



**Roll Call**

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 212 MAIN STREET  
March 19, 2026**

A regular meeting of the City Council was called to order by Council President Rachel Maiore at 6:33 p.m. Upon a roll call, the following City Councilors were present:

- |                                |                                       |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| At-Large Councilor Meg Robbins | 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 7 Councilor Rachel Maiore | Ward 6 Councilor Christopher Stratton |

Ward 5 Councilor Aline Davis was absent.

**Announcement that Meeting Audio/Video Recorded**

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

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

**Public Hearings**  
Councilor Maiore read the legal notice advertising the public hearing as follows:  
**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 The City Council will consider the [Capital Improvement Program for FY2027-FY2031](#), and hear all persons who wish to be heard thereon.

**Public Hearing to Consider FY2027 Water and Sewer Rates**

**Councilor Klemer moved to open the public hearing. Councilor Stratton seconded. The motion passed unanimously 8:0 by voice vote with Councilor Davis absent.**

**The public hearing was opened at 6:35 p.m.**

Councilor Maiore explained the procedure she would use in conducting the hearing.

Mayor Sciarra introduced the FY2027 - FY2031 Capital Improvement Program (CIP), noting that the city charter annually requires the mayor to create a five-year road map of potential capital needs across all city departments and schools and to submit it to the city council at least 120 days prior to the start of the new fiscal year. The charter in turn requires the City Council to conduct a public hearing to adopt the five-year program by resolution. This highly-recommended practice of the Department of Revenue's (DOR's) Division of Local Services (DLS) outlines the upcoming fiscal year's capital projects and how they will be funded and presents a beginning plan or blueprint for how the city could fund projects proposed for the out years. The CIP is a renewing plan updated and extended each year and not part of the operating budget. Some communities approve the two at the same time, especially towns, which need to pass all spending at Town Meeting. Key advantages to approving the CIP earlier in the year are that it gives the city a competitive advantage in soliciting bids for goods and services and the ability to award contracts in time for the limited construction season, especially school projects which generally need to be completed over the summer.

With recent challenging market conditions, city officials have also found that a long lag time between estimating project costs and getting projects approved to be put out to bid sometimes results in significantly higher costs, preventing projects from moving forward or requiring additional appropriations.

Another reason they don't do them at the same time is that both the CIP and the budget are very time and labor intensive, requiring significant staff time and attention.

Mayor Sciarra outlined the lengthy process behind development of the capital plan, which begins in the fall with departments submitting their capital requests. For the last few years, they have been working to align the plan with the city's climate action work and goals, so Climate Action

and Project Administration (CAPA) department staff have been very involved in its development. As has been the case for over 24 years, a capital advisory committee is appointed to assist the Finance Director in reviewing projects and making recommendations for funding. This year, she expanded that committee to add an additional city councilor, School Committee member and Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School (SVAHS) trustee. Due to increased talk and interest in its work, including some misrepresentations, she also made its presentation meetings public, hoping this window into the committee's work would correct any misperceptions. As in past years, she publicly recognized advisory committee members: former councilor Marissa Elkins and Councilor Jeremy Dubs, former School Committee member and current councilor Aline Davis and School Committee member Amy Martyn, SVAHS Trustee Julie Spencer Robinson and three resident appointees: Janna White, Jaime Broussard and Megan Murphy Wolf, who, with over 10 years of service, is currently the longest-serving member.

She thanked the committee for its thoughtfulness and work and for sharing its thoughts and recommendations.

After working with the committee, Director Nardi puts together funding for the projects based on the CIP submissions, recommendations of the committee and the availability of funding. This involves working with departments and many meetings with her to refine and clarify requests, often making changes and pushing projects out into the out years if needed. Emergency needs sometimes present themselves requiring reworking. This year, the Academy of Music (AOM) boiler failed after the CIP advisory committee had done its work and needed to be prioritized. When emergencies happen after the CIP's been approved, they need to rely on reserve funds.

Mayor Sciarra drew attention to key points in the narrative, including the definition of a capital improvement as "a physical public improvement involving a facility, parcel of land or piece of major equipment with an estimated useful life of five (5) years or more and cost of \$10,000 dollars or more." Along with new buildings, additions and major renovations and land and major equipment acquisition, it includes feasibility studies and engineering design services for potential future capital improvements, she clarified.

The finance team goes through the city's funding systems and policies to ensure any debt taken on is sustainable and that spending conforms to best practices as set by the Department of Revenue (DOR) and outside bonding agencies. Bonds are to be paid back within a period not to exceed the expected useful life of the capital project and must remain within statutory limits. Before bonded long-term debt is used, the impact is analyzed to ensure it is sustainable, she advised.

As can be seen, the plan contains large capital needs that need to be budgeted for outside of the General Fund, and contingencies are needed in case of unplanned emergency expenses. Besides being used to address emergency concerns, stabilization funds are used to responsibly fund projects and mandated requirements, either directly or by managing their associated debt service.

Some projects work towards achieving long-time goals established and reaffirmed for years, such as those in the Sustainable Northampton Plan, and some are unfunded mandates from state and federal government. Some projects needing to be addressed as emergencies now are because of deferred maintenance and the inability to address capital needs in previous decades when there were not sufficient stabilization funds. Without sufficient reserves, maintaining city assets and moving projects forward wasn't possible and borrowing came at much higher interest rates and greater cost to residents because of the city's lower bond rating. In FY2012, the city had almost no reserves and a rock bottom balance of \$4,684 in its capital stabilization account, she recounted. It took years to build the stabilization funds back. They use them in a planned and responsible way to make sure they don't quickly deplete them again and find themselves unable to meet the city's needs.

Starting in FY2014 with the Fiscal Stability Stabilization Plan (FSSP), the city began making annual contributions to the capital stabilization fund and has been able to continue this practice, with the exception of a pause in FY2021 due to the financial impact of the pandemic. Also

contributing to financial reserves in recent years was historic one-time federal relief in the form of FEMA, the CARES Act and ARPA funds.

As they can see from pg. 5 in their books, the capital stabilization fund has been decreasing and they are projecting less funds to be available in it.

For the CIP, the city primarily relies on one-time funding sources such as Free Cash, stabilization and borrowing. Another main source is dedicated receipts such as parking receipts to fund capital projects for the parking system and enterprise funds for capital projects for the water, sewer, solid waste and stormwater and flood control systems.

Other funding sources are revolving funds, reprogrammed funds, grant or gift funding, state funding such as chapter 90 and the sale of land.

The CIP consists of projects totaling \$132,358,913 spread out over five years across city departments and the two school districts, with \$65 million for public works. Recommended projects for the next fiscal year total \$29,984,505 with \$3.9 million funded through enterprise operational funds, \$6.9 million from reprogrammed funds, federal tax credits and grants, \$10.3 million from borrowing and the remainder from Free Cash and stabilization.

Appendix A lists projects by department, with many falling under Central Services and Information Technology Services (ITS), since they handle capital improvements for other departments. In Appendix B, projects are organized by year with funding sources shown. Appendix C includes narrative submissions from departments with detailed project descriptions.

Mayor Sciarra thanked CAPA, ITS and DPW department heads for being here this evening as the departments representing the majority of projects. She also thanked Mayor's office staff for putting the CIP together, especially Finance Director Nardi for her many months of work.

Department heads proceeded to deliver a series of Powerpoint presentations with specific details of the capital projects submitted for their departments.

**Central Services Director Katie Deppen**, accompanied by **School Maintenance Supervisor Tony Kusnierz** and **CAPA Director Benjamin Weil**, shared their plan to pull out selected projects for more detailed discussion, since others are more self-explanatory. With regard to their approach to facilities management in general, she applied a quote from Albert Einstein: "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

"We at Central Services are changing the framework," she asserted. What they will see reflected in this and future capital plans is a department in the process of a genuine shift. They are moving towards a proactive, data-informed and strategically-integrated model for managing, maintaining and investing in the city's physical assets, she shared. It doesn't happen overnight. Digital transformation, rethinking long-standing approaches, looking for new solutions and examining problems from angles they haven't tried before, is a multi-year commitment, not a single budget cycle. But, it starts with thinking differently and it starts now, she stressed.

What they are asking them to fund tonight is not just a list of projects, it is the beginning of a new way of operating, one that anticipates needs before becoming emergencies, bundles related work to stretch every dollar further and keeps the city's infrastructure aligned to modern standards and expectations, she elaborated.

Director Deppen showed a slide listing the city's assets in the form of city and school buildings, noting that the average age is 90 years. She also showed a slide with an overview of the 19 proposed FY2027 projects stretching across the department's three main divisions: Parking, City Buildings and infrastructure, and Schools and infrastructure.

Beginning with Parking Garage Repairs, the EJ Gare garage is a 37-year old, five-level, pre-cast, double T concrete structure reinforced with carbon steel rebar, construction materials typically no longer used in today's building practices, Director Deppen advised. Many garages built in the 70's and 80's are now experiencing significant failures attributable to the carbon steel rebar and its

susceptibility to corrosion, particularly in New England where seasonal conditions expose these structures to road salt and chloride infiltration. She showed a slide featuring pictures of concrete in various locations showing the effects of this exposure. Modern construction would use stainless steel rebar or fiber reinforced polymer alternatives. At 37 years old, EJ Gare is approaching a 40-year threshold structural engineers consider a critical assessment window for parking structures of this type and era. The city is currently conducting a condition assessment of the garage with Hoffman Architects to inform them of immediate items needed to maintain safe daily operations and outline a path forward, whether that means remediation or full replacement.

Deppen next described a proposed Facilities Assets Inventory and Data Collection project which, if funded, in partnership with a company called Alpha, would allow them to conduct an asset inventory of city-wide owned buildings, property and parking. The process would include a technical, systems-level review of all major building equipment and infrastructure. From this data, a preventative maintenance schedule would be developed for each asset and imported into an asset management system (Brightly). This platform assures the ability to accurately plan and budget for future projects, track work history and maintain continuity of knowledge across time. Any staff member responding to an asset will have immediate access to its full history, documentation and condition data while in the field.

With regard to Building Upgrades to City Hall, a 175-year old building that serves the public every day, Deppen noted that deferred maintenance is no longer an option. The work before them addresses age-related deterioration and is essential to preserving the structural and architectural integrity of one of Northampton's most historic and significant civic buildings. The scope of work includes roof replacement, envelope repairs, masonry restoration, interior upgrades and reconfiguration and additional improvements identified through the design process.

As background, in FY2025, the city appropriated funds for exterior modifications. Bids were issued in May of 2024, and the only bid received was well above the city's appropriation.

In FY2026, the city appropriated funds for roof replacement and design. As the design progressed and a cost estimate was completed last summer at 60%, it became clear that the appropriated funds would not be sufficient to deliver the full scope of the project.

The requested appropriation is intentionally presented as an 'up to' figure for strategic reasons. By establishing an 'up to' amount, the city preserves the ability to potentially combine the roof replacement and exterior work into a single project delivered by one contractor. Doing so reduces 'soft costs' - mobilization, staging, contractor overhead – that otherwise would be duplicated. A critical component to the project under 521 CMR is that the Architectural Access Board requires renovation projects that exceed a certain threshold to bring the entire building into full code compliance. Even if the city moves forward with roof replacement alone, that work would trigger building-wide compliance. Thus, the project is presented to allow for the potential additional costs of bringing the building to full compliance, since those are currently unknown.

Director Deppen showed pictures of Forbes Library's front entrance, which has spalled, cracked and deteriorated, creating an unsafe and uneven surface for visitors. This project will replace the damaged concrete and paver landing area with a new code-compliant and fully accessible entry platform.

She also reviewed the following additional projects:

- ❖ purchase of a **robotic mower** for the school department. The mower supports the school's organic field management program and the city's carbon reduction goals, she explained. Benefits include healthier grass from low impact equipment and increased mowing frequency to regulate plant growth and freeing grounds staff to focus on other tasks.
- ❖ **AOM boiler replacement.** One of the building's two existing noncondensing cast-iron boilers recently failed, leaving the building operating with only a single unit and exposing deficiencies in the system's current configuration, Director Deppen reported. Staff are in the process of evaluating replacement options with energy efficiency in mind. Replacement will require full code compliance for associated systems, including plumbing, ventilation and mechanical connections. Since any replacement is subject to the active

gas moratorium, this may affect equipment selection and the scope of work required to bring the system to compliance.

CAPA Director Ben Weil reviewed two previously-presented school energy projects: the Ryan Road roof top solar array and NHS geothermal system. City staff have not yet secured the compliant solar panels to enable them to qualify for the larger tax credit, he shared. The intention is to use the appropriated amount as a ceiling and, hopefully, obtain a similar or better tax credit and comparable amount of solar production.

The NHS geothermal project is an upfront investment with very high life-cycle benefits, Director Weil presented. He shared a chart comparing the upfront vs. life-cycle costs of three options for heating/cooling system replacement: geothermal, boiler + chiller and air source heat pumps (ASHP). The chart showed that while the upfront costs of geothermal are the highest, its life-cycle costs are significantly lower. Upfront costs could be lower depending on test well results, he added.

As an update, Director Weil noted that the city is proposing to bid the project as a performance contract with responsibility on the contractor to make sure certain performance standards – i.e. - advertised energy savings and the thermal stability of the ground loop – are met/satisfied. The city has applied for \$5 million in grant funding to help offset the borrowing.

The new discussion is the upgrade to the Jackson Street School HVAC system; in particular, the 1970's wing, he continued.

Regarding the path to de-carbonizing schools, they always want to improve building envelopes, he reminded. That sometimes is not practical or cost-effective in a given school. The next most important first step is ventilation - providing regular, conditioned fresh air in the correct amount. "That enables everything else." Transition to new technology includes optimizing existing systems since, where phasing of new equipment is necessary, the existing system needs to keep working.

They now have a proof of concept, he volunteered. At Leeds Elementary this past summer, workers removed the steam boilers and electrified the entire 1950's wing. The key was providing fresh air using energy recovery ventilation (ERV). They now have heating and cooling in at least half the school, including the cafetorium, and proof of good savings. Adjusting for normal weather (this year's weather was a bit *abnormal*). they achieved a 35% savings in operational costs, 44% reduction in carbon dioxide and "pretty massive" reduction in gas use with only a 20% increase in electricity, even though they are now heating half the school, he reported.

The original project as designed and contracted was estimated to cost \$2.5 million. With the city council's help and some grant funding, they managed to bring the project in for under one million, most of which was grant funded. "That's our proof of concept," he confirmed.

Science shows that improvement in cooling and ventilation improves performance and learning, he stressed. The Jackson Street HVAC project starts with investment in cooling and ventilation in the 1970's wing. If approved, the plan this summer is to provide cooling and air source heat pumps, change the ventilation system and enable existing heat pumps in the library. After that, they will apply for grants towards getting the 1950's wing ventilated, cooled and heated with electricity. Ideally, all of that will be done before they need to replace a boiler.

The slide 'Balanced System' shows how investment in a balanced system is cash flow positive, since the purchase of variable frequency drives to slow speeds of electric motors (\$21,200) is offset by utility incentives (-\$2,000), rebates from previous projects (-\$6,000) and 'On bill refinancing' (-\$13,200. With these features, the payback period is just over three years.

His calculation of estimated annual savings for the 1970's wing is \$13,760, he shared.

#### **ITS DEPARTMENT**

Chief Information Officer (CIO) Luigi Ottaviani reviewed the three key areas of the FY2027 ITS Capital Budget: 1) Infrastructure and Connectivity, 2) Endpoint Fleet Modernization and 3) Security and Smart Operations.

IT infrastructure refers to the platform/equipment hosting city servers, databases and critical applications, he explained. The current platform will reach the five-year end-of-life/end-of-support mark common in the IT industry in FY2027, he reported. The investment needed to refresh the city's core systems is relatively significant, but unfortunately, there are not viable alternatives.

Changing systems would be ridiculously expensive and labor intensive and moving part of the system to the cloud is significantly more expensive than keeping it in-house.

Part of the IT Department's work each year is unifying and modernizing the municipal and school computer networks, which have historically been separate, he continued. Items associated with this capital request include firewalls, network switches and wifi access points. This year among other things, they are obliged to invest in a new firewall for the Water Treatment Plant (WTP) since they have realized it needs a more reliable connection than the 'radio bridge' presently connecting it to the city's local area network (LAN).

An additional capital need is expanding the municipal fiber network connecting key facilities. This year, IT is trying to reach the landfill on Glendale Road. Next fiscal year, it will work on infrastructure to support the fiber network, such as creating vaults and installing fiber conduit in conjunction with road reconstruction projects.

With respect to 'fleet' modernization, the city's 'fleet' consists of city workstations, school workstations and school 1:1 Chromebooks, he related. 218 of the city's 412 workstations are deemed to need replacement so the \$45,000 FY27 request will replace about 35. Similarly, a \$55,000 request for school workstations will allow replacement of 35 to 40, and the \$200,000 request for 1:1 Chromebooks will provide new, high end devices to incoming 6<sup>th</sup> graders which they will be expected to use for the remainder of their school time.

CIO Ottaviani presented the following additional capital requests:

- ❖ \$47,000 for School Projector Replacement
- ❖ \$130,000 to upgrade digital platforms (Focus: GIS infrastructure, electronic permits and public safety applications)
- ❖ \$45,000 for unified communications (focusing on a transition from copper lines to digital and wireless communication)
- ❖ \$185,000 for School Camera Replacement and
- ❖ \$35,000 City Access Control System Replacement (door controls are failing, and the existing platform is so old that it cannot be repaired, he advised)

#### **DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**

DPW Director LaScaleia reminded councilors that the DPW's capital plan is unique in that it consists of requests for both General Fund divisions and enterprise funds which are completely closed financial systems unrelated to the General Fund (GF).

GF projects are typically in the same categories every year. Three big ticket items within the GF: are 1) vehicle purchases, 2) road resurfacing and 3) sidewalks.

The DPW has over 150 vehicles and pieces of specialized equipment which have to be able to simultaneously mobilize and operate for 36, 48 and/or 72 hours continuously. It is extremely important to have a well-maintained fleet and to regularly turn the fleet over, she stressed. Every year, they assess the state of their fleet to see what needs to be replaced. Vehicle replacements are a big ticket item across all five years, even across the enterprise funds.

Street resurfacing – more than 50% of roads in the city are in poor condition and in need of total base rehabilitation. A lot of problems in their streets are due to utility issues such as poor drainage and so cross over into enterprise fund projects. They have to look at utility structures to see if they need to be reconstructed while they are paving the roadway. The GF appropriation pays for paving but appropriations across all enterprises are needed to go with that appropriation.

She showed a list of roads the DPW intends to resurface this year (Florence Street, Kingsley Avenue, Belmont Avenue, Carpenter Avenue, Randolph Place, Jewett Street, Sheffield Lane, Stilson Avenue, Hillcrest Drive, Crescent Street, Hillside Road, Longworthy Road, Perkins Avenue and Summer Street). Additionally, roads the DPW intends to design this year for resurfacing next year are Locust Street, Riverside Drive, Landy Avenue, Fort Hill Terrace and Bradford Street.

With the geopolitical climate and the price of gas, important to note is that the #1 ingredient in asphalt is oil. It is unclear what impact this will have on their projects.

Whenever they resurface roadways, they address sidewalks in accordance with the complete streets ordinance, she reminded. However, unrelated to the resurfacing of any streets, the DPW

will be bidding a discreet sidewalk project estimated at over \$1 million dollars for spot repairs in various locations, particularly in the South Street and Village Hill neighborhoods.

Director LaScaleia stated her intention to talk about capital projects within the water and sewer systems as part of the rate setting public hearing. However, as mentioned, enterprise funds are closed financial systems and so are constrained by their revenue when putting together a capital plan. Although the list of needed capital projects for enterprises contains really big numbers, even if something costing \$30 million is needed, they may not be able to afford it. There is no interplay between those enterprises and the General Fund, she reminded.

The Stormwater utility has been at a \$2 million overall value for more than 10 years. As operating expenses within the enterprise rise, there is diminished capacity to fund capital projects. The levy and flood control system and storm drains are two big ticket items within this enterprise that directly impact the degradation of the roadways. However, because of its value, the enterprise has less than \$1 million to split between these important items. Even though the CIP suggests millions in expenses for the Hockanum Road Flood Control Station, maintaining the levies and replacing storm drains, in reality, they are limited in their ability to afford that within the enterprise. A \$2 million enterprise simply cannot take on a \$10 million project.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Councilor Maire opened the floor to comments from the public.

**Nick Mottern, 16 Strong Avenue**, said he is curious about whether the CIP includes money for Picture Main Street (PMS). He proposed that any money for PMS be transferred into a fund to deal with city streets and school roofs. He thinks they're headed into a very difficult economic time and that PMS is going to harm businesses on Main Street. Deeper problems having to do with property ownership in the city affect the economy downtown, he suggested. From what he knows from other communities, he doesn't think PMS is going to improve business downtown. His monthly tax payments have gone up. Some of the streets are actually unsafe because of potholes. He would like to see the money shifted from PMS into these greater imperatives. "We're all going to have less money to pay for this as we go ahead."

**Joanne Sickles, 1 View Avenue** asked who is responsible for removal of the coal box that was found near Florence Savings Bank. She understands Eric Suher owns the property but wondered if the city is actually responsible for its removal. At some point, if anything happens with that sidewalk and it crumbles, it could be a danger.

She also expressed concern about the lack of a closed gate at 8 View Avenue where condos are being built and large equipment is left overnight. The other day people were down there. She is afraid some child is going to get severely injured if they climb on that equipment. She is letting them know that the gate is open all the time now and people are going down there.

**Laura Belusci, 71 State Street**, reported that the ramp/driveway entrance to Michael's House is dangerously broken. This just happened. People have to enter and exit on one side since the other side is completely broken. Also, she walks a lot in town and has noticed big holes and chunks of concrete missing in the sidewalks. Many people in her building use walkers. A person using a walker would have to pick up the walker to get over the gaps.

**Luke Rotello, Florence**, questioned the different contracting model being proposed for the high school geothermal project. What he understood is that the onus of compliance for this major public project is being offloaded onto private hands. He asked for clarification on that.

**Pam Fitzpatrick, 176 Coles Meadow Road**, spoke in favor of the allocation of funding for repair of the broken front patio at Forbes Library. As a city, they are fortunate to have the beautiful Forbes Library as a heavily-used site for a library and other functions. The patio at the entrance has been in dire need of attention and repair for some time. The main entrance poses a high risk for falls to the most sure-footed and, even worse, to elders and any others using mobility devices. The lovely lift recently added inside the entrance is of no avail if the entrance is inaccessible. Please address this preventable accident waiting to happen as soon as possible. She asked what the earliest possible is that this repair could happen.

After a brief recess to address a technical issue with the broadcast, the public hearing resumed.

**Melissa Maciborski** said her overall question is if there is any reason they can't consider the CIP and the operating budget at the same time. She expressed her understanding that the CIP and the budget have to be voted by June 1<sup>st</sup>.

There being no further comments, city officials responded to the questions raised.

Question: Does the CIP contain money for PMS? Answer: No

Question: Is there a reason they can't consider the CIP and the operating budget at the same time?

Answer: Mayor Sciarra clarified that, according to the Charter, the CIP resolution must be adopted by May 31<sup>st</sup> while the budget must be adopted by June 30<sup>th</sup>. They do them at separate times because both are labor intensive and have different funding sources but, the most important reason is that approving CIP orders so late in the season would make it difficult to complete projects in the subsequent summer construction season. With later approval, they are also bidding at a more competitive time and so wouldn't get the best bids. If they have to wait until the next construction season, the difference between estimates and actual bids increases, she added.

Question: What is the projected timeline for replacing the front patio?

Answer: Director Deppen said once funding is available, they will start immediately.

Melissa Maciborski clarified that her question is whether the Charter gives any legal reason that the CIP and the operating budget cannot be considered at the same time.

Mayor Sciarra reviewed the timeline in the Charter.

CAPA Director Weil clarified that, for the geothermal system, the burden being shifted to the contractor is that of project performance, not legal compliance. A key prerequisite to designing the project is drilling a test well to determine the geology and water production of the soil. Under the traditional contracting approach, the city would need to hire multiple specialized contractors for each phase of this complicated project. With performance contracting (Chapter 25A Section 11), DOER approves requests for qualifications developed by the city and the city generates a proposal with specific performance standards (such as cost savings and thermal performance).

To avoid a disconnect between the project's design and its implementation, they decided that the best way to manage the project would be an integrated energy systems management contract, he explained.

The coal box is not on the CIP and not on the agenda this evening, Mayor Sciarra said.

City staff fielded questions and comments from councilors on specific projects (the robotic mower, Brightly asset management system, geothermal system, etc.) and general financial practices (i.e. - how decisions are made on which budget to charge for IT-related products and services).

There being no further questions or comments, **Councilor Loisel moved to close the public hearing. Councilor Klemer seconded. The motion passed unanimously 8:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Davis absent.**

**The CIP public hearing closed at 8:31 p.m.** Department heads were excused.

#### **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. The City Council will hear all persons who wish to be heard thereon.

**Councilor Klemer moved to open the public hearing. Councilor Nabad seconded. The motion passed unanimously 8:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Davis absent.**

**The public hearing opened at 8:32 p.m.**

Director LaScaleia gave an overview of the city's water supply system. Its infrastructure and operations are highly regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department

of Environmental Protection (DEP), meaning that the city has little discretion and if it makes a mistake, everyone is going to know about it, she observed. The city has three surface water reservoirs – Ryan, West Whately and Mountain Street - holding over a billion gallons of water combined and an extensive network of water transmission mains that bring water from the reservoirs to the Water Treatment Plant (WTP) and from the WTP into the city.

She showed a map of the water distribution system, consisting of 135 miles of water mains, two wells at Spring Street and Clark Street and three water towers in Wards 6 and 7 (all out of service and scheduled for decommissioning).

In talking about utility rates, it is common to hear comparisons with other communities, but as the slides illustrate, the scope and scale of their infrastructure is fundamentally different from many neighboring municipalities. Treating surface water from reservoirs is a much more complex endeavor than using wells to provide drinking water, she pointed out.

The WTP was constructed in the early 2000's and has the ability to flow over six million gallons a day. A Water Management Permit issued by DEP strictly regulates withdrawal rates from their reservoirs and tells them when they need to impose water use restrictions. She showed a chart tracking the millions of gallons of water treated annually from FY2021 to FY2025. The enterprise rate structure is heavily based on usage, so it's important to note that overall usage is declining, attributable largely to Coca-Cola's impending departure.

Director LaScaleia reviewed the major budget categories, noting that the overall budget has been level-funded at \$6,945,000 since FY2021. Debt service has been the same since the WTP was constructed in 2008 and will actually fall off the debt schedule in 2028, freeing up some borrowing capacity. At one time, the enterprise regularly transferred money to a stabilization account within the enterprise but that contribution is now zero. The only way to balance the budget without increasing rates is by decreasing investment in capital projects, she noted.

External pressures are causing operating costs to rise, so this forces them to throttle back capital investment since there are no other options for cutting expenses, she elaborated.

Coca-Cola's announcement in 2021 that it was going to cease operations by the summer of 2023 required them to study ways to replace its revenue, as the company was the biggest water and sewer customer in the city, representing a full 25% of both water and sewer enterprises. In July of 2023, in preparation for the company's departure, the city implemented new base rate fee structures in both water and sewer enterprises. Usage rates (meter fees) did not change. The cost impact to the average user was a \$128 annual increase in their water bill.

As everyone is aware, Coca-Cola's departure was delayed, so, since FY2024, the enterprise has received about \$2 million in unanticipated revenue. In building the budget for FY2024, they had to anticipate zero dollars per Coca-Cola's announcement since they couldn't build a budget on tentative revenue. As shown by the accompanying table, replacement of Coca-Cola's revenue with base rate charges has been quite successful.

Coca-Cola's revenue stream at this point is greatly diminished and highly unpredictable.

In answer to the question of what the city did with the unexpected revenue, Director LaScaleia showed a partial list of projects completed over the past five years totaling \$5.7 million.

In January, this council approved several transfers from retained earnings into various projects, giving her greater flexibility to address deferred maintenance and relieving pressure on the budget she is building for the coming year, she added.

Director LaScaleia showed a list of pending capital projects (FY2027-FY2031), noting that the price tags are 'extraordinary:'

- ❖ Ryan Reservoir Dam Rehabilitation (\$7,250,000)
- ❖ 20" Transmission Main Construction (Williamsburg - \$7,000,000)
- ❖ Water Asset Management Plan Implementation (\$7,000,000, includes decommissioning water towers)

She showed a graph depicting Coca-Cola's usage as a percentage of overall water revenue from FY2023 to FY2027 followed by a chart with historic residential and commercial usage (CCF) and revenue excluding Coca-Cola, noting that general usage is flat to declining.

**SEWER ENTERPRISE**

As with water, the city owns and maintains extensive infrastructure in its sewer enterprise, including the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP), 110 mile of sewer mains, and seven remote pump stations to pump wastewater from areas of the city where it cannot flow by gravity. The city receives and treats between 80,000 and 120,000 gallons of wastewater per day from the town of Williamsburg. The city holds a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit allowing it to discharge treated sewage into the Connecticut River under very restrictive conditions. The WWTP on Hockanum Road receives all wastewater in the city. It flows five to six million gallons a day and, last year, treated 1.5 billion gallons.

There is no way to shut off the flow of wastewater, so the WWTP needs to be ready to receive and treat it at all times or risk being in violation of its permit, Director LaScaleia pointed out. She showed a chart indicating that wastewater flow has declined over time, attributable both to the weather and lack of flow from Coca-Cola.

Like the water enterprise, at \$6,177,500, the Sewer Enterprise Budget has not changed since FY2021. Debt service is expected to rise significantly in the coming year because of Phase II upgrades to the WWTP. Again, in order to balance the budget and keep rates stable, she has had to decrease capital investment. This year when they build the budget, since debt service is climbing again, they will actually be transferring money from stabilization.

She showed a chart indicating that, as in the water enterprise, the implementation of base rate charges has successfully replaced the loss of revenue from Coca-Cola. Also, as in water, since announcement of Coca-Cola's closure, they have collected \$1.4 million in unanticipated revenue.

She showed the \$37 million worth of capital projects in process, representing six times the overall value of the enterprise. Projects include Phase II upgrade to the WWTP (\$20,641,662), which comes on the heels of a \$12 million upgrade completed two years ago, and sewer main lining and pump station repairs.

Along with wastewater, stormwater also flows into the plant, stressing its capacity. To reduce this influx and infiltration, they are progressively lining sewer lines and in fact will be doing a lot of work in Ward 2, on Crescent Street in particular. Of their 110 miles of sewer mains, last year, they did about a mile.

She showed a slide representing Coca-Cola's tailing usage along with a slide showing the historic usage for *non*-Coca-Cola residential and commercial customers. She noted that, as in water, usage and revenue are completely flat to declining.

For FY2027, no changes are proposed to either base rate or usage fees for sewer or water.

She mentioned income exemption programs for eligible residents and stressed the DPW's overriding goal of maintaining stable operations and rates. As always, she concluded by recognizing and thanking water and sewer enterprise staff

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Nick Mottern, 16 Strong Avenue**, wondered if having a modest increase in fees paid by users now would allow the city to cut back on debt service going forward.

**Melissa Maciborski** expressed her understanding that most households pay \$243 extra dollars in anticipation of Coca-Cola leaving. They didn't leave and the city took in \$3.4 million for additional needed capital projects. If the trend were to continue as is and the company stays, she asked if any of that money would be used on the PMS project.

Director LaScaleia confirmed that any increase in rates would relieve the financial pressures on both enterprises. They are proposing no change in the rates because Coca-Cola has continued to operate in the city and they think it's important to see what it's going to do before adding an additional burden to ratepayers.

ARPA money has been appropriated to pay for waterline relocation associated with PMS, the director reminded. The final cost of those upgrades is not yet known, but money is already earmarked for that purpose.

Dr. Maciborski restated her question as being whether additional unexpected revenue received from Coca-Cola could be used towards PMS.

Director LaScaelia stressed that transfers from retained earnings to specific capital projects have to come before City Council for approval.

Councilor Maiore said she is hearing that it is possible but that council approval is required.

Mayor Sciarra said there are no specific plans to use unanticipated revenue from Coca-Cola for PMS, but the Main Street reconstruction project includes replacement of water and sewer lines.

**Joanne Sickles, 1 View Avenue**, noted that she comes from another community and, in other communities, when excess revenue is received, money has been returned to residents. She asked if that would ever happen in Northampton. Specifically, she asked if money could be put aside to pay for water or sewer main breaks.

Director LaScaleia explained that, in the sewer enterprise, stabilization funds are actually being transferred into the operating budget this year to avoid increasing rates. In that way, some money is essentially being returned to rate payers.

There being no further public comment, Councilor Maiore opened the floor to comments and questions from councilors. In response to a question from Councilor Nabad, Director LaScaleia confirmed that Coca-Cola's continued presence in the city has indeed delayed a discussion around rate increases. Mayor Sciarra said she is very sensitive to people's frustration around paying higher rates despite Coca-Cola's continued presence, but explained that, in formulating budgets, they have no choice but to take the company at its word as to the timing of its departure.

Director LaScaleia confirmed that the combined cost of water and sewer rate increases is the higher figure cited by Maciborski.

In response to questions from Councilor Maiore, Director LaScaleia said that, prior to the 2023 implementation of base rate charges, the last time water and sewer rates increased was 2019. Coca-Cola has been in the city since the 1950's and, at its height, represented a full 25% of the city's water/sewer usage.

Councilor Robbins asked about any grants that may have subsidized capital projects within the water and sewer systems. She expressed her understanding that Northampton recently received an earmark of \$500,000 for the resilience hub and wondered if the city had made similar requests to cover water and sewer capital needs. Are there any pending funding requests the director might need support in advocating for?

City officials aggressively pursue low interest loans through the state revolving fund (SRF), which they received for WWTP upgrades, Director LaScaleia responded. They applied to SRF for the transmission main project but did not get it, she reported. The state prioritizes programs for PFA's and lead and focuses its resources on these issues rather than transmission line replacement.

The city has prioritized seeking congressionally-directed funding for flood control, Mayor Sciarra said.

When asked if they could seek funding for water, Mayor Sciarra noted that they have to prioritize the biggest risk.

A lot of federal programs for municipal projects no longer exist, such as Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC), Chief of Staff Wolf noted.

The DPW is pursuing funding from a dam and seawall program for the design and construction of the Ryan Road reservoir but construction costs will likely exceed any grants that might come out of that program, Director LaScaleia added.

Councilor Stratton shared a series of related thoughts, beginning by referring to a rumor that the city still has some wooden water mains. More generally, it feels like the walls are closing in on them because their system was sized for Coca-Cola, he noted. This presents a very real challenge for the city that he takes very seriously, he commented.

He thinks the concept of separation of enterprise funds from the city budget is a nice idea but has some holes in it, he continued. He pointed to “five or six million dollars of direct ARPA spending” as having “effectively subsidized the enterprises.”

“We could have used that in many places in the city . . .” he pointed out.

Deploying ARPA spending on water and sewer infrastructure has enabled them to hold the rates down, which raises some interesting policy questions, he asserted. The CPA exemption waives water/sewer base charges, so, subsidizing the enterprise actually makes the city’s taxation “even less progressive,” he opined.

He wondered if decommissioning the water tanks might produce a few pieces of property they could sell.

And, in the city’s quest to find a replacement for Coca-Cola, he mentioned the troubling possibility of finding themselves in the ironic position of supporting the ban of single-use water containers while at the same time shipping water out of the city in bottles on trucks.

Finally, he wondered if the city had ever explored the possibility of selling water to other communities.

Director LaScaleia said she is not aware of any wooden water mains but there are some tunnels in the stormwater system made of brick with wooden floors. The average age of water mains is a little before 1900, so everything is well beyond its service life.

In terms of the possibility of surplussing water tank sites, she doesn’t see that as a huge money maker. Some sites will have decommissioned infrastructure that would limit the land’s ability to be surplussed.

Exploring water sales to other communities is obviously a larger conversation.

He asked if expanding the sewer system would cost more than it would bring in.

Director LaScaleia confirmed that the potential revenue would not justify the cost.

Councilor Loisel said she found this kind of dire and is surprised they aren’t raising rates.

She is confident in their strategy, Director LaScaleia assured. They have built and staged their projects in such a way that they are progressing well. Northampton has enjoyed tremendous rate stability and a very well-run system and they’re very proud of that. However, the time is coming when rates are going to have to move and to move more than 2 and 3%, she acknowledged.

The message tonight is, “we have managed this as well as we can.” Coca-Cola is leaving and they have to be prepared for that and to make decisions to raise rates in a way that will allow the enterprises to continue operations. She feels like they are well-positioned in both enterprises but that there will need to be a conversation next year about some movement in the rates.

**Councilor Perry moved to close the public hearing. Councilor Klemer seconded. The motion passed unanimously 8:0 by voice vote with Councilor Davis absent.**

**The hearing closed at 9:32 p.m.**

Financial Orders (on 1st reading)  
26.037 An Order to Reprogram \$914,035 Unexpended Bond Proceeds for DPW Cold Storage Facility - 1st reading

Financial Orders (on 1st reading)

26.037 An Order to Reprogram \$914,035 Unexpended Bond Proceeds for DPW Cold Storage Facility - 1st reading

As background, there was talk in the past about building a new DPW facility but the price tag was prohibitive. When she was appointed director, one of her assignments from former Mayor David Narkewicz was to determine future facility needs. The DPW consolidated operations by moving water department offices out of 237 Prospect Street and into the new WTP. The next major need prioritized was bringing equipment previously degrading out in the elements under cover. The strategy adopted was to build three storage facilities at Locust Street, Spring Grove Cemetery and the WTP. A borrowing authorization was approved for the Locust Street building and the Spring Grove cemetery and an appropriation was made through the water enterprise operating

budget for the water building. Then COVID happened and priorities shifted. While they were able to build the building at the WTP, the ones at Locust Street and Spring Grove were put on hold. Many years later, here they are with unexpended bond proceeds.

Their proposal calls for taking the unexpended bond proceeds from Spring Grove, consolidating it with money appropriated for Locust Street and building a storage building at Locust Street, she presented. If she adds the \$914,000 to money previously appropriated, she will have a little over \$2 million and is confident they will be able to put up a storage building to accommodate the most valuable vehicles. If approved, she intends to engage a design team from Tighe & Bond to get something up within the next year.

The money borrowed can't be given back; the funds have to be spent on a project of similar size and scope within 18 to 24 months, Director Nardi explained.

In response to a question from Councilor Stratton, Director Nardi said the bonds were interest-free and have been moved into a non interest-bearing account.

Councilor Stratton said he is not seeing this in the CIP.

The three CIP projects were approved back in 2018 and 2019, Director Nardi clarified. They did not put it back into the CIP because the CIP appropriates new funds for new projects. They are reprogramming funds that have already been appropriated.

**Councilor Nabad moved to suspend the rules to waive two readings. Councilor Klemer seconded.**

Councilor Stratton said he is a little troubled by the motion to suspend the rules since it shortcuts the chance to fully understand what is going on and he'd rather not get into a pattern of it.

**The motion failed 5:3 with Councilors Perry, Robbins and Stratton opposed since a two-thirds majority is required to suspend the rules.** [Editor's note: Councilor Maiore's ruling at the time was that rules were suspended, so, after some discussion, the council went on to adopt the order with only Councilor Stratton opposed. However, after subsequent review, it was determined that the order should be revoted since rules were not properly suspended.]

**See minutes of March 31, 2026 for final reading.**

<b><u>Recess</u></b>	<b><u>Recess</u></b> <b>The City Council recessed at 9:50 p.m. The council reconvened at 10:01 p.m.</b>
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<b><u>Public Comment</u></b>	<p>Councilor Maiore explained the procedure she would use in conducting public comment and opened the floor to comments.</p> <p><b>Nick Mottern</b> said he came to present documentation to the mayor and city council that L3Harris Technologies, which has a weapons plant in Northampton, is providing weapons to Israel and the U.S being used to kill civilians in Gaza and, as they must now assume, also in Lebanon and Iran. He feels this documentation should be included among the reasons for ejecting L3Harris from Northampton. This evidence was used to provide a Northampton District Court judge the basis for finding him and three colleagues innocent on charges of trespassing and disorderly conduct for their occupation of the L3Harris plant lobby a year ago. Paki Wieland, who passed away just a week ago today, was one of the protestors involved. A testament to the quality of the affidavits before them is that they were instrumental in establishing the necessity defense, which is rarely successful. He invited the mayor, city council and all citizens to participate in a protest at L3Harris planned by Smith College students for 3:30 p.m. next Wednesday, March 25th.</p> <p><b>Walter Moscala (sp?), Northampton</b>, thanked the Mayor and employees for their service to the city.</p> <p><b>Melissa Maciborski, Northampton</b>, expressed her belief that it is important for them to hold their operating budget as they consider the capital budget. She suggested concrete ways to do that, such as not approving the CIP prematurely and establishing transparency and clear expectations as they consider large projects. She pointed to the information request on tonight's agenda as a way to begin that process. "These requests are simple and democratic."</p>
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	<p>“Ask yourself, what is the harm in transparency? What is the harm in giving careful consideration to city finances as a whole as the CIP and the budget come into being?”</p> <p>She asked them to take a moment to consider harm before voting and please center the preventable harm occurring to their children day after day. The decision to cut staff and underfund schools was a choice, and the harm has been increasing exponentially. If there’s anything they can agree on, she hopes it is the importance of public education and democracy.</p> <p><b>Luke Rotello</b>, noted that it was at a meeting just like this in January about 15 months ago when last year’s CIP was first considered. They are encountering many of the same sort of rhetorical flourishes and points of emphasis that they need to do this “now, now, now,” yet these requests are coming through in March this year rather than in January. He recalled that, at about 12:30 in the morning, an attempt was made to push the entire CIP to the consent agenda, closing off further public comment or discussion. “I should hope that we do not make the same mistake this year.”</p> <p>There being no further comments, <b>Councilor Maire</b> brought public comment to a close.</p>
<p><b><u>Announcements from Councilors and the Mayor</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>Announcements from Councilors and the Mayor</u></b>                  Councilor Perry announced that, unfortunately, Community Resources could not hold its regular meeting last Monday due to technical difficulties. The meeting was rescheduled to Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup> and will feature speakers from Abundance Farm, the Parks and Recreation Department and GrowFood Northampton.</p>
<p><b><u>Presentations</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>Presentations</u></b>                  None.</p>
<p><b><u>Consent Agenda</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>Consent Agenda</u></b>                  Councilor Maire reviewed the items on the consent agenda. <b>Councilor Perry moved to approve the consent agenda as presented. Councilor Klemer seconded. The motion passed unanimously 8:0 by voice vote with Councilor Davis absent.</b></p> <p>The following item was approved as part of the consent agenda:</p> <p>A. <u>Minutes of January 29, 2026 Joint School Committee/City Council and March 5, 2026 regular City Council meeting</u>                  B. <u>26.016 An Order to Establish Water and Sewer Rates for FY2027 – 2<sup>nd</sup> reading</u></p> <p><i>For the text of orders approved as part of the consent agenda, see Financial Orders (on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading) below.</i></p>
<p><b><u>Financial Orders (on 1<sup>st</sup> reading)</u></b>  <u>Package of 14 Financial Orders to Implement FY2027-FY2031 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) (On 1<sup>st</sup> reading)</u>  <u>26.022 An Order to Appropriate \$2.166 Million Free Cash to Various Capital Projects</u>  <u>26.023 An Order to Appropriate \$300,000 from Climate Mitigation Stabilization for Jackson Street</u></p>	<p><b><u>Financial Orders (on 1<sup>st</sup> reading)</u></b>  <u>Package of 14 Financial Orders to Implement FY2027-FY2031 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) (On 1<sup>st</sup> reading)</u>  <u>26.022 An Order to Appropriate \$2.166 Million Free Cash to Various Capital Projects - 1<sup>st</sup> reading</u>  <u>26.023 An Order to Appropriate \$300,000 from Climate Mitigation Stabilization for Jackson Street School Air Source Heat Pumps - 1<sup>st</sup> reading</u>  <u>26.024 An Order to Appropriate \$515,756 from Stabilization to NPS Paratransit Vans - 1<sup>st</sup> reading</u>  <u>26.025 An Order to Appropriate \$1.35 Million from Capital Stabilization to Various Capital Projects - 1<sup>st</sup> reading</u>  <u>26.026 An Order to Authorize Borrowing \$1.8 Million for City Hall Roof Replacement and Exterior Repairs - 1<sup>st</sup> reading</u>  <u>26.027 An Order to Authorize Borrowing \$1 Million for Sidewalks - 1<sup>st</sup> reading</u>  <u>26.028 An Order to Authorize Borrowing \$1.5 Million for Road Reconstruction - 1<sup>st</sup> reading</u>  <u>26.029 An Order to Authorize Borrowing \$700,000 for DPW Vehicles - 1<sup>st</sup> reading</u>  <u>26.030 An Order to Appropriate \$25,000 from Cemetery Trust and Income for Cemetery Restorative Work - 1<sup>st</sup> reading</u>  <u>26.031 An Order to Appropriate \$30,000 from Receipts Reserved for Appropriation - Sale of Land - for Tax Title Properties - 1<sup>st</sup> reading</u></p>

School Air Source Heat Pumps  
26.024 An Order to Appropriate \$515,756 from Stabilization to NPS Paratransit Vans  
26.025 An Order to Appropriate \$1.35 Million from Capital Stabilization to Various Capital Projects  
26.026 An Order to Authorize Borrowing \$1.8 Million for City Hall Roof Replacement and Exterior Repairs  
26.027 An Order to Authorize Borrowing \$1 Million for Sidewalks  
26.028 An Order to Authorize Borrowing \$1.5 Million for Road Reconstruction  
26.029 An Order to Authorize Borrowing \$700,000 for DPW Vehicles  
26.030 An Order to Appropriate \$25,000 from Cemetery Trust and Income for Cemetery Restorative Work  
26.031 An Order to Appropriate \$30,000 from Receipts Reserved for Appropriation - Sale of Land - for Tax Title Properties  
26.032 An Order to Appropriate Parking Receipts Reserved Funds for Parking Projects  
26.033 An Order to Appropriate from Stabilization and Reprogram \$450,000 to Replace AOM Boiler  
26.034 An Order to Appropriate from Capital Stabilization and Reprogram \$120,000 for Building Facility Condition Assessment  
26.035 An Order to Reprogram Tennis

26.032 An Order to Appropriate Parking Receipts Reserved Funds for Parking Projects - 1st reading  
26.033 An Order to Appropriate from Stabilization and Reprogram \$450,000 to Replace AOM Boiler - 1st reading  
26.034 An Order to Appropriate from Capital Stabilization and Reprogram \$120,000 for Building Facility Condition Assessment - 1st reading  
26.035 An Order to Reprogram Tennis Court Project Money to Various NPS Projects - 1st reading

Councilors began by discussing process, specifically, whether to refer the orders to the consent agenda in whole or in part, or refer them to Finance.

**Councilor Robbins moved to refer the whole list to Finance. Councilor Stratton seconded.**

Councilors asked questions on specific orders. Among other things, Councilor Nabad asked if cemetery restorative work is eligible for CPA funding and which buildings are included in the facility condition assessment.

Otherwise, councilors discussed ways to break down the larger package for referral.

Councilor Maiore said she would like to see 26.026, the order to authorize borrowing \$1.8 million for City Hall roof replacement and 26.025, the order to appropriate \$1.35 Million from Capital Stabilization to various capital projects go to Finance.

Councilor Klemer proposed sending more straightforward financial orders, which she identified as 26.023 (B), 26.024 (C), and 26.030 to 26.035 (I – N) to the consent agenda. She thought the other three borrowing orders (26.027, 26.028 and 26.029) should go to Finance.

Councilor Stratton said he would like to see 26.033, the \$450,000 appropriation for the AOM boiler, go to Finance to explore the possibility of applying for CPA money for it, since this potentially frees up unrestricted money for use elsewhere in the budget.

Councilor Robbins spoke in favor of sending all the orders to Finance, since sending some to the consent agenda won't result in any earlier approval. She also advocated for holding off acting on Northampton Public Schools (NPS) items so as not to override the School Committee's process. The Budget and Property Committee is scheduled to consider those items this week, she noted.

After additional discussion, **the motion to refer all orders to Finance failed 4:4 by roll call vote with Councilors Dubs, Perry, Robbins and Stratton in favor and Klemer, Loisel, Maiore and Nabad opposed and Councilor Davis absent.**

**Councilor Klemer moved to send 26.022, 26.025, 26.026, 26.027, 26.028 and 26.029 to Finance and the rest (26.023, 26.024, 26.030, 26.031, 26.032, 26.033 and 26.034) to the consent agenda. Councilor Loisel seconded.**

At the request of Councilor Nabad, **the body agreed to amend the motion to add 26.033 to the items referred to Finance. The motion passed unanimously 8:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Davis absent.**

**See minutes of March 31, 2026 for final reading.**

<p><u>Court Project Money to Various NPS Projects</u></p>	
<p><u>Financial Orders (on 1<sup>st</sup> reading, continued)</u>  <u>26.036 An Order to Reprogram \$6,310 for Visual Notification System in JFK Band Room - 1st reading</u></p>	<p><u>Financial Orders (on 1<sup>st</sup> reading, continued)</u>  <u>26.036 An Order to Reprogram \$6,310 for Visual Notification System in JFK Band Room - 1st reading</u></p> <p>Councilor Klemer moved to refer the order to the consent agenda. Councilor Loisel seconded.</p> <p>Mayor Sciarra explained that this was a safety concern brought to them by School Maintenance Supervisor Tony Kusnierz.</p> <p>Councilor Robbins said she feels like they are leaving the School Committee out of these discussions.</p> <p>Councilor Stratton said he thinks the School Committee’s perspective is important but he is not sure sending it to Finance is how to learn it. He thinks they can learn more about it in the time between now and the next council meeting.</p> <p>The motion passed unanimously 7:1 by roll call vote with Councilor Robbins opposed and Councilor Davis absent.</p> <p><u>See minutes of March 31, 2026 for final reading.</u></p>
<p><u>Ordinances</u></p>	<p><u>Ordinances</u> None.</p>
<p><u>Resolutions</u>  <u>26.015 A Resolution to Adopt the Capital Improvement Program for FY2027 - FY2031 - 1st reading</u></p>	<p><u>Resolutions</u>  <u>26.015 A Resolution to Adopt the Capital Improvement Program for FY2027 - FY2031 - 1st reading</u></p> <p>Councilor Loisel asked what happens if they don’t approve the resolution.</p> <p>Councilor Perry pointed out that the resolution itself does not have the effect of appropriating any money but is simply conceptual approval of the overall plan. Councilor Maiore said the city solicitor told her that, since the resolution can be amended, the expectation is that it will be adopted in some form. She acknowledged not having been able to obtain a direct answer to the question despite having made several phone calls.</p> <p>Councilor Stratton made the observation that he is generally not finding the following information required by Charter Section 7-5 (a) (4) in the CIP:  (4) the estimated annual cost of operating and maintaining each facility and piece of major equipment involved.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">This information shall be annually revised by the mayor with regard to the capital improvement process of being acquired, improved or constructed.</p> <p>Mayor Sciarra said they have been working to revise the CIP project form and estimated annual maintenance costs honestly fell off in the process. They will certainly look at that for next year.</p> <p><u>See minutes of March 31, 2026 for final reading.</u></p>
<p><u>Information Requests</u>  <u>26.021 An Order to Require Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra to Provide Information on the Downtown</u></p>	<p><u>Information Requests</u>  <u>26.021 An Order to Require Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra to Provide Information on the Downtown Complete Streets Project - 1st reading</u></p> <p>Councilor Robbins moved to suspend the rules. No one seconded.</p> <p>As the order’s sponsor, Councilor Robbins said she feels like she has made as much effort as can be expected to get this information through regular channels. She has asked program</p>

**Complete Streets  
Project - 1st reading**

directors and tried to place it on the council agenda. People in the city would like a public presentation on what's happening with Picture Main Street. She believes a decision will be made relatively soon about whether it will start in FY2027 or FY2028 and she hears a lot of concerns. It seems to her that it is their job to answer those questions for their constituents and to give the mayor an opportunity to be specific about what she knows and, in particular, the costs.

In support, Councilor Stratton said it's really been since the council before the previous one that there's been substantial coverage of this in council. The Downtown Northampton Association (DNA) gets a little bit of an update, but the council doesn't. "The public really has been hearing nothing," he observed.

Mayor Sciarra said she had hoped to give an update in January or February that they were at the 100% design stage but was surprised right before submittal to learn that the line work Eversource did over the summer did not match the plans it had submitted. They have mobilized to assess the situation and are doing a series of test pits to figure out whether the new lines are in conflict with PMS infrastructure. She told Council Maiore three or four weeks ago that she would be happy to give an update when they have the information from those tests.

In the half hour discussion that followed, councilors went back and forth, debating the appropriate ways to request and share information. All councilors agreed that they wanted information but disagreed on whether compelling it is the right approach.

Councilors Perry, Nabad and Maiore advocated for having the Community Resources Committee host a presentation.

Councilor Dubs said the questions are valid but he feels like the approach is non-collaborative and almost assumes the Mayor is withholding information from them. Councilor Nabad described the order before them as "a little forceful," saying it "feels like an inquisition."

When asked by Councilor Loisel if there had ever been a time she had not given the council requested information, Mayor Sciarra said 'no.' She doesn't feel it is necessary to require this because they can just ask for it and get it, Councilor Loisel concluded.

However, Robbins said that she contacted the mayor's office, city finance director and planning department for this information in early February. She received a response from Sciarra's Chief of Staff, Alan Wolf, who said the city is in the process of an update, but not from anyone else. She would prefer not to have come with this structure, she acknowledged.

In terms of decision-making, Councilor Stratton expressed his opinion that a committee is not the appropriate place to weigh in. "This is a decision for the council," he asserted.

"This is a project of immense civic interest . . . The population of Northampton is talking about this extensively and our public process and government is not," he observed.

Councilor Klemer and Councilor Perry echoed Councilor Dubs' reaction. Councilor Robbins's request seemed 'heavy-handed,' they noted. Councilor Klemer suggested 'doing it in a nicer way' than putting an order on the agenda.

If the questions are extensive enough to require an immense amount of staff time, Mayor Sciarra said she would ask councilors to vote to see if that's how they want city resources to be used.

Discussion continued, with Councilor Stratton voicing his perception that, in interacting with city officials, councilors in the room have very different email experiences. "Some get their questions answered, and some do not . . . that has a lot to do with who's asking and what they're asking."

He loves the idea of regular updates but would like to see some degree of specificity on key questions, he maintained.

To the sponsors, Councilor Maiore said she is hearing they all agree on wanting information but disagree about the process.

**See minutes of March 31, 2026 for final reading.**

**Financial Orders (on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading)**

**Financial Orders  
(on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading)**

The following order was approved as part of the consent agenda:

**26.016 An Order to Establish Water and Sewer Rates for FY2027 – 2<sup>nd</sup> reading**

**City of Northampton  
MASSACHUSETTS**

March 5, 2026

Upon recommendation of Mayor Sciarra

**26.016 AN ORDER**

**TO ESTABLISH WATER AND SEWER RATES FOR FY2027**

***Ordered, that:***

Effective July 1, 2026, the per 100 cubic foot (CCF) rates for water and sewer and the quarterly base rate charges for Fiscal Year 2027 will remain unchanged from Fiscal Year 2026. Rates and charges will remain as follows:

**WATER**

Water Rates		
Meter Size	Consumption	FY2027
Meters ≤ 1 "	Tier 1 (0-16 CCF)	\$4.51 per CCF
	Tier 2 (> 16 CCF)	\$6.09 per CCF
Meters > 1 "	All consumption	\$5.99 per CCF

Quarterly Base Rate Charge FY27	
Water	
Meter Size	FY27
5/8 Inch	\$47.45
3/4 Inch	\$71.25
1 Inch	\$118.65
1.25 Inch	\$177.95
1.5 Inch	\$237.25
2 Inch	\$379.55
2.5Inch	\$545.60
3 Inch	\$711.65
4 Inch	\$1,186.05
6 Inch	\$2,372.05
8 Inch	\$3,795.25

**SEWER**

Sewer Rates	
Meter Status	FY2027
Non-Metered	\$7.86 per CCF based on 80% of metered water consumption
Metered	\$7.86 per CCF

Quarterly Base Rate Charge FY27	
Sewer	
Meter Size	FY27
5/8 Inch	\$28.85
3/4 Inch	\$36.06
1 Inch	\$50.49
1.25 Inch	\$86.55
1.5 Inch	\$86.55
2 Inch	\$129.83
2.5Inch	\$230.80
3 Inch	\$230.80
4 Inch	\$375.05
6 Inch	\$735.68
8 Inch	\$1,168.43

**Passed final reading and enrolled.**

<p><b><u>New Business</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>New Business</u></b> None.</p>
<p><b><u>Adjourn</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>Adjourn</u></b> Councilor Perry moved to adjourn. Councilor Dubs seconded. The motion passed unanimously 8:0 by voice vote with Councilor Davis absent. The meeting adjourned at 11:45 p.m.</p> <p>Attest: _____, Administrative Assistant</p>