



Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council

*Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra, Chair
Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Vice Chair
Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.
Councilor John Thorpe*

On-line Zoom Meeting

Meeting Date: January 7, 2021

Note: The Finance Committee Meeting took place during the City Council Meeting as announced. The City Council Meeting began at 7 p.m.

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 11:53 p.m., Councilor Sciarra called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were committee members Gina-Louise Sciarra (Chair), Marianne LaBarge (Vice-Chair), Michael J. Quinlan, Jr. and John Thorpe. Also present from the City Council were William H. Dwight, Alex Jarrett, Karen Foster, Rachel Maiore and Jim Nash. Also present was Conservation/Preservation Planner Sarah LaValley.
3. **Approval of Minutes of December 3, 2020**
Councilor Thorpe moved to approve the minutes of December 3, 2020. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.
4. **Financial Orders**
 - A. **20.178 An Order to Increase Personal Property Tax Exemption Threshold to \$2,500**
Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

In 2017, the city council enacted a \$1,000 threshold and the principal assessor is now recommending that it be raised to \$2,500, Finance Director Susan Wright presented. The city processes the bills for personal property over four quarters. It's a very small amount residents pay and a good time to give a small break to small business owners. There are 240 personal property accounts with a value of \$2,500 or less. Total revenue the city is losing is about \$6,800 but there is a cost involved in printing, mailing and tracking these bills. The \$1,000 was a good first step but they feel \$2,500 is a good cut off.

The local act the city accepted allows municipalities to exempt personal property values up to \$10,000, Mayor Narkewicz added. It is a lot of processing and a lot of bills for a very small amount of money.

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There being no further questions, Councilor Sciarra called the motion to a vote, and it carried 4:0 by roll call vote.

B. 20.179 An Order to Authorize Borrowing \$1.5 Million for Paving Projects

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

This is an order they have begun bringing forward earlier in the season, typically in December or January the last few years, Mayor Narkewicz advised. It is the local contribution the city has been making to its paving program since it started supplementing Chapter 90 money with local funding. Bringing the order forward earlier allows the DPW to go out to bid early in the year when contractors are just starting to schedule work for the upcoming paving season, and they have found doing so has enabled them to get pretty favorable rates. The idea is to get the authorization in place so they can go out to bid and sign contracts for paving.

Mayor Narkewicz reviewed the paving projects identified as highest priority for the upcoming construction season. This past construction season the city had one major project, reconstruction of two miles of North Farms Road, including sidewalks, drainage and some water line work. This year the DPW has identified several roads and streets that are high priority:

- ❖ Winter Street, off of Prospect, which basically blew up a year or so ago. It had a massive waterline infrastructure failure and basically the street was in danger of getting sucked down into the earth. Literally, a tree did get sucked down into the earth. The idea is to reclaim the street which was badly damaged by two catastrophic water main breaks and do water, sewer and drainage work.
- ❖ Atwood Drive, a 900-foot road down where the Clarion Hotel used to be and where the courthouse and Cooley Dickinson office buildings are now located. The roadway is in fairly rough shape and the DPW has some utility work to do there as well.
- ❖ Loudville Road, about 2,600 feet long and in serious disrepair. Loudville Road goes in and out of the city limits so they will be doing the Northampton portion of it.
- ❖ Meadow Street, about 2,700 feet long - a reclaim from Spring Street to Park Street
- ❖ Pine Street, a little under 2,000 feet long - a reclaim from South Main Street to Maple Street. The project will include safety improvements at the intersection of Maple, Mann and Pine.

In addition to reconstruction and reclamation, there will be some mill and overlay work on downtown streets, including Strong Avenue, Pearl Street, Summer Street and portions of Elm and North Elm. And, crack sealing and maintenance work will take place throughout the city as usual.

City officials have to put the work out to bid, so it could change, but these are the targets for this year's paving program, Mayor Narkewicz presented. It is a mixture of some rural roads, some residential streets and some downtown streets. Administrators are doing their best to provide additional funding to supplement Chapter 90 money and thus continue the progress they've made on the backlog of paving projects.

Councilor Quinlan asked the timeframe for paying back the \$1.5 million.

Director Wright said the city bonds over either five or 10 years.

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Councilor Quinlan said he thinks it's just great that Summer and Winter Street are both on the list. They had a sink hole on Summer Street this week, he noted.

Councilor Jarrett said he is glad to hear about Pine Street and improvements to the Maple and Pine Street intersection. He wondered if work will include sidewalk improvements and traffic calming measures.

They are looking at adding sidewalks on Meadow Street, Mayor Narkewicz confirmed. As they do the designs they will be looking at what other potential traffic-calming features can be added. Work on the intersection itself will be a traffic-calming feature. They are closing off Mann Terrace so as not to have a surprise fifth lane entering the intersection.

Councilor Jarrett said he is curious about Atwood Drive. He wondered if this is an older street or if it was recently added when the new development went in.

It was an existing street, Mayor Narkewicz said. The developers have made a significant investment in the property. They have built three significant office buildings but the road was already in challenging shape. They are required to add a traffic light once the development is completed. This is a street that carries a lot of traffic; i.e. - people going to doctor's appointments and the courthouse. Final plans call for having a circle that the bus can turn around in.

Councilor Jarrett expressed his understanding that, in addition to the stoplight, developers have added sidewalks and updated pedestrian infrastructure but are not otherwise contributing to the cost of the new road.

That is correct, paying to upgrade the road was not one of the Planning Board's requirements, Mayor Narkewicz confirmed. He did have some conversations with the developers about whether they would be interested in assuming ownership of the street, but they did not come to a mutual agreement to accept responsibility for paving and maintenance. Another factor is the city has utilities under the street.

Councilor Dwight asked if the Summer Street repaving includes the section between King Street and Finn Street.

Mayor Narkewicz said it depends on how the bids come in.

One thing under consideration in the King Street reconstruction is reconfiguration of that intersection so it would be a shame to tear it up if it was just paved, Councilor Dwight observed.

Mayor Narkewicz said his point is well-taken. State to Prospect is the piece in the roughest shape so that is the first priority.

The motion carried with 4 Yes, 0 No by roll call vote.

C. 20.180 An Order to Appropriate Free Cash \$1.5 Million to Stabilization, Capital Stabilization and Fiscal Stability Stabilization Funds - 1st reading

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Thorpe moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded.

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Free Cash was certified in November and, in December, they transferred \$60,000 in Free Cash to the health department for additional overtime, Director Wright reminded. As they have done every year, right after Free Cash is certified they make contributions to the stabilization funds to shore up reserves. They will re-evaluate after the snow and ice account is settled up and may recommend additional transfers. They are recommending \$500,000 to each account now.

Ms. Wright gave the balances of the reserve accounts as follows:

- ❖ Regular stabilization - \$5.2 million, adding \$500,000 will bring it up to \$5.7 million
- ❖ Capital stabilization \$3.6 million, adding \$500,000 will bring it to \$4.1 million
- ❖ Fiscal Stability Stabilization Fund - \$2.5, will increase it to just over \$3 million

Councilor LaBarge asked the balance of Free Cash. Director Wright said it is \$5.7 million, with \$3.7 of new Free Cash.

The motion carried with 4 Yes, 0 No by roll call vote.

5. New Business

None.

6. Adjourn: There being no further business, Councilor LaBarge moved to adjourn. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion carried on a roll call vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting adjourned at 12:22 p.m.

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