor Perry nominated Councilor Stratton.

Councilor Stratton accepted. He said his remarks were largely as before.

Councilor Perry accepted. He said he was very moved by Councilor Stratton's discussion/speech for chair. What was evident to him was his attention to detail. They do align on the core value of establishing facts here. The reason he accepted the nomination was the concern he heard of having a more senior person helping to rein in this committee. The reason he didn't nominate himself is that he is trying to be more aware of his work load and hold back. He has a tendency to volunteer for everything. He served as vice chair last term and that is why he is willing to step up and do that.

Councilor Stratton said it depends to some extent on what tasks they want the vice chair to fulfill. He could see a benefit to a coalition of opposites. He is somewhat curious as to the view of his colleagues on the balance of these roles.

Councilor Maiore thanked Councilor Perry for his willingness to serve, saying she has 100% faith in his ability. She does think having a senior person helping Councilor Loisel would be an asset. She frankly does have concern about whether a union of opposites would work out at this point. Her vote will be for Councilor Perry.

Councilor Perry said he thought he could handle this role. He thought it important to acknowledge Councilor Stratton's opinions and views. He can commit himself to trying his hardest to make sure the viewpoints and work ethic advocated by Councilor Stratton are facilitated. He does think Councilor Stratton could be a fine vice chair. He is moved by his research and his vision for this body. That being said, he is ready and willing to facilitate whatever makes this body work.

Councilor Loisel said she does feel it would be good to have a senior member as vice chair. She has a lot of respect for Councilor Perry's leadership and his experience on this committee.

She said she is a little perplexed by some of the things Councilor Stratton said about a coalition of opposites. She doesn't know why he is assuming that they're opposites. She thinks subcommittees are typically more collegial and [prone to] giving each other the benefit of the doubt and she hopes he would do that for her.

Councilor Stratton acknowledged they are engaging in an experiment. He sees the role of senior councilors as contributing their presence as opposed to a formal title. There is an implicit power in things that happen behind the scene.

To Councilor Loisel, he said he knows her mostly through their meetings and sees that they come to them with different intentions in terms of the depth with which they want to see things examined. He hopes she will prove him wrong.

Councilor Maiore said she thinks Councilor Stratton will be pleasantly surprised.

Councilor Loisel called the nominations to a vote, and **councilors voted 3:1 by roll call vote as follows:**

Councilor Perry – Councilor Perry

Councilor Loisel – Councilor Perry

Councilor Stratton – Councilor Stratton

Councilor Maiore – Councilor Perry

Councilor Perry was elected as vice chair

5. Public Comment

There was no general public comment.

6. Approval of Minutes of November 10, 2025

Members received an email earlier that day letting them know the minutes were not quite ready.

7. Items Referred to Committee

A. 26.010 An Ordinance Relative to All-Way Stop Control for Finn Street at Prospect Street, expected referral February 5, 2026

After clarifying the legislative process, Councilor Loisel proposed hearing from the DPW director. She voiced her assumption that they had all read the ordinance and the underlying study.

DPW Director Donna LaScaleia explained that the city contracts with a third party engineering firm to look at problematic intersections and roadways. The consultant's recommendations are vetted by the DPW, then moved to the Transportation and Parking Commission (TPC), which solicits feedback from the public and makes recommendations. TPC (which she chairs with the police chief as vice chair) then forwards them to City Council for referral to this committee.

This was part of a group of intersections sent to Fuss & O'Neill, transportation engineers who do work for a lot of municipalities and MassDOT. She asked them to review several intersections and tell the city if some sort of stop control is warranted based on their observations and the data collected. She wanted to be clear what she asked to explain why options such as geometric reconfiguration were not presented. The request was to assess for stop control recommendations. The study took several months to complete. Other ordinances have already made their way through council. The report generated is posted on the DPW's webpage.

At TPC, there was quite a bit of resident feedback on this intersection; it was definitely a popular topic of conversation. She had a follow-up conversation with Fuss & O'Neill after the meeting to request that they watch the recording and generate a short follow-up memo to talk through some of the things mentioned.

Director LaScaleia noted that, when talking about the installation of traffic control devices, warrants are used to determine if traffic control is warranted, almost like mathematical metrics listed in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). A list of metrics like crashes, traffic volume, etc. and something called engineering judgment is used to make the determination. Engineers are always looking at the MUTCD and using engineering judgment. Because some level of subjectivity is associated with these decisions, oftentimes there are different opinions, she acknowledged. She certainly understands that everybody can have an opinion and people can look at data and view it differently. Her job is to present the data.

Councilor Loisel asked how this particular intersection came to her.

Director LaScaleia said it was per request of residents.

Councilor Loisel proposed that councilors start by asking Director LaScaleia questions and save their opinions for deliberation.

Councilor Maiore said she is curious about the stop sign on Finn Street going away from town. Why a three-way instead of a two-way? She asked. She wondered if the decision was pedestrian-driven.

Fuss & O'Neill's recommendation was installation of an all-way stop, Director LaScaleia advised. Engineers called out deficient sight lines looking from the existing stop sign on Prospect Street where drivers take a right onto Finn Street to head towards King Street. Coming up Finn Street and turning onto Prospect Street to go towards the YMCA is also a deficient sight line because of a large house on the corner.

Fuss & O'Neill's justification is the presence of two deficient sight lines and that, in their engineering judgment, pedestrian safety in the area is poor because people are moving quickly, she stated.

Councilor Maiore expressed her understanding that Director LaScaleia identified the big house on the corner as being the visual obstruction for vehicles at the stop sign on Finn Street.

Councilor Stratton said he is a little dismayed that this follow-up memo had not been shared with this committee. He thinks it is needed to inform their decision.

Regarding Director LaScaleia's statement that there are two deficient sight lines, he said he has the report up and it says there is only one deficient sight line, an alleged 114 feet where they say 390 is recommended. The other sight line they are reporting as being 420 feet while the recommended distance is 335. He wondered how they got from one deficient sight line in the report to now saying two.

Director LaScaleia stressed that the follow-up memo is not anything different; nothing has changed. The original recommendations in the report stand. It is posted on their website. It's difficult for her to go line by line. She asked if he could tell her his specific concern.

Councilor Stratton said he would like her to please email him this memo.

The report did not make a judgment on the basis of engineering judgment, he observed. The report made a judgment solely on the basis of deficient sight lines.

The original report contains a comment about pedestrian safety, Director LaScaleia noted. When the DPW gets an original report from the consultant, they look at it and superimpose their own engineering judgment on it, she explained. Even if warrants are met, sometimes it doesn't make sense to install a stop sign. Engineering judgment is always the trump card even if warrants are actually met.

The only document he has to look at is from Fuss & O'Neill, and they specifically do not make an argument of engineering judgment, Councilor Stratton said. They just make an argument of one particular warrant, which they need to look at the evidence for.

She is telling him that someone made an argument of engineering judgment, but he has not read that argument, he clarified.

Director LaScaleia said the memo is on the project page of their website, and Councilor Stratton successfully located it.

Director LaScaleia explained the discrepancies in the sightlines by noting that they were measured at different times of year.

Councilor Stratton said he is not seeing the word judgment mentioned in the memo.

Councilor Loisel wondered if the judgment is implicit in the recommendation.

Yes, it can be implicit, Director LaScaleia confirmed. The ordinance has been drafted with her approval, so it is the DPW's engineering judgment, including that of their subcontracted engineer, that stop signs are warranted.

Councilor Stratton asked who the responsible engineer asserting engineering judgment is, and Director LaScaleia said it would be Fuss & O'Neill.

He asked the basis of the recommendation, and she said it is the report.

Procedurally, he is very troubled that he has a brand new memo to absorb that was not included in the order or submitted to council. This information is extremely contradictory of the information they were given before; it is drastically different.

He expressed his understanding that the calculation of the desired intersection sight distance is based on traffic speed. He asked what the applicable speed is at the intersection.

Fuss & O'Neill uses design speeds different from the actual posted speed limit. They use design speeds based on observed speeds, not what the speed limit says it is. They are using a 35 mph design speed, even though the posted speed drops to 20 mph.

In the safety study, it said they got the speed limit from a MassDOT viewer tool. He has that tool open, and it says the speed limit is 20 mph. A 20 mph speed limit sign is posted. The report is basing the calculated required sight distance on the regulatory speed but when he goes to that data base, he finds 20 mph.

They've also seen two sets of measurements that are drastically different, so he has little confidence in these numbers right now.

Councilor Loisel said she thinks he is getting into opinions and she'd like him to stick to questions.

At Councilor Perry's request, Councilor Stratton screen-shared the website he was referring to.

Councilor Maiore said she sees they might have different ideas about what their task is. She noted Councilor Stratton has an engineering background. When does that go into micro-managing? To her, it's less about what a number looks like in the report. The more helpful framing is what are the pros and cons of putting the stop sign in and what is the feedback and the concerns, not so much getting into the weeds with city staff.

She thinks they have much more compelling questions.

Councilor Perry said he believed the director said that the speed was based on observed speed. He made the observation that, looking at the report, Table 1 in Section 2.1.2. shows observed speed as 35 mph.

Councilor Stratton remonstrated that the argument they were given is based on a faulty report of the applicable speed limit.

Councilor Loisel said she didn't want him to say it is a faulty report. Director LaScaleia explained that by saying that sight distance was based on observed speed, she reminded.

Councilor Stratton highlighted the following sentence on pg. 4 as being technically inaccurate: "A posted speed limit of 35 MPH was listed for both roadways in the MassDOT Road Inventory Viewer."

Director LaScaleia said there isn't a discrepancy, the MassDOT viewer is correct. She expressed her perception that Councilor Stratton was trying to discredit the report because maybe he doesn't agree with the installation of the stop sign. The speed limit actually does drop a few blocks before that corner but cars continue through the corridor at that speed.

The way Fuss & O'Neill analyzes stopping distances is based on observed speeds.

Councilor Loisel expressed her understanding that the speed limit in the road leading up to the intersection is 35 mph.

Councilor Stratton said he's concerned about the factual accuracy of the report.

If there were an error, a procedural mistake, in the materials they were given, where in the process would that be uncovered? He asked. He would say it would be right here in this room.

Councilor Maiore said the report isn't bringing this ordinance forward, the director is. To her, it feels like he is hyper-focusing on a report when that is one tool. He brought it up, and the director has now explained.

She would like to get to the bigger question of the pros and cons and impact to the community.

Councilor Stratton reiterated that the process for approving stop signs is either satisfying a numeric warrant or making an engineering judgment.

He shared his finding from visiting the site that Warfield Place is a little over 114 feet from the intersection, the distance originally claimed to be the extent of sight distance. "They are saying that you can't even see to that, which you obviously can."

Regarding pedestrian safety, he asked if there have there been any pedestrian collisions at this intersection in the last 25 years.

Director LaScaleia said she doesn't know about the last 25 years but there haven't been any recently.

He asked Director LaScaleia if she had read the letter from retired city engineer David Veleta.

Yes, Director LaScaleia said.

He asked if she had any conclusions or response?

A lot of members of the public have comments about their projects, and he had comments about the proposed stop sign, she volunteered. Ultimately, they have to make decisions about the right way to move forward. Belaboring reports is not necessarily constructive. The bottom line is that it is their opinion than an all-way stop is warranted here.

Councilor Loisel asked that he stop sharing his screen, and Councilor Stratton appealed the chair's ruling.

He asked if David Veleta is just anybody. He is a registered professional civil engineer, he noted.

Councilor Loisel said she thinks he's just anybody. They are not in the business of going to find their own registered engineers.

Councilor Maiore clarified that the chair's request is not a ruling and so is not appealable.

After more general questions about the process for proposing stop signs and their purpose, Councilor Maiore refocused the discussion, noting she has heard concerns from residents about safety. There is some fear that traffic is going to back up.

Director LaScaleia said one of the reasons she went back to Fuss & O'Neill was to confirm there weren't going to be queuing problems. She wanted them to put in writing a queuing analysis.

They do not see queuing as a problem, she reported. She was specifically concerned with cars coming off King Street up Finn and proceeding up towards the YMCA. That is one thing they do not believe is going to be a factor. They shared their capacity analysis worksheets with them.

If they had infinite resources, she thinks this intersection is actually a good candidate for geometric reconfiguration. "But we don't have those infinite resources."

Councilor Loisel asked her to summarize the comments heard.

There were some folks who felt this would be a vehicular inconvenience and others who felt it was a dangerous area for pedestrians to cross.

Councilor Stratton moved to make an information request for documentation of the sight distances in the memo (looking up Prospect Street from the existing stop sign) or, alternately, a written argument of engineering judgment signed by a named responsible engineer.

There was no second.

He would assert that drivers can see to Perkins.

Going back to what he was saying about identifying the problem, he said he would like to discuss what it is. His view of the problem is that people perceive this as a dangerous intersection. State data goes back to 2000, and there have been no reported pedestrian crashes at this intersection. They can go all over the city and find intersections that have had pedestrian crashes. This intersection has never had one. It's perceived as dangerous, but there is no evidence that it is.

"Is the problem an actual danger or are we trying to solve a constituent concern?" he asked.

Councilor Perry noted that, if people perceive it as dangerous, they are less likely to use it. Some people might avoid it altogether.

Councilor Stratton said he used to live right there. He did have a scare there one day. Someone was coming west up Finn and were going straight into the sun and didn't see him. After that, he started crossing mid street so he could see cars in both directions. He questioned why the crosswalk is where it is. It is not actually a given that this is the best place to cross. It is the place currently established but not necessarily the best choice. "We don't want people's pedestrian mobility to be confined by fear."

Councilor Perry said he agrees this is a dangerous intersection in general. People sometimes just assume there is a stop sign there. They are really trying to solve that lack of clarity.

Councilor Maiore said the hesitation factor is a good point, since it itself could cause a collision if someone stops and the person behind them doesn't stop. She is hearing that the approach to making it safer is not ideal. She would always err on the side of safety and doesn't really want to wait for a pedestrian to be injured or killed. She wants to know what he sees as the cons of trying this out.

Councilor Loisel said she was persuaded by public comments, particularly the young man who said he feels unsafe. She also heard people say this isn't the best way to make people safer and that traffic calming is better. She knows putting up a stop sign is much easier and less expensive. It feels like it's sort of an imperfect fix to a complicated problem.

Councilor Stratton said one of the things important to remember is that stop signs are not traffic calming. The reason they don't want too many stop signs is that it is an unfortunate reality that, with too many, they lose their meaning. There is an engineering process; they don't just place stop signs politically. There are warrants.

He hears the desire to achieve traffic calming through the ready means of buying a stop sign. In terms of intersection data, 26 years is a very long sample size. It is perceptually considered dangerous but no one has gotten hit. He feels like they are in the momentum of doing what is seen as the right thing for the wrong reason.

"There's this nebulous argument being made of engineering judgment that doesn't have anyone's name on it," he asserted.

He has not seen this argument of engineering judgment named and signed. The argument that has been given to them is numerical, but he hasn't seen it substantiated. He's been out there and taken pictures and come to a different conclusion.

He understands the public is very passionate about this and wants to do something, but he questioned whether they have followed their process in terms of having either a numeric argument or the subjective argument of engineering judgment actually stated by an engineer.

Councilor Maiore said they ultimately have the judgment of the director, who has experience in the community. She said she thinks they just come to different conclusions. "I feel satisfied in her judgment call on this," she affirmed.

Councilor Loisel said she is not seeing this as a traffic calming measure, she is seeing it as a safety issue.

Director LaScaleia said they have a report from professional engineers who are recommending a stop sign.

Councilor Stratton said they have a report and a memo which give two different sets of numbers, neither of which are substantiated. And, the only judgment is a numerical argument.

He feels like the director has alleged an engineering argument which has not been stated anywhere. Councilor Loisel said it is evident in the recommendation

Councilor Perry moved a positive recommendation. Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion carried 3:1 by roll call vote with Councilor Stratton opposed.

Councilor Stratton requested that the report to the council be inclusive of the following:

- ❖ The original Fuss & O'Neill report
- ❖ Fuss & O'Neill memo
- ❖ David Veleta's memo

Set Meeting Schedule and Format for 2026 - 2027

Members agreed to continue meeting the second Monday of the month at 6 p.m.

8. New Business

None.

9. Adjourn

Councilor Maiore moved to adjourn. Councilor Stratton seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 6:08 p.m.

Prepared By:

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