



Roll Call

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING
VIRTUAL MEETING
March 5, 2026**

A regular meeting of the City Council was called to order by Council President Rachel Maiore at 6:30 p.m. Upon a roll call, the following City Councilors were present:

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| At-Large Councilor Meg Robbins (6:32 pm) | At-Large Councilor Garrick Perry |
| Ward 1 Councilor Gwen Nabad | Ward 2 Councilor Deborah Klemer |
| Ward 3 Councilor Laurie Loisel | Ward 4 Councilor Jeremy Dubs |
| Ward 5 Councilor Aline Davis | Ward 6 Councilor Christopher Stratton |
| Ward 7 Councilor Rachel Maiore | |

Announcement that Meeting Audio/Video Recorded

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

**Public Hearings
Announcement of Public hearing re: Northampton Capital Improvement Program for FY2027 - FY2031 - Thursday, March 19, 2026
Announcement of Public Hearing to Consider FY2027 Water and Sewer Rates**

Public Hearings

Councilor Maiore read the following public hearing announcements:

Announcement of Public hearing re: Northampton Capital Improvement Program for FY2027 - FY2031 - Thursday, March 19, 2026

In accordance with Article 7, Section 7-5 of the Charter, the Northampton City Council will hold a public hearing on **Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 6:30 p.m.** in City Council Chambers, Wallace J. Puchalski Municipal Building, 212 Main Street, Northampton, MA Instructions for accessing the hearing remotely may be found on the March 19, 2026 City Council agenda to be posted on www.northamptonma.gov no later than 48 hours prior to the meeting. The City Council will consider the [Capital Improvement Program for FY2027-FY2031](#), and hear all persons who wish to be heard thereon.

Announcement of Public Hearing to Consider FY2027 Water and Sewer Rates

The Northampton City Council will hold a public hearing to consider the FY2027 water and sewer rates on **Thursday, March 19, 2026 @ 6:45 p.m.** in Council Chambers, 212 Main Street, Northampton, MA. Instructions for accessing the hearing remotely may be found on the March 19, 2026 City Council agenda to be posted on www.northamptonma.gov no later than 48 hours prior to the meeting. The City Council will hear all persons who wish to be heard thereon.

Public Comment

Councilor Maiore explained the procedure she would use in conducting public comment and opened the floor to comments.

Jacqueline McCreanor, Northampton, said that, as she learns about additional Picture Main Street (PMS) project delays, she is becoming increasingly concerned about hidden expenditures related to the project and the Sciarra administration’s lack of transparency with regard to costs being passed on to Northampton taxpayers for below-grade work on Main Street. For example, it has come to people’s attention that Eversource has been conducting several test digs on Main Street and, though that work, may have identified some additional work and costs related to underground utilities that may need to occur during the project. Northampton taxpayers deserve to know what issues have been identified by different utilities, what additional work may need to be done to underground utilities, what the costs are, and who will be on the hook for paying for them. Folks have also learned of vaults located below Main Street that appear to be connected to basements of some of the buildings along the street. What are the issues associated with PMS and the underground vaults? What does that work entail? What are the costs of this work and who will have to pay for it to be done? Northampton taxpayers need clarity on who will pay for any replacements or repairs to water, sewer and stormwater lines under Main Street. And, are the upgrades – particularly the stormwater infrastructure upgrades - going to be truly adequate and sufficient to keep up with climate change?

Northampton taxpayers request this administration to share real-time PMS project information and cost updates – at the state, federal and local levels – on the PMS portion of the city website as soon as these cost and information updates become available.

Lastly, they ask that the City Council openly and transparently discuss all expenditures for all of the stake-holders of the PMS project, particularly expenditures that will be covered by Northampton taxpayers, in near-future council meetings.

Saying she knew her two minutes were up, Ms. McCreanor pointed out that Northampton taxpayers should not have to ask for PMS cost updates; the Sciarra administration should be providing them voluntarily, which is not happening.

Jim Nash, Montview Avenue, spoke in favor of the financial order appropriating \$90,000 for economic development for downtown. The financial order very aptly describes that this investment has a great return. "When we support our downtown and the activities that draw people to our community, the pay-back is substantial," he confirmed. He is asking council to approve the \$90,000. He is very glad to see they are getting an update from Finance Director Charlene Nardi relative to revenue and expenses. He asked them to look in particular at the local revenues. Their downtown continues to do well, indicating recovery from the pandemic. Their numbers continue to grow, but they'd still like to see more robust improvement, and this \$90,000 will help make that happen.

Collete Paro, Chicopee, said she is deeply connected to Northampton, being a disabled vet who some-times visits the VA center three times a week. She is also in a theatre company that last year had a residency and three performances at the APE Gallery on Main Street and is part of the workspace co-op program at the Northampton Center for the Arts. Quite frankly, she spends a lot of money on dining, shopping and entertainment in Northampton. She can appreciate wanting to have a clean city but prohibiting flyers is not how to promote a thriving arts scene. Pushing advertising on line only promotes and channels money towards companies like META, which they all know can be a breeding ground for false information and hate speech. The city of Northampton has a long history of being a mecca for free speech. Northampton's very own Wikipedia page describes the city as "an academic, artistic, musical and countercultural hub."

Do they think they've achieved that status by ripping down an acoustic guitarist's concert flyer or by tearing down the local theater company's posting for a play about Emily Dickinson? One excuse city government has given for removal of flyers is to ensure unacceptable postings are not allowed. But controlling forms of communication is censorship, and that is a very slippery slope. Trust that the over-whelming majority of citizens post flyers for art, music and organizing events that contribute positively to the community, she urged. Trust that citizens won't stand for intolerance in their community and will actually save them money by taking hateful flyers down themselves.

They are asking for temporary removal or change in the flyering ordinance or at least its enforcement in order to collect data.

Ross C. introduced himself as a lifetime **Massachusetts** resident, also known as his drag persona, Victory Evangelica, who represented Northampton in Massachusetts Office of Tourism and Travel's podcast, "It's Revolutionary," covering the queer community of Northampton in celebration of Massachusetts' 250th anniversary. With regard to the ordinances surrounding flyers, as a nightlife entertainer and artist, he recognizes the harsh reality that Northampton is a place where they lose beloved businesses like the Majestic Saloon, Faces, Doherty or Wurst Haus frequently to the high costs associated with running a business in the unstable economic environment seen nationwide. He referred to reasonable concerns that opening flyering to the public could risk tasteless and controversial material posted downtown, thus deter-ring business. However, he reminded the council that the reason Northampton is beloved is not a squeaky-clean, family-friendly reputation but rather its reputation as an artistic community with a history of abolitionist and Utopian thinkers going back centuries. As money leaves this city, so does a starving artist who makes this city. The least they can do to allow Northampton to retain its Utopian spirit is to loosen up regulations here and there and allow creativity to thrive in the small nooks and crannies it still can. He warned the council that, without flyering, downtown will continue to become nothing more than a quirky shopping mall that casts the shared spirit of its locals aside. Please stop wasting resources, even tearing down flyers unless they are hateful in nature, even for a little while to test the waters. The community that gives the town its identity will show them that it's worth the risk. The small difference helps Northampton preserve it's revolutionary spirit and allows the town to live and breathe in person, not through nebulous social media platforms that shadow ban artists.

Heather Geoffrey, Co-director of Northampton Center for the Arts, shared what Arts Night Out means from the perspective of a participating arts event venue. 33 Hawley is home to three

arts organizations, Northampton Center for the Arts, APE, which also operates a gallery on Main Street and Northampton Open Media (NOM), which is recording this meeting. In addition, an arts trust owns the building and is another nonprofit that benefits from the noticeable foot traffic Arts Night Out brings in. This traffic benefits all of the organizations in the building, including artists having openings in their galleries (two each month) and musicians hired to perform. It becomes one of the most active evenings of the month and introduces many new visitors to their space, people who often return later for classes, performances and exhibitions and sometimes go on to become participants and often donors. They appreciate the city's continued support of the Downtown Northampton Association (DNA) and the role its playing in organizing and promoting these events and ask that they consider any other support that could be put towards the DNA that benefits Arts Night Out and Northampton.

Northampton resident Karen Carswell, the DNA board member who heads the Taste of Northampton Committee, talked about why economic development funding matters from the front line of the Taste. The Taste centers Northampton as a culinary, music and community celebration at the start of the school year. Last year, they drew about 5,000 people over two days and returned to the Armory parking lot where it felt like a homecoming for businesses. This year, they would like to add a second musical stage to showcase musical talent. Last year, Smith College students attended and a professor connected it to an Anthropology class. This year, they are in conversations with local nonprofits about getting more people involved and the DNA is committed to growing its impact. None of this happens without the city – the free parking, the electricity on site and the city employees who show up from health inspection, licensing and the Arts Department to solve problems on the fly. She volunteers because she wants to showcase the incredible businesses that chose Northampton as their home. It is an honor to work alongside restaurant owners who literally cook outside and share their craft with the community. Order 26.019, the \$90,000 appropriation for economic development, is an investment that comes back to this community through local spending, tax revenue, and a downtown people want to return to. Please support this funding.

Erin Morse, Northampton, an educator and local musician in the city's DIY music scene, also spoke to the flyering ordinance. Since moving to western Mass in 2024, she has easily spent 20 hours walking downtown to get the word out about local events, going in and out of buildings with public spaces to hang flyers, talking to neighbors, handing leaflets out at intersections and hanging flyers on city buildings, which are taken down at speeds greater than those directed to address any other city issue. Access to information about community events is critical to the thriving arts scene the city purports to support which draws transplants to the Pioneer Valley. Northampton benefits from this part of its public image but does little to support its growth – even the most basic things like hanging flyers - let alone maintaining active small music venues downtown accessible to local and small touring music acts. Preventing the hanging of flyers in the city forces the community into the online realm and requires individuals to engage with social media in order to know about events. Information about arts and culture events, as well as things like Narcan trainings, library fundraisers and more, could be easily accessible at any passing light post as people move throughout their city. When people ask her how she knows about so many events in the city, her answer is always from flyers. She asked them to consider at least a temporary halt in the existing flyer ordinance with the hope to repeal this ordinance.

Arts and Culture Department Director Brian Foote spoke in support of the order to appropriate \$90,000 for economic development. As a producer of events like Bands on Brewster and Salsa in the Plaza, he serves as the primary link between the artists who energize their streets and the organizers who shape the downtown's vision. His work goes beyond managing performances, it is about intentionally fostering the vitality of their city. When he coordinates with the talent and teams behind these events, the conversation is as much about the foot traffic sustaining their local storefronts as it is about the music or dance. These initiatives are not merely nice-to-have cultural perks, they are the essential engine driving their local economy and community identity. By supporting this order, they are supporting the critical resources needed to manage outreach and recruitment for their downtown. They are ensuring that the success stories built over the last five years, from Salsa in the Plaza to Summer on Strong, can continue to be scaled and thrive. He urged councilors to vote in favor to keep Northampton's economic and cultural heart beating strong.

Chris Freeman, Executive Director of the **Parlor Room Collective**, spoke in support of the initiative for more city funding for downtown events. He has seen firsthand what this kind of smart public investment can unlock. When the Iron Horse was closed, downtown felt different; one of the hearts of their cultural life was dark. In the early days of bringing it back, the city stepped up with \$73,000 in ARPA funds, which was about 10% of what was needed to get the project off the

ground. That 10% really mattered because it sent a signal that this was worth saving and gave them the foundation to raise the other 90%. Since reopening, they have staged over 400 shows, welcomed more than 60,000 attendees and re-energized downtown nights and weekends. That initial public investment has led to an operation that supports 22 full-time jobs and dozens of part-time jobs, pays out over \$800,000 a year in payroll and has paid over \$1.5 million to artists, working musicians who power the vibrant music ecosystem that exists in their valley. According to NEA figures, the Iron Horse has generated roughly \$2.4 million for Northampton's economy. Festivals and venues are hard to run; they carry a lot of risk, and the city funding that underlies events can really help.

Virginia Crand, Northampton, urged councilors not to support a ban on public postings. The first speaker (Collette) said it very well that this will only weaken their economy and what attracts people to Northampton. Making it so people can only post flyers in places of consumerism; i.e. - cafes, restaurants, etc., feels very pro capitalism. She thinks a lot of people in their community will make sure to take down posters that have gone past the date. She thinks it is imperative that they keep this. She has gone off Instagram before but got back on because it was one of the only places where people can see what's going on. "Flyers help so much to make us so more connected. . ."

Justin Cohen, a former Northampton resident now living in **Springfield**, spoke in favor of the \$90,000 appropriation for economic development, sharing that he runs both profit and nonprofit events in Northampton, including the Northampton Record Fair, and coordinated one of the concert series – Wednesday Parties in the Park - last summer for the Arts Council which usually drew a few hundred people. He also went to a lot of Salsa in the Park and Bands on Brewster events. The more the city can do in addition to 'for profit' events, the better. He always felt Northampton was the cultural hub of the Pioneer Valley. Less is happening now, not because of government but because of the falling of the 'for profit' industry. . . everything the Arts Council and Center for the Arts is doing is a major push toward picking up the slack.

He totally agrees with lifting the ban on flyers. He flyers a lot but makes sure not to put them on city property. He didn't realize there was a possibility of lifting that ban and would certainly be in support.

Oliver Kelly said he lives in **Easthampton**, works in Northampton, and produces drag shows in the area. He urged councilors to impose a temporary repeal or alteration of the flyering ordinance or at least of its enforcement. This ordinance hurts local arts scenes, drives communities even further isolated and online into the hands of unethical tech platforms and is an infringement on their basic first amendment rights to speech and distribution. When flyering in Northampton, several times he has had city employees follow directly behind him ripping down flyers as soon as he posts them and, at times, shouting at him. Several times in the past month, he has tried to speak to various city staff members about it. With the exception of Meg Robbins, he has been ignored, given a political roundabout, or given obtuse answers that changing it would be too difficult, that city councilors don't have time to consider asks from their own community, etc. This matter was brought up at a review meeting last November, and the only opposition recorded was that it would open them up to stuff they don't want and that removing the ordinance would raise the question of enforcement and discretion, but the town is already doing that. "I haven't seen much enforcement around lost cat flyers," he quoted from meeting minutes.

When he pointed out that the city is already paying to take things down and that, if anything, it would save money by doing so periodically instead of constantly and reduce waste by letting flyers serve their purpose instead of being instantly thrown away, he was ignored. When he suggested a volunteer group of citizens, himself included, would be happy to contribute and ensure the recycling of materials, this was also ignored. This makes him think there may be some larger opposition at hand than material logistics which perfectly viable solutions have been provided for. The fact that this ordinance is located under Disorderly Conduct next to public drinking and swearing shows all that is needed to know how the city views this issue. He urged them to think about the soul of the city, the impact on the community and art spaces as a whole that the city touts as its lifeblood, and ask themselves why the city should be so hell bent on opposing its own community on what should be an easily solvable issue.

Jesus Acevedo, Amherst, said he grew up in the valley and spent many years in Northampton either working, walking, or eating. With regard to the flyer ordinance, flyers have always been a part of this town from community boards in the Forbes Library to flyers posted in storefronts and on the walls of bus stops. It is a quick, easy way to find events and help to build community. It's tied into the spirit of Northampton, a community made up of artists, musicians and the queer

community. He believes restricting flyers basically hampers ways for people to find events and build community within this town. He just ate at a restaurant where there is a community board and that's usually how he finds out about large events. On the way here, he saw flyers for missing kids in storefronts. While their heart may be in the right place, he thinks city officials should really think about repealing the ordinance because flyers are really the lifeblood of this community. There are better ways to deal with them than taking them down. Have faith people will take down hateful messages if they see them, he urged.

Diane Germain, who, with her husband, Kevin, owns **Splendor Solis Books**, spoke in favor of the economic development order on behalf of the Market Street Market: A Curiosities Fair team, composed of her and her husband and Isaac Weiner of Familiars Coffee and Tea. In October, along with the city and DNA, the team self-funded a market that attracted over 30 artists, makers, musicians and 'purveyors of the strange and beautiful' from all around New England to Market Street, she share.

She read the following prepared statement:

The event drew a substantial crowd to Market Street all the while supporting the broader downtown Northampton's shops and restaurants. This kind of event in the Ward 3 district has a potential to become a neighborhood-scale cultural and economic driver for the city of Northampton.

There was a measurable boost in sales for Market Street businesses — we can personally say we had our best day since opening three years ago, Deep Thought Records reported an 85% increase in sales. We are pleased to say that this trend expanded beyond Market Street— Familiars Coffee and Tea also reported it being one of their best days, Thorne's Market reported foot traffic was up almost 13% and a 22% increase in sales year to date.

We are on target to repeat the event on October 3rd of this year with the hopes of growing it and adding more vendors, entertainment and merchandise. An increase in funding for this year's event would help us to further market it through print, social and online media as well as ensuring that we can continue the event in a safe and sustainable way with increased officer details, portable restrooms, and adequate trash and recycling stations.

We are proud to say that this type of programming is like no other that is being presented in town. It highlights Ward 3 and brings Northampton back to its roots of being truly bizarre, weird and quirky.

Jim Olson, Signature Sounds, Masonic Street, said the business produces music events. He spoke in favor of the initiative to continue to fund arts funding for downtown Northampton, which he thinks is so important for the city's general 'halo' effect, its reputation and what has grown over the decades. The 12th annual Back Porch Fest is coming up March 28th. Musicians are coming from all over the U.S. to play in 12 different venues in downtown Northampton. Over 60 bands are booked over three days with a mix of national and local artists. The festival attracts visitors from all over the northeast. It started very humbly and wouldn't have happened without support from the city. He can't understate how important this arts funding is to keep Northampton 'weird and cool' and keep it growing.

Fred Zimnoch said he lives on **Pomeroy Terrace**, a residential street with a walking school bus and truck escape route that sidesteps the truck-eating bridge and is a well-known cut through to avoid busy Main Street. Earlier this year, he returned home on Bridge Street only to find cars jamming up Pomeroy Terrace. Later, he learned that, during that traffic blockage, the Hot Chocolate Run was in progress. Picture Main Street, a project that will change downtown, will narrow Main Street and reduce its traffic flow. The Toole functional design document only says that displaced traffic will go elsewhere. Can the city assure him that their busy residential street will not become a full-time cut through? Other streets are also in jeopardy.

Amanda Chaffee, chair of the DNA board, thanked the city, saying she is extremely invested in Northampton as both a property owner and business owner. The city has been a strong partner of the DNA and, without the city's support, much of what they do would not be possible. She is here to support the economic development funding request. Another example of city-supported programs is the recent Ice Arts festival. Earlier this year, they nearly had to cancel the event due to funding challenges. When discussed at the monthly downtown business forum, the response was overwhelming. Businesses told them just how important this festival is for bringing people downtown during slow winter months. This year, several snow days forced businesses to close, resulting in lost sales during an already difficult season. This year's Ice Arts featured 17 ice-

carving stations across downtown attracting visitors from Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. In the month surrounding the event, DNA social media saw over 94,000 organic Instagram views, 631,000 Facebook views and nearly 19,000 website visits. Most importantly, businesses reported packed restaurants and some of their strongest winter sales days. Events like Ice Arts, Arts Night Out and Taste of Northampton are more than celebrations; they are economic engines that support small businesses and strengthen Northampton's identity as a vibrant destination. The economic initiative supports their continued partnership and investment in the DNA. Results show that this investment pays back many times over.

Brigid Bogan, social worker, former Northampton resident and part of the western Mass DIY music scene for the past eight years, said she is struck by all the people who've come out to support the change to §241-2 and thanked them for their support. For the past year, she has been flyering independently, not asking for funds, just using her own time and resources. She can easily speak for most people in the underground scene when she says the lack of venues is depressing enough that it's harder to exist as a music scene, especially with the existence of §241-2. She gets so much joy from being able to fly around town, talking to people, hanging up flyers and speaking with business owners has made a huge difference in her view of the scene and she has heard the same from those around her. The city is standing in their way to being more free in their expression of events. "It can't be simply restricted to a Northampton.live website or a few private buildings that are inaccessible, full and even more heavily curated."

She hopes they can all hold Mr. Eric Suher responsible for his empty storefronts. As Mr. Cohen said, a lot less is happening downtown than it used to, and she highly disagrees that it is not the government's fault. What's the plan for those storefronts? Flyers, maybe? She asked.

Andrea Fox said she is a Northampton homeowner who can see the intersection of Finn and Prospect Street from her driveway. Every day, she either walks, drives, trikes or bikes through that intersection and has observed traffic in all directions traveling faster than is safe. Due to the curve in the road, visibility can be limited. She named destinations on Prospect Street, such as the LGA school, the synagogue, the survival center and the YMCA, that draw walkers, people pushing carts or wagons and children alone or in groups needing to cross. Because of the proximity to the bike path, there are a lot of scooters, trikes and bikes that are lower to the ground and easier to miss if you're not expecting them. Traffic signs assist with traffic calming and create a safer and more orderly process for travel. She mentioned four-way stops at State Street and the intersection of Prospect and Jackson Street. It is her belief they have added to improved traffic flow, replacing the often long delays waiting for the kindness of motorists to allow others to pass either on foot, bike or car. Yesterday, while on Bates at the Day and Lincoln three-way stop, she noticed its similarity to the curve of this intersection. She noticed no delays but rather a smooth orderly process for travel. She urged them to support and affirm the 3:1 vote in favor of the three-way stop taken by TPC and LM committees and to vote for safety.

Shelly Berkowitz, Northampton, said she supports not obstructing informational flyers. She expects insanity from the federal administration but, until recently, naively still viewed Northampton's government pretty much as a rational entity. How does she continue believing that when she sees communications worthy of the Orwellian Ministry of Truth, where millions and millions of their Northampton dollars are stashed away for a Disneyland-esque, poorly thought out, unnecessary and frankly dangerous project, Picture Main Street. Thankfully, since the last election, the majority of Northampton residents now know the truth about this project, the real truth. They already witnessed the bungling, pseudo-resilience hub scam which left their city the proud owners of a boarded up, unusable, \$3 million church, all while the mayor continues to claim they're penniless and can't afford to fix the harm already inflicted on their children and their schools, some of whom are reading at the 7th percentile for their grade level, because of cruel, illegal and frankly dangerous understaffing.

Back to PMS. To finish, "jump off that clown car. . . forget about the bogus POP, Pardon Our Progress." Show empathy for their downtown small businesses who would go bankrupt. "Forget about the cockeyed, dangerous protected bike lanes and, for god's sakes, just fix the damn pipes."

While they're at it, make sure they're wide enough to handle the expected flood-level rains that come from global warming, she added. That would give the mayor a meaningful environmental legacy, not chopping down mature trees. "And, oh yeah, fund our schools."

Denise McKahn, Northampton, said she lives just a few blocks from Finn and Prospect. She believes it is the 4th time she has come to talk to council about it, telling them something about

her level of interest. She hopes they will support the stop sign installation. They know stop signs are inconvenient for drivers and the intersection would be better served by other interventions, like a push-button light. However, doing nothing puts her and her children at continued risk. This is an intersection she literally crosses daily by foot or bike. She personally has almost been hit multiple times in the middle of the crosswalk by drivers who can't see her when they turn a 90-degree angle, even if they're not going too fast. This intersection is on a major walking path to the elementary school and high school. Her son also came to council asking for this stop sign. Please protect her, her neighbors and their kids. "Something is better than nothing."

Isaac Weiner, co-owner of **Familiars Coffee and Tea** and the **Florence Pie Bar**, vice chair of the DNA, board member of the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce and co-organizer of Summer on Strong and Market Street Market, spoke in support of the order to appropriate \$90,000 for economic development. Since the decline of the BID (Business Improvement District), Northampton has been caught in an impossible struggle between expectations for high deliverables - such as economic vibrancy and world-class programming - and the ever-dwindling resources and funds from private donors, sponsors and stakeholders. More and more businesses are going after fewer and fewer private donations. Had the city not stepped up and filled the financial void left by the BID in such a strong and tangible way, the land-scape of their town as they understand it would be nonexistent. It has taken hard work, dedication and investment from both public and private partners to maintain and enhance their culture. They have become a scrappy, frugal and agile community of volunteers as they navigate this reality. They are at a pivotal moment in Northampton's history. They need to pursue alternative, stable and sustainable revenue for a strong economic development budget that will allow them to strategically and thoughtfully evolve and grow. In the meantime, it's imperative to maintain this vital economic lifeline that has allowed their town to prosper with events like Summer on Strong, the Taste and Market Street Market and through partnerships like those between the city, DNA and the Chamber. He is so hopeful as he looks around and hears from those who have shown up and spoken. He cannot tolerate hearing about the Northampton of yesterday anymore when there are so many of them working to build the Northampton of tomorrow. Please stand with them again to make sure these crucial resources are available to allow them to continue to do what they know needs to be done. Please stand with the DNA, the mayor's office, business and restaurant owners and retailers in their community to help them grow and support their beloved downtown.

Vince Jackson, Executive Director of the greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce, shared the chamber's mission to promote a thriving economy and thriving community, since they know the two are inextricably linked. He offered comments in strong support of the \$90,000 appropriation. Chamber members take great pride in partnering with the city and DNA on initiatives that drive economic impact, enhance the quality of life and create memorable experiences for those who choose to spend time here. Businesses already offer great products and services people want but it's the 'stuff to do' that attracts more people, keeps them here longer, gives them reasons to come back over and over again, and, for residents, makes it a place they can really appreciate living, working and playing. Marketing is a key strength of the chamber. Whether it's elevating the Ice Arts festival or supporting Summer on Strong or the inaugural Market Street Market, they are excited to be partners with the city and the DNA. These events and many more support small businesses, drive economic activity, and reinforce Northampton's reputation as a regional gem, a great tourist destination and a fun, vibrant place to be. As they always say at the chamber, when the economy thrives, the community thrives and vice versa.

Ruth Griggs introduced herself as **President of the Northampton Jazz Festival**, held every year on the last weekend of September, and proud member of the newly-formed western MA Arts Advocacy Coalition. Personally, the funding they received for the first time this year from the economic development department made it possible for the Northampton Jazz Festival to have musicians able to perform in a restaurant every month this year on Arts Night Out. They enjoyed the beauty of the music, the increased attendance in the restaurants and the enthusiastic participation of restaurant owners. This absolutely, unequivocally would not have happened without the support of the city. Chief of Staff Alan Wolf recognizes the value of the arts as an economic driver. If able to continue this partnership, they are looking to turn it into a 'Side of Jazz' restaurant membership operation during the Main Street redesign to keep people coming downtown. This \$90,000 appropriation is crucial for ensuring that the arts will continue to support the economic vitality of the city. As a resident, she supports the stop signs at Finn and Prospect Street and recently installed signs at Trumbull and Prospect, she added.

Melissa Maciborski, Northampton, said she wanted to check in with councilors. A lot of their constituents are still under the impression that PMS is funded by the state because of the

narrative put forward by the city. People do not think any municipal funds are being spent on this project, and that is not true. They are spending millions of city funds and she thinks they need more specifics on exactly how much. She doesn't know if anyone had a chance to listen to the case report but it showed that students in Northampton are behind their DESE-designated peer district academically. This is a city that has always been known for its schools, and the kids are behind. The only thing that could have fixed that is funding. What they've done is decrease funding leading to staff cuts, to put [other] funding aside. She hopes people on the council will look a little deeper and see where that money is actually going. When kids can't read, all of that harm that was done was completely preventable. "The choice was yours."

John Mark Lampley, Crescent Street, said he was speaking out of some discomfort he is feeling about public comment on the \$90,000 for downtown development. He has been looking over the order on the agenda and is not seeing very clear answers as to how that sum is supposed to be spent. From public comment, he feels like there is some consensus as to where it is going but, as a resident, he just doesn't know. It is giving him pause and discomfort. When Chief of Staff Wolf makes this kind of proposal, he would like him to be prepared to speak on where it is going before it is approved with at least the same level of scrutiny applied to funding for goods and services like roads, sidewalks and schools.

There being no further comments, **Councilor Maiore brought public comment to a close.**

Announcements from Councilors and the Mayor

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March 13th is the next Arts Night Out, Councilor Perry reminded. He encouraged folks to support it.

At the most recent Community Resources meeting, members had a really robust discussion with Historic Northampton and Ruggles Center representatives. Historic Northampton currently has a moving exhibit on slavery in Northampton and Ruggles Center members reminded the committee that anyone in the city can schedule a visit. At their next meeting Monday, April 16th at 5:30 p.m. committee members are talking about trying to delve into resources in terms of food and farms.

Councilor Loisel announced that Legislative Matters meets next Monday, March 9, 2026 at 6 p.m. And, a 'No Kings' protest will be March 28th from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. downtown.

Councilor Maiore said Saturday is the Volunteers in Northampton Schools (VINS) dog show from 12 to 3 p.m. at Northampton High School. As emcee, they will have the pleasure of seeing her trying to come up with bad canine puns.

Presentations 2025 Special Committee for Review of Ordinances - Presentation of Final Report

Presentations 2025 Special Committee for Review of Ordinances - Presentation of Final Report

Councilor Dubs and Councilor Perry jointly presented the Ordinance Review Committee's final report, including ordinances recommended for adoption, revision and/or rescission and topics recommended for further study.

As a process note, Councilor Dubs noted that no votes are expected tonight. Recommended ordinances can be introduced by any one of the councilors at any point, he advised.

Councilor Stratton commented that the ordinances prioritized for amendment include many he is looking forward to working on. A lot of work remains to be done since nobody has written them up as orders yet. He is particularly interested in the snow problem and eager to begin working on it. Council rules in general allow referral of matters to council committees or executive multi-member bodies, he reminded. He asked if councilors could refer the topic to the Transportation and Parking Commission, City Services and/or Legislative Matters or whether those committees themselves could self assign the subject.

The council also has the ability to issue a study request, he noted. As a point of information, M.G.L. 40U has some state recommendations related to snow removal ordinances and M.G.L. Ch. 85, Sections 5 and 6 also have relevant provisions, he added. He would be interested in discussing the options tonight for kick-starting some action.

Councilor Dubs said no specific agenda items related to their recommendations are on tonight's agenda, so he believes any votes would need to be taken at a future meeting.

Councilor Maiore recognized Attorney Seewald, who let them know this is his 3rd time overseeing the ordinance review process. This particular committee didn't have a specific charge. Last time, the City Council adopted a resolution recommending a charge so there were specific parameters around discussion. This process was wide-ranging and free-flowing. He enjoyed working with the councilors and members of the public who brought an innocence councilors couldn't bring. He acknowledged the administrative assistant's 'yeoman's work' in coordinating and recording the proceedings.

Since no specific orders are on the agenda, if the council would like to bring a particular ordinance forward or refer anything to a committee, they can do that at another meeting, he clarified. He put in a plug for the sign ordinance, since the city currently has an unconstitutional sign ordinance that cannot be enforced. It's there and ready to go. Former Councilor Stan Moulton and Planning Director Carolyn Misch with his assistance put in a lot of work on this.

Councilor Moulton thanked Councilor Dubs and Councilor Perry for their presentation. A lot of the work presented in the report is conceptual and requires a discussion to see if it is the council's will to move it forward as a more specific proposal. However, the sign revisions are in substantially completed form.

The sign ordinance needs to be content neutral, he stressed. The path forward for it is fairly straight-forward. Once introduced, it can be referred to Legislative Matters and the Planning Board.

Councilor Nabad she said was thinking of pulling any pesticide-related recommendations and bringing them to the Northampton Energy and Sustainability Commission (NESC). She understands from Attorney Seewald that they cannot make those referrals tonight.

Councilor Loisel asked if there were any major things they didn't get to that they wanted to that should be noted for the next time.

Looking at E-bikes was an important topic they did not take up, but they did push it to another committee, Councilor Perry said.

It is helpful to hear that there is some urgency to the sign ordinance, so it would be helpful to know what the other priorities are, Councilor Loisel said.

There are some 'shovel-ready' ordinance changes identified as 'housekeeping' measures, Councilor Perry confirmed.

Councilor Loisel wondered if chairs would feel comfortable coming to the next meeting with a list of things that are shovel-ready. Councilor Perry and Councilor Dubs agreed the logical next step is to bring specific proposals to the next meeting.

Councilors thanked committee members for all their hard work and Mayor Sciarra added her huge thanks to the councilors and two community members, Molly Moses and Dane Kuttler. Councilor Robbins said she hoped they could continue working on the noise issue that emerged and was referred to the License Commission, since it didn't end up resulting in tangible change to address the concerns of constituents.

Attorney Seewald stressed that councilors can sponsor ordinance changes at any time. He offered to make himself available to any councilor who would like to write legislation but needs help drafting an order. The spreadsheet of housekeeping changes can just be attached to an order, he pointed out. He encouraged the council to move forward with these and any other proposals they may have.

Her concern is making sure this work does not get lost, Councilor Loisel stressed. She doesn't want to leave this meeting without a plan. She hopes someone can come back with a plan for some of the low-hanging fruit.

Councilor Stratton wondered if they should have some kind of a sign-up sheet. He is very interested in working on the snow ordinance and thinks vegetation is a natural companion to it. He wondered if some sort of coordination is needed.

Attorney Seewald cautioned against the council making assignments since this would constitute creation of a subcommittee, which would be subject to the Open Meeting Law (OML).

	<p>To avoid duplication of effort, Councilor Loisel renewed her suggestion that Councilor Dubs and Councilor Perry map out a plan.</p>
<p><u>Recess</u></p>	<p><u>Recess</u> The City Council recessed briefly at 8:39 p.m. The council reconvened at 8:50 p.m.</p>
<p><u>FY2026 Second Quarter Financial Report</u></p>	<p><u>FY2026 Second Quarter Financial Report</u> Finance Director Charlene Nardi presented the second quarter financial report. For a line item-by-line item comparison, she referred councilors to the five spreadsheets attached to the agenda.</p> <p>As a quick overview, everything is on track to meet budget revenue projections, Director Nardi reported. Revenue is at 48.5% of projected collections and expenses are on track to stay within budgets.</p> <p>With regard to revenue, she focuses on the percent collected, making sure it is close to or above 50%, she advised. Tax revenues are right where they expect them to be, slightly below 50%. The first two bills are preliminary and mirror bills from the third and fourth quarter of the previous year while bills for the last two quarters are based on new values and the actual tax rate, so collections are expected to be just below 50% at this point.</p> <p>For motor vehicle excise, the first bills go out in February and are due in March, so most of the money comes in in March and April. Collections are only at 14.2%, but this is to be expected.</p> <p>Hotel/motel taxes so far have brought in \$683,000, 70.1% of projected receipts. This is \$121,000 higher than the same time last year, representing a 21% increase in revenue. This projection was pushed higher in FY2026, up about 11.4% from last year, she reminded.</p> <p>Meals tax receipts are \$441,750, 59.1% of the revenue projection. This projection was increased 3.17% over last year and is coming in slightly higher (\$30,000) than the same time last year.</p> <p>Cannabis revenue is at 51.8% of the projection of \$466,000. This is lower than the same time last year by about \$120,000, so receipts are down by 21%.</p> <p>Although many PILOTS show zero, invoices are sent out in December and are expected to be paid by the end of the fiscal year.</p> <p>Overall, the tax and excise category, representing the bulk of their revenue, is at 47% after motor vehicle excise tax is removed.</p> <p>Moving on to page 2, collectively, the parking revenues category has brought in \$984,000, 64% of projected receipts. This represents a \$13,157 (1%) increase over the same period last year. All funds over projections go to support the parking system, she reminded.</p> <p>Ambulance Services is at 54.8% of the projected budget, only slightly higher (\$23,000) than the same time last year. They increased this budget by 11% in FY2025 and another 13.3% in FY2026.</p> <p>Fees and services are running ahead in most lines using the 50% measurement. While the overall category is at 34.7%, if they remove tuition for Smith Vocational, the overall category is budgeted to bring in \$394,000 and has so far taken in \$303,000 for a 77% collection rate. It is looking good.</p> <p>On pg. 3, Licenses and Permits, most are looking good but overall they are at 47.1% of the budget projection, \$229,000 less than the same period last year. They increased this projection by \$194,000 so that is another category they will continue to watch.</p> <p>In federal revenue, they are at 6.3% for Medicaid reimbursement but she believes they will meet projections this year. They have been told Medicaid reimbursement may not be the same for FY2027.</p> <p>State revenues (cherry sheet figures) are at 49.1%.</p>

The city collected \$450,629 in parking tickets, 62.6% of the projected budget. The collection percentage is the same as last year but they are actually bringing more money in towards the budget over FY2025 as the budget projection increased.

At 64% of the projection, interest on investments has earned \$1.3 million, \$177,000 less than the same time last year. The city is now relying on this revenue source for \$2 million in the FY2026 budget. Two years ago, they took in \$422,000 in interest on ARPA funds in this period; this year (FY2026), they took in \$64,000 from that source. Conversely, in interest on General Fund (GF) reserves, the city took in \$829,000 at this point last year, but it is at \$1.26 million now. They need to keep an eye on this as outside auditors and Standard & Poor do not recommend relying on this revenue source, since it is volatile and can change.

Overall, the city has collected 46.3% of its revenue projections, and, if SVAHS tuition, motor vehicle excise tax and PILOTS are removed, collections are at 48.5%. "We're right where we expect to be for our revenues," she confirmed.

For enterprise fund revenue, everything is tracking as expected. Sewer and water enterprises are at 58% and 56%, respectively, with rates and base charges being the two big drivers. Revenue in rate charges is higher because Coca-Cola is still running two lines. (They've been told that will drop sometime this summer.) Stormwater is at 51.1% and solid waste, 63.4%. Revenue drivers of that enterprise are dump stickers and trash bag sales.

For GF expenses, the end of the report puts overall expenses at 43.1%. A lot of the DPW's work occurs in the spring and carries over into early summer, so expenses tend to peak later in the fiscal year. If capital projects, reserve for personnel, and contributory retirement are taken out, expenses are at 47%.

Expenses are tracking as expected, she concluded.

Generally, percentages of enterprise fund expenses are lower due to carryovers and carry forwards as projects are ongoing and cross fiscal years.

Director Nardi referred to the local receipts spreadsheet and made brief comparisons of current revenues for meals, hotel/motel and cannabis with previous year totals.

Councilor Stratton noted that the relatively high proportion of local receipts relative to the city's overall budget is one reason they all recognize for the city still being solvent. He expressed his understanding that permit receipts were unusually high in FY2025 because of Smith College projects, so comparison to that year may not be entirely fair.

Also, in FY2025, interest income went from \$500,000 in the 1st quarter to over a million in the 2nd, then back down to \$600,000. So, while they're lower this year than the same time last year, the more interesting comparison may be that the 1st quarter of FY2026 is just under \$700,000 while the 2nd quarter is \$636,000. "I think we're basically back on the long-term trend there," he suggested.

Referring to a recent tour of Northampton Fire Rescue, Councilor Stratton noted that mutual aid has typically not involved money. However, an article in the Greenfield Recorder reported that South County EMS, an EMS system that serves South Deerfield and Whately, has done so many calls to Hatfield that they recently began charging. He hopes that if Northampton finds itself in a similar state of imbalance, it could do something similar.

Councilor Stratton asked the Mayor if they had any information about why the PVRTA assessment increased.

Assessments are based on audited figures for FY2025, Director Nardi said. A letter from the transit authority explained that PVRTA may increase the assessment by 2.5% plus additional service if applicable.

The difference of \$252,388 in the prior year's assessment is due to a 27.2% increase in fixed route service miles and a 41% increase in paratransit service, the letter stated.

Councilor Stratton wondered if they got a new bus route they're now being charged for.

Mayor Sciarra said they could find out what accounts for the increase in fixed route service.

<p><u>Consent Agenda</u></p>	<p><u>Consent Agenda</u> Councilor Maiore reviewed the items on the consent agenda. Councilor Stratton requested removal of <u>26.020 Appointments to Various Committees, for referral to City Services.</u> Councilor Klemer moved to approve the consent agenda with the removal. Councilor Davis seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.</p> <p>The following item was approved as part of the consent agenda: A. <u>Minutes of February 5, 2026 regular meetings and February 26, 2026 special meeting</u></p> <p><u>26.020 Appointments to Various Committees, for referral to City Services</u> <u>Board of Health</u></p> <p>Luke Messac, 294 Cardinal Way Term: March 2026 - June 2028 <i>To fill a vacancy</i></p> <p><u>Community Preservation Committee</u></p> <p>Leticia Ward, 12 High Meadow Rd Term: March 2026 - June 2028 <i>Filling the position of Debin Bruce</i></p> <p><u>Housing Partnership</u></p> <p>Yakov Kronrod, 188 Rocky Hill Rd Term: March 2026 - June 2028 <i>To fill a vacancy</i></p> <p>Councilor Stratton said he will of course move to refer this to City Services, but he expressed his hope that, since these are all new appointments, City Services will schedule each of the candidates for an interview by the full committee rather than assigning them to a single member. Two of three of them are relatively new to the city, so he would appreciate the opportunity to interview each of them as a committee.</p> <p>Councilor Stratton moved to refer the appointments to City Services. Councilor Nabad seconded.</p> <p>The process decision will be made by City Services, it was noted. He is raising the suggestion now since the council only has 45 days to act, Councilor Stratton explained.</p> <p>The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.</p>
<p><u>Financial Orders (on 1st reading)</u> <u>26.016 An Order to Establish Water and Sewer Rates for FY2027 - 1st reading</u></p>	<p><u>Financial Orders (on 1st reading)</u> <u>26.016 An Order to Establish Water and Sewer Rates for FY2027 - 1st reading</u> City officials will make a presentation in two weeks as part of the rate-setting public hearing, Mayor Sciarra advised.</p> <p>Councilor Robbins said she would like to refer the order to finance so the Finance Committee has the opportunity to hear public feedback.</p> <p>Councilor Stratton noted that filing for the CPA exemption waives water and sewer base charges, representing fairly substantial savings, but he is finding the application deadlines on the website confusing. He asked if the mayor and assessor could make sure those documents are up to date.</p> <p>The Mayor confirmed that rates are not changing.</p> <p>Councilor Maiore said that, since rates are not changing, she personally does not feel the need to refer it to Finance.</p> <p>Councilor Robbins said she would like to have some discussion. There is concern from her constituents about sudden changes so she would want to be very cognizant of not having that</p>

happen again. If projections for operations beyond FY2027 might result in substantial increases in FY2028 or FY2029, she thinks they should be aware of that.

Next Tuesday at noon, Finance Director Nardi and Principal Assessor Marc Dautreuil are giving their annual presentation on tax exemptions at the senior center which will be posted to the website, Mayor Sciarra advised. Applications are due April 1st.

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

See minutes of March 19, 2026 for final reading.

26.017 An Order to Accept Gift of Scoreboards from Ray Ellerbrook Family Memorial Field Fund - 1st reading

26.017 An Order to Accept Gift of Scoreboards from Ray Ellerbrook Family Memorial Field Fund - 1st reading

Parks & Recreation Director Ann-Marie Moggio explained that the gift is in memory of Ray Ellerbrook, director of Northampton's Parks and Recreation Department for 27 years. In 2009, Ellerbrook Field was named in his honor. He unfortunately lost his 10-year battle with cancer in 2013, but, since then, his wife and children have established the Ellerbrook Family Fund to keep his memory alive. The family has made multiple gifts - sheds at various fields, picnic tables, rebuilding the playground at Arcanum Field after a fire and scoreboards there - and made a major donation to the pickle ball courts. They are just asking the City Council to accept this generous gift as a reflection of Ray's passion and inspiration.

Councilor Nabad moved to suspend the rules to waive two readings. Councilor Dubs seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.

Councilor Robbins said it was a perfect and appropriate memorial to Mr. Ellerbrook.

Councilor Loisel moved to approve the order. Councilor Klemer seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.

The following order passed final reading:

APPROVED - 26.017
An Order to Accept
Gift of Scoreboards
from Ray Ellerbrook
Family Memorial
Field Fund - 1st
reading

City of Northampton
MASSACHUSETTS

In City Council March 5, 2026

Upon recommendation of the Mayor

26.017 An Order to Accept Gift of Scoreboards from Ray Ellerbrook Family Memorial
Field Fund

Whereas, Ray Ellerbrook was the city Parks & Recreation Director for 27 years; and

Whereas, over the past 13 years his family through the Ray Ellerbrook Family Memorial Field Fund has donated needed recreational equipment such as a play structure and scoreboard at Arcanum Field, picnic tables, and field storage sheds in support and recognition of the value of the Northampton Parks & Recreation Department; and

Whereas, the family would like to purchase two (2) electronic scoreboards at an estimated cost of \$15,000; and

Whereas, using CPA funds the scoreboards will be installed at the two baseball fields at Florence Recreation Fields for use by Northampton youth and high school teams.

Ordered, that

The Northampton City Council gratefully accept the donation of two (2) scoreboards from the Ray Ellerbrook Family Memorial Fund as a gift to the City of Northampton, in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 44, Section 53A 1/2.

Rules suspended, passed final reading and enrolled.

26.018 An Order to
Reprogram Funds to
Repaint JFK Gym -
1st reading

26.018 An Order to Reprogram Funds to Repaint JFK Gym - 1st reading

The order simply requests reprogramming of left over funds from two completed projects, Mayor Sciarra explained.

Councilor Klemer moved to suspend the rules to waive two readings. Councilor Nabad seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.

Councilor Nabad moved to approve the order. Councilor Perry seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.

The following order passed final reading:

City of Northampton

MASSACHUSETTS

In City Council

March 5, 2026

Upon recommendation of Mayor Sciarra

26.018 An Order to Reprogram Funds to Repaint JFK Gym

WHEREAS, the Supervisor of NPS School Maintenance would like to reprogram leftover funds for a small project to repaint a portion of the JFK middle school gymnasium; and

WHEREAS, there are leftover funds from the JFK Façade Repairs project and the JFK tennis court project that can be used to support this project which is less than \$10,000.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDERED,

That the City Council reprogram and authorize the transfer of the funds from the completed NPS projects to support the small repainting project at the JFK middle school gymnasium.

Project	Transfer out	Transfer in
CS - JFK Façade Repairs Project	\$ 2,763.35	
NPS - JFK Tennis Court Rebuild	\$ 1,536.65	
JFK Gym Repainting		\$4,300.00

Rules suspended, passed final reading and enrolled.

26.019 An Order to Appropriate \$90,000 Free Cash to Economic Development Projects and Initiatives - 1st reading

26.019 An Order to Appropriate \$90,000 Free Cash to Economic Development Projects and Initiatives - 1st reading

Mayor Sciarra thanked all those who spoke tonight and everyone who works to make Northampton the vibrant place that it is.

Chief of Staff Alan Wolf gave the slide presentation, "Investing in Downtown Vitality: Economic Development Appropriation." As background, Northampton previously had a Business Improvement District (BID) that generated over \$400,000 a year for downtown activities, but, in November of 2014, it was dissolved and that money went away, he explained. For about a year, everyone was shocked and not much happened downtown. Then, a bunch of people got together and formed the Downtown Northampton Association (DNA) and raised money to get things going again. The mantra was beautification, events and advocacy. When asked for money, downtown business leader Chuck Bowles said, "you've got to bring the BID back because this 'pass the hat' method is never going to work," Mr. Wolf recounted.

Enter the pandemic and the 2nd Trump presidency; all these things inspired people, along with the Chamber of Commerce and other downtown actors, to get active and think creatively. To quote Arts and Culture Department Director Brian Foote, "Our job is to get peoples' butts downtown."

"We have centered that mantra in every action that we have done and supported since," he reported. He referred to initiatives to bring back the Taste of Northampton and roll out musical events like Bands on Brewster and Masonic Street Live as examples of activities intended to keep people coming downtown.

With the pandemic, different pots of money became available. The result has been a reactive, creative and hard scrabble effort by a lot of people to 'make a lot out of a little.'

An official economic development budget hasn't been created; instead, financial requests have always been a one-off. Now, they are at a crossroads trying to get to the next step. An effort is underway with a steering committee to try to bring back a BID to restore recurring revenue to support downtown initiatives. He has no illusions that this is a large amount of money, but a lot more could be done with more. The DNA no longer has an executive director.

Now is the time to reinforce what's working, he proposed. Things have not really gotten better; they now have Trump tariffs, international uncertainty and fear and war. Gas prices are rising and the stock market is dropping. It is not a time to take their foot off the gas.

There is no secret agenda; when people come to them, they want to have money available, he shared. This continues to build on the effort to keep downtown active and vibrant.

He reviewed a slide titled, "A strategic investment with a meaningful return," pointing out that while \$90,000 is just .06% of the city's FY2026 General Fund budget, local receipts generated over \$5.81 million in FY2025, indicating that a modest investment goes a long way. Last year's investment supported outdoor dining (with barriers and planters), downtown music (Summer on Strong, Bands on Brewster, Salsa in the Park and the Back Porch Festival) and provided in-kind support for one-time events such as the Taste.

He showed examples of additional city support, such as ARPA community investment grants and the Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program.

City officials are trying to get them to a BID - a consistent, recurring revenue source.

Councilor Perry expressed strong support.

Councilor Stratton said he wanted to refer this to Finance. Local receipts are in many ways the engine of their city budget, he agreed. He thinks this is very important and would like to see time for public comment on it in committee. He finds the 'Whereas' clauses a little vague as to what actual spending will be and would ultimately like to see it amended to add more specificity. He thinks the public needs to know more specifically how the money will be spent.

He moved to refer the order to Finance. Councilor Robbins seconded.

Councilor Loisel asked what the process is by which the money is given out?

Chief of Staff Wolf said the people they have been working with ask again. The DNA has been struggling and has asked for more money and support, so that's why this ask is bigger than the last. He said he is happy to share a list of what they've funded in the past.

Frankly, he would like some flexibility to fund somebody else's great idea. He cited Ruth Griggs' recent appeal to support Arts Night Out, which is struggling, as an example. They sponsor things people come to them with. Bands on Brewster would not happen without the city's support.

Councilor Loisel said she does not see a need for this to go to Finance. She met with Isaac of Familiars and heard how much they all were struggling. She feels like the businesses are running on a shoestring and it is a good use of their money to support them. She would hope they could approve this tonight.

Councilor Robbins said she enjoyed the presentation and thinks it is a good investment. They heard from a lot of voices tonight but didn't really hear a specific break down of expenses. It is hard to understand how these funds fit into a larger city economic vitality plan.

She looked at a lot of city documents, including the Sustainable Northampton Plan, and didn't see any directly addressing economic development. If there is one, she thinks it would be helpful to make it available to the public. If there isn't, she wondered if it is time for a council conversation about creating a larger economic plan. "This really needs to be 'part of,' instead of just a piece of," she suggested.

She would agree with a referral to finance.

Chief of Staff Wolf said he doesn't think he is ever going to be able to quantify the direct impact on the city budget of Bands on Brewster or Market Street Market. But, take it down to 1%; call it a 100% return on investment and it's still worth it. The point of the numbers is to say how important this money and activity is to their city and that it is a wise investment.

"This is not a tough choice. This is supporting our residents who are doing this work," he asserted.

If the threshold is going to be to prove a direct line between Salsa in the Park and local receipts, "I'm not sure I'm up to that," he noted. "This is an incredibly critical thing to support. . . there's no hidden agenda."

Councilor Perry said they listened to a lot of people tonight claiming that the city is not supporting their downtown and arts over flyering and are now presented with a clear example of how the city *is* trying to promote downtown business. It's important to understand that it's hard to show causality. Having this money gives organizers the peace of mind to move on to the next step. It allows them to keep moving forward and expand on things he thinks they all believe are important to their community.

He doesn't believe it needs to go to Finance.

Councilor Klemer agreed with everything Councilor Perry said. She doesn't think it should go to Finance. She thinks they should suspend the rules and move on with this so restaurant owners and everybody else involved can start planning for the summer.

Councilor Davis noted that, in this particular case, she heard passionate people who love Northampton who would use this pittance of money well when split among them. She agreed the flyer-ing conversation and this are absolutely linked. Approval would demonstrate their love for all kinds of arts, whether music or visual.

Councilor Dubs said he personally is living proof of how important and meaningful it is to have a vibrant downtown. 20 years ago, he lived in Pennsylvania and moved up here with his band mate because he heard it was a great place for people in bands. He became part of the community because of its vibrant arts, culture and music. It can't be overstated how important this is.

Councilor Nabad said that as a former business owner herself, she knows the struggle. She thinks it would be preposterous - a real 'kick in the teeth' to people who keep their city moving during the summer - not to approve this tonight.

She also stressed the importance of these events. It can't be overstated how much foot traffic and business they bring in. She would not be up for any kind of referral.

Councilor Stratton said he is a little alarmed here by the disparate standards. When the schools come to them with terrible test scores, children denied their legal rights and a request for money, there's no money. When the mayor and chief of staff comes to them on just a few days' notice, "we're ready to write a check."

Councilor Loisel raised the point of order that this is not a conversation about the schools. .

They're talking about \$90,000; \$90,000 was two of the interventionists they didn't just fund or five paras or tutors. Essentially what they're saying is that their businesses are an investment but their children are not.

Councilor Stratton proposed amending the order to pull out the amount for support of specific festivals and come back with more information about other things.

Councilor Maiore said her comfort level with this is that they do this every year, so businesses have come to expect it. She is comfortable with it going to the consent agenda.

Councilor Maiore called the motion to refer the order to Finance to a vote, and it failed 2:7 by roll call vote with Councilors Robbins and Stratton in favor and the rest opposed.

Councilor Perry moved to suspend the rules to waive two readings. Councilor Dubs seconded. The motion passed 7:2 by roll call vote with Councilor Robbins and Stratton opposed.

Councilor Perry moved to approve the order. Councilor Klemer seconded. The motion carried 8:1 by roll call vote with Councilor Stratton opposed.

The following order passed final reading:

APPROVED - 26.019
An Order to
Appropriate \$90,000
Free Cash to
Economic
Development
Projects and
Initiatives - 1st
reading

City of Northampton
MASSACHUSETTS

In City Council, March 5, 2026

Upon the recommendation of Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra

26.019 An Order to Appropriate \$90,000 Free Cash to Economic Development Projects and Initiatives

Whereas, the city identified during COVID-19 economic recovery planning that activating economic development projects is key to reviving and sustaining local economic activity, particularly for hotel/motel and meals tax revenues; and

Whereas, as the city continues working to help businesses recover from the pandemic, navigate ongoing economic uncertainty, and prepare for the upcoming improvements to downtown infrastructure, safety, and equity to support general economic development efforts; and

Whereas, Northampton's parking fees and fines, cannabis, hotel/motel, and meals taxes made up 4.75% of the city's general fund revenue in FY2024 and totaled \$5,814,180 in FY2025, with \$3,048,932 received in the first two quarters of FY2026 alone; and

Whereas, even with a modest investment in economic development, this proposed appropriation represents just 0.06% of the FY2026 General Fund budget, which can yield a significant return. If economic development efforts drive just 10% of local receipts, this investment delivers a return on investment (ROI) of more than 546%. These revenues fund Northampton's schools, public safety, public works, and other essential services; and

Whereas, Northampton continues to face economic headwinds. Federal relief funds are winding down, and reduced support for health and human services, education, community and social safety nets, and environmental and regional programs are just some examples of a broad withdrawal of federal investment. At the state level, Governor Healey's proposed budget reduces funding for key social service programs that cities like Northampton rely on to meet local needs. Combined with volatile business conditions and cumulative inflation in the Boston area now exceeding 22.46% since 2020 (per the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics), these pressures make it all the more critical for Northampton to strengthen its locally generated revenue base through strategic economic development; and

Whereas, the city will continue to partner with the Arts & Culture Department and groups like the Downtown Northampton Association, the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce, Signature Sounds, and the Iron Horse on events such as Summer on Strong, The Taste of Northampton, Market Street Market, and the Back Porch

Festival, and continue initiatives like Bands on Brewster, Salsa in the Plaza, Parties in the Park, the Florence Concert Series, outdoor dining, and more; and

Whereas, the city will apply to the FY27 round of the Community One Stop for Growth for up to \$50,000 in refundable state tax credits through the updated Vacant Storefront Program; and

Whereas, this economic development appropriation will help position the city competitively by continuing to provide municipal matching funds and resources to manage the outreach, application, and recruitment process for the MSVP program and to support the many worthwhile downtown economic activities that have proven successful over the past five years.

Now, Therefore be it Ordered, that

The sum of \$90,000 be appropriated from the FY2026 General Fund Undesignated Fund Balance (Free Cash) for economic development projects and initiatives, including but not limited to activities that support the city's participation in the FY27 Vacant Storefront Program, ongoing economic development efforts, and related revitalization efforts.

Rules suspended, passed final reading and enrolled.

Financial Orders (on
2nd reading)

Financial Orders (on 2nd reading)
26.003 An Order to Appropriate \$2.1 Million Free Cash to Various Reserve Accounts - 2nd
reading

26.003 An Order to Appropriate \$2.1 Million Free Cash to Various Reserve Accounts - 2nd reading

Councilor Stratton said he will be opposing this. By the end of the fiscal year, they do have to put everything in stabilization because Free Cash is frozen, but they have not really seen the full plan yet for Free Cash or the budget. He has asked repeatedly why they need to do this now. In effect, by passing this tonight, they will be continuing with business as usual, i.e. - "underfunded schools, neglected services. . . [and] roads that don't get plowed timely." Yes, they could legally vote to pull money back out of all of these funds. However, passing this order tonight will preempt a lot of important conversations he thinks need to happen.

Councilor Klemer moved to approve the order. Councilor Dubs seconded.

Councilor Robbins said Councilor Stratton is absolutely right that when they put money in stabilization funds, they can draw it out. However, it feels nominally easier to draw it out of the Fiscal Stability Stabilization Fund (FSSF) than one of the other named funds. She will vote positively on this but hopes they would have an understanding as a council that, should they need money for essential services, these are funds they could conceivably draw on.

Councilor Klemer and Councilor Nabad maintained that this has gone through the process and been thoroughly discussed. They both expressed support.

The motion passed 8:1 by roll call vote with Councilor Stratton opposed.

The following order passed final reading:

City of Northampton
MASSACHUSETTS

In City Council

Upon recommendation of Mayor Sciarra

26.003 An Order to Appropriate \$2.1 Million Free Cash to Various Reserve Accounts

Ordered, that

\$2,112,722 be appropriated from the FY26 General Fund Undesignated Fund Balance (Free Cash) to the following accounts:

\$528,180.50	Capital Stabilization Fund
\$528,180.50	Climate Mitigation Stabilization Fund
\$528,180.50	Fiscal Stability Stabilization Fund
\$528,180.50	Stabilization Fund

Passed final reading and enrolled.

Ordinances
26.010 An Ordinance Relative to All-Way Stop Control for Finn Street at Prospect Street

Ordinances
26.010 An Ordinance Relative to All-Way Stop Control for Finn Street at Prospect Street

Councilor Dubs said he heard from quite a few Ward 4 constituents. He read several of their comments in support aloud, saying he agrees with the recommendation.

Councilor Dubs moved to approve the ordinance. Councilor Klemer seconded.

Councilor Klemer said she also heard from a number of constituents and was on Transportation and Parking (TPC) last term where the proposal for stop signs was discussed at length. She expressed her opinion that it is the best and least expensive option.

Councilor Robbins said she would like to talk about the process. The city website has a couple of pages on traffic calming and presents putting in stop signs as somewhat of a last resort, giving an explanation of how stop signs actually can be more dangerous than traffic calming. It's a terrible corner which she doesn't think should ever have a crosswalk.

She called the school transportation director to see if kids on the Summer Street side of Finn Street could pick up the school bus on State Street instead of having to cross there. The transportation director said they could, so that's an option that's available.

At a public hearing [before TPC], 12 people spoke, she reported. Two spoke in favor of stop signs and 10 had really good ideas about how to do things differently. She was very surprised at the end that the entire TPC voted unanimously not to explore what they heard in the public hearing but just to put in stop signs.

"I wondered about why we have public hearings if a decision's already been made," she noted.

Most councilors got an extensive email from former city engineer David Veleta, who was quite disturbed by the report of the consultants, Councilor Robbins continued. Mr. Veleta had some very good suggestions about making the intersection more pedestrian-friendly, including simply moving the stop sign on Prospect Street forward. At Legislative Matters, a member asked to talk about the data he brought forward, and she was a bit shocked that the chair was not interested, saying, "oh, he's just a resident."

She questioned the correlation between the traffic-calming request's position on a DPW website traffic-calming list and its prioritization for action/review, noting that this item is #38 on that list.

A lot of folks seem really happy with stop signs, but "I think we all know that, in Northampton, people aren't stopping at stop signs."

Her biggest fear is that someone is going to come around the corner without stopping and hit a kid who thinks they *will* stop.

Councilor Maiore shared that they talked in Legislative Matters about how, if money were no object, other options could be pursued, but budgetary constraints are a reality.

To echo Councilor Robbins, this is clearly a request for traffic calming, Councilor Stratton agreed. It also happens to be an intersection that doesn't have a pedestrian crash history leap-frogging over many intersections that do because people perceive it as dangerous.

"Stop signs are not a means of traffic calming," he stressed.

There are rules for stop signs. "They are not supposed to be installed by legislative fiat, which is what we are poised to do." There are criteria to be met, and the suggestion they have been met seems not entirely credible to him. They don't have traffic speed measurements, they have a subjective measurement by someone with a misconception of the actual posted speed. The sight line measurements also seem not credible to him. There are cases that could be made that would be compelling for a stop sign, "but I'm not seeing that made." This will be a 'no' for him.

Councilor Loisel took exception to Councilor Robbins's statement that people don't stop at stop signs. "I think the police would beg to differ with you," she remonstrated.

DPW Director Donna LaScaleia clarified that her request to Fuss & O'Neill, the city's third-party engineering firm, was to assess/evaluate the intersection for the need for all-way stop control. She made this request because she believed there to be insufficient sight lines on the Finn Street approach to Prospect Street and the Prospect Street turn onto Finn Street.

Fuss & O'Neill collected speed limit detail and found the 85th percentile in that area to be 25 mph. They used 35 mph as a sightline metric because they observed multiple cars speeding during their field visit. Although the 85th percentile shows a lower speed limit, they are using a higher speed when calculating sight distances, she acknowledged.

All that being said, even at 25 mph, they are still not hitting required sight line distances. What they are focused on is safety of vulnerable road users. With cars moving uncontrolled through an intersection with a crosswalk without good sight lines, they have to contemplate how they can actually stop those cars to help vulnerable road users move through that intersection.

She is confident in their traffic consultants who do traffic analyses all over the Commonwealth.

Councilor Stratton noted Director LaScaleia referred to traffic measurements from which the 85% speed determination was made, but these were not included in the report or associated memo.

He moved to postpone to give the director time to bring the actual data.

No one seconded.

Councilor Maiore called the motion to approve to a vote, **and it passed 7:1 by roll call vote with Councilor Stratton opposed and Councilor Robbins abstained.**

The following ordinance passed final reading:

**CITY OF NORTHAMPTON
MASSACHUSETTS**

In the Year Two Thousand and Twenty-Five
Upon the Recommendation of the Transportation and Parking Commission

**26.010
AN ORDINANCE**

**RELATIVE TO ALL-WAY STOP CONTROL FOR
FINN STREET AT PROSPECT STREET**

An Ordinance of the City of Northampton, Massachusetts. Be it ordained by the City Council of the City of Northampton, in City Council assembled, as follows:

1 SECTION 1

2
3 *That the § 312-113 of the Code of Ordinances be amended as follows:*

4
5 § 312-113 Schedule XII: Stop and Yield Intersections.

6
7 A. Isolated stop signs. Stop intersections are established at the following locations:
8 [10-15-1981; 10-15-1987; 5-18-1989; 5-6-1993; 11-5-1998; 1-7-1999; 3-6-2003;
9 12-2-2004]

Location	Direction of Travel	At the Intersection of
Prospect Street	North	Finn Street

11
12
13 D. Multiway stop signs. Multiway stop intersections are established at the following
14 locations:

Location	Direction of Travel	Intersection
<u>Finn Street</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>Prospect Street</u>
<u>Prospect Street</u>	<u>North/South</u>	<u>Finn Street</u>

15
16

Passed final reading and enrolled.

New Business

New Business

Councilor Stratton submitted a reformatted information request on behalf of himself and Councilor Robbins. [Councilor Maiore explained that she asked for it to be reformatted because Councilor Robbins earlier submitted an information request to be considered under 'New Business' but it did not meet the required format of being a "written proposed order, ordinance or resolution."]

Adjourn

Adjourn

Councilor Klemer moved to adjourn. Councilor Davis seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 11:09 p.m.

| Attest: _____, Administrative Assistant