



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 Teleconference Meeting

Meeting Date: April 2, 2020

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 7:48 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, Rachel Maiore and Jim Nash. Councilor Karen Foster was absent.
3. **Approval of Minutes From The Previous Meeting**
 - A. **Minutes of March 19, 2020**

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of March 19, 2020. Councilor Thorpe seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.
4. **Financial Orders**
 - A. **20.032 An Order to Establish Water and Sewer Rates for FY2021**

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Thorpe moved to put the order on the floor for discussion. Councilor LaBarge seconded.

She is very happy to hear from the Mayor that no increase is proposed for year FY2021, Councilor LaBarge commented. With this being such a critical time for many people in the city, she is supporting adoption of these rates, she confirmed. It's the right time to keep the rates as they are, she concluded.

When this appeared on the agenda a few weeks ago, he had a phone call with Finance Director Susan Wright who generously spent a good deal of time with him getting into some of the details of the enterprise funds and their budgeting process, Councilor Quinlan related. He wished tonight as they were discussing the water rates that they had a status report of projects to be funded with stabilization funds.

Councilor Sciarra noted that often when discussing rates, DPW Director Donna LaScaleia would join them to discuss the status of capital projects. During this moment of crisis, she didn't feel it was necessary to

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have her come as she is working around the clock. If councilors have specific questions for the director, they could ask her to come to the next meeting, she offered.

They are continuing to move forward on the budget process and continue to have the same capital projects presented in the most recent capital program, Mayor Narkewicz advised. Administrators are working to bring forward both a budget and a capital program – both have been somewhat sidetracked by the current emergency. \$15 million in waste water treatment plant (WWTP) upgrades that the council already gave authorization to seek lending authority for through the state's Clean Water Trust Fund are still pending, he confirmed. The city also still has major projects pending in water enterprise funds for work on city reservoirs and major transmission lines.

Staff will be bringing some of these projects forward. Rest assured that they continue to work on all of the projects that have been identified as long-term projects in the capital plan. A big part of what water rates and sewer rates support is existing debt service. A major portion of the debt service in the water enterprise fund is to pay for the water treatment plant while rates also support operational expenses of staff, equipment and materials. He will bring forward additional updates as part of the capital process.

Councilor Quinlan acknowledged the Mayor's affirmation that money for WWTP upgrades has been approved. He asked about the status of other projects. If he understands correctly, some of the water enterprise funds are going to construction projects on North King Street, King Street and Damon Road. He asked if those had been approved. He also asked the status of reconstruction work on North Farms Road.

Funding for North Farms Road was approved at the end of last year and the DPW is working on the engineering process for that project and hoping to get it bid, Mayor Narkewicz advised. They are having to adapt the bid process since it typically involves in-person meetings with contractors to review plans and bid specifications. The Damon Road projects are also moving ahead and all the engineering work for that is complete. As far as they know, the projects at the state level will still advance but they don't know if they will be delayed due to the construction environment.

WWTP engineering and construction work is advancing. They are getting close to the point where they will need to advance that project in a more significant way. The state has issued a 45-day delay in the deadline for accessing the 0% financing, he noted.

He hopes to have more updates on larger projects a little bit later in the springtime. City employees are continuing to work on them and advance them; the challenge becomes the actual physical construction portion of it, particularly the indoor construction required as part of the WWTP upgrades.

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded. The motion passed unanimously with 4 Yes, 0 No by roll call vote.

B. 20.035 An Order to Accept a Donation of Land on Woodland Drive for Housing and Trail Uses
Councilor Sciarra read the order.

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

Office of Planning and Sustainability Director Wayne Feiden apologized for a typo. Item #3 in the second 'whereas' clause should be Woodland Drive to Ladyslipper Lane, not Tiffany Lane, he clarified.

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The subdivision was finished about 30 years ago. The developer sold all the other lots. He was left with this lot and decided he couldn't develop it. He stopped paying taxes and has offered it to the city. (Not a lot of taxes have accumulated.) It has the potential for development as affordable or market-rate housing. They are asking the City Council to accept the donation and then planners will do due diligence to make plans for the lot's development. Planners will conduct a community process for the use of the lots, he said.

Councilor LaBarge expressed support for the proposal, saying she thinks it is a great deal. They need affordable housing even in Ward 6. It is a nice area and she thinks they could eventually look at putting a trail going into Ladyslipper Lane.

Councilor Quinlan wondered the value of the property and taxes owed.

The lot is assessed at \$95,000 and taxes owed are in the neighborhood of \$5,000 or \$6,000, Feiden said.

In last year's Capital Improvement Program (CIP), the City Council established a fund to buy land in tax title for the value of back taxes. What the city spends on the property to pay off the taxes comes back to the city. Part of the idea of saying one affordable housing and one market-rate home is that a market-rate unit could be self-supporting. Planners could come back to the council with a different proposal, he advised.

The back taxes are \$5,330, Councilor LaBarge volunteered. Somebody could go in and buy that property and the city will lose out on two homes and affordable housing.

Councilor Jarrett applauded the idea of creating more affordable housing. He asked Mr. Feiden to define 'workforce' housing since the order says 'market-rate' or 'workforce.'

The reason the developer could not develop the property is that he would need to get a comprehensive permit to do so and this requires creation of affordable housing, Mr. Feiden explained. Affordable housing is defined as being affordable to a person earning 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI). He expressed his understanding that workforce housing for purposes of the Community Preservation Act is housing affordable to households with incomes up to 120% of the AMI; in other words, what most working class people can afford. Other than for CPA purposes he believes it is not a defined term. It basically means that most of their workforce would be able to afford it.

The idea of having a trail that cuts through is a great idea, Councilor Jarrett added. It would mean residents would not have to walk on Route 66 to get to two adjoining neighborhoods.

Mr. Feiden clarified that this property would only take them about 40% of the way through but leaves that option open for the future.

Councilor Thorpe moved to amend the order to change 'Tiffany Lane' to 'Ladyslipper Lane.' Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously with 4 Yes, 0 No by roll call vote.

Councilor Sciarra called the main motion to a vote, and it passed unanimously 4 Yes, 0 No by roll call.

C. 20.036 An Order to Accept a Donation of Easement for Electric Power to NSH Memorial Park
Councilor Sciarra read the order.

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

When MassDevelopment laid out Village Hill, it set aside land for a memorial park and built infrastructure and a sidewalk from Olander Drive to serve the neighborhood, Mr. Feiden reminded. It wasn't anticipated at the time that there would be a need for electricity at the park, so no electric service was provided. To run electric service from the road would be very disruptive and very expensive. The Wrights have generously allowed them to run power through their property from a nearby transformer to the park. The city received a \$950,000 Massworks grant primarily to extend infrastructure to a new affordable housing project at North Commons but included work to extend electric service to memorial park as part of its application. They opened bids and received good quotes for other work covered by the grant, leaving money available.

She is very happy that the city has accepted memorial park at the former state hospital, Councilor LaBarge affirmed. There is so much history there. She publicly thanked Jonathan and Margaret Wright.

The electric service is for an old fountain that was there when 'Old Main' was torn down, Feiden elaborated. The power will recirculate water to the fountain. The city doesn't have to operate it in bad economic times.

The motion passed unanimously 4 Yes, 0 No by roll call vote.

D. 20.038 An Order to Appropriate \$3,000 in CPA Funds to Lathrop Communities for Invasive Species Removal

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

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

Conservation/Preservation Planner Sarah LaValley presented. She came before the council earlier in the year to talk about some larger Community Preservation Act (CPA) applications. The two before them tonight are part of the small grant process. The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) established this a few years ago to try to spark some smaller projects. Lathrop Communities is a past recipient and has a 50-acre area on its north campus that is completely free of invasives. This may be the last application as progress has been made in removing invasive species from its east campus. Retirement community representatives are hopeful that they will be able to stop using a consultant after this and just continue with volunteer work.

Councilor LaBarge spoke in favor of the project.

Councilor Nash said he assumed the work is going to involve some application of round-up to address the invasive species.

Lathrop Community was very clear with the CPC that they are only using Rodeo which is a glyphosate product and are doing really targeted spraying, basically the minimum necessary to take care of these plants, Ms. LaValley related. They are doing as much as possible with mechanical means and volunteers.

Councilor LaBarge said she had concerns about the herbicides being used. She asked Ms. LaValley to repeat her response to how much they are using. Ms. LaValley reiterated that they're using the minimum amount necessary to be effective.

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Councilor Jarrett drew members' attention to the final report of the Select Committee on Pesticide Reduction (SCPR), completed during the last council session. He read the following excerpt from the report:

"...SCPR concludes that it is important for Northampton to consider eliminating pesticide use. ***If deemed absolutely necessary, any pesticide should be applied with utmost care in a manner that provides maximum protection of the public.***"

He asked if Ms. LaValley feels this application is meeting that standard. How will it provide maximum protection to the public? He asked.

Lathrop Community was clear with the CPC that they have had this debate internally as well (a lot of residents are not in favor of using pesticides) but ultimately did decide to put the application forward, Ms. LaValley responded. They are working with a licensed professional and using the absolute minimum necessary.

Councilor Jarrett asked what it would take to do this without pesticides.

Lathrop Communities has a very dedicated volunteer base but, based on their experience and the recommendations of professionals, they have found some of the plants do need a treatment of herbicides to be eradicated, Ms. LaValley said.

The meeting was interrupted by profanity from unidentified members of the public who joined via Zoom. Councilor Sciarra and other councilors offered profuse apologies.

Councilor Sciarra called the motion to a vote, and it passed unanimously 4 Yes, 0 No by roll call.

E. 20.039 An Order to Appropriate CPA Funds for Beaver Brook Greenway Invasive Plant Control Project

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

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

This project is building on the work of the Broad Brook Coalition and Leeds Civic Association to build trails and a bird blind on the Beaver Brook/Broad Brook parcel on Route 9, Ms. LaValley related. Now that the clean-up and trail-clearing work has been done, they realize the need for a little bit of follow-up work to brush hog to maintain the rare turtle habitat. They are proposing very limited glyphosate application to eradicate invasive species.

Councilor LaBarge asked questions and offered comments.

Brushhogging will encourage the turtles to continue to use this area, Ms. LaValley said. The brush-hogging is expected to continue for a few years.

Councilor Jarrett noted that, in the previous application, it seemed pretty clear that the application of herbicides was hoped to be limited to a year. He asked if this was similarly limited or whether the application would be ongoing.

If anything, it would be less ongoing, Ms. LaValley said. It is just for bittersweet and is all cut stump treatment.

The motion passed unanimously 4 Yes, 0 No by roll call vote.

F. 20.040 An Order to Approve Gift Fund Expenditures for Emergency COVID19 Expenses

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

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

As councilors may have seen in recent communications, a number of people have asked for different ways to help support the emergency shelter at the high school, Mayor Narkewicz explained. Some have been able to volunteer, some have donated materials and others have asked if they could just contribute money. Administrators immediately put out a fund and set it up electronically on the city's website so that residents could make a donation to the fund through Unipay. The order essentially authorizes the expenditure of funds collected in the gift fund for COVID-19 expenditures.

Councilor LaBarge asked if Mayor Narkewicz would like two readings and he said, yes, if possible.

Mayor Narkewicz gave details for those wishing to make donations. Donors can either make a donation by check or make a donation on-line on the city website.

The motion passed unanimously 4 Yes, 0 No by roll call vote.

5. New Business

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

None.

6. Adjourn: There being no further business, Councilor Quinlan moved to adjourn. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion carried on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

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