



Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council

*Councilor Rachel Maiore, Chair
Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Vice Chair
Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III
Councilor Jim Nash*

Virtual Meeting
Meeting Date: May 11, 2022
Time: 6 p.m.

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 6:05 p.m. Councilor Rachel Maiore convened the meeting.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were committee members Rachel Maiore (Chair), Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge (Vice Chair), Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III (joined at 6:08 p.m.) and Councilor Jim Nash. Also present were DPW Director Donna LaScaleia and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.
3. **Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**
Councilor Maiore announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded.
4. **Approval of Minutes**
Councilor Nash moved to approve the minutes of the March 1, 2022 meeting. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed 3:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Moulton absent.
5. **Continuation of Public Hearing To Alter The Lay Out Of Winter Street (from May 5, 2022)**
Councilor Maiore opened the continued hearing.

The city solicitor is requesting that the hearing be continued as some discussions are still going on between him and the property owners, Councilor Nash reported. He would recommend continuing to the next regularly-scheduled meeting, but it is the budget hearing, so he is proposing to continue to June 8th.

Councilor Nash moved to continue the public hearing to Wednesday, June 8th at 6 p.m. Councilor LaBarge seconded.

There may be a way to resolve this so another public hearing is not needed, Councilor Nash added.

Kathryn Basham asked what the implications of the continuance are for the timeframe of the DPW's project. They were anticipating the DPW was going to move forward with the bid process. Residents of the street are already into the third year since the last water break, she reminded.

The DPW director sent her photos of the last water main break and it was pretty harrowing, Councilor Maiore commented. It looked like New Orleans. She did say they are ready to move. The DPW director is very aware of the time pressure and the implications of waiting too long, she assured.

Sarah and Will Freedberg of 18 Winter Street said their house was one of those impacted by the flood in 2019 and the water main break on Christmas Eve in 2006. There were two water main breaks, which is one of the reasons they were all hoping to get this resolved sooner rather than later. The first was when their house was being built and it flooded out their cellar. The city did pay for that.

In 2019, they weren't home but their neighbors the Ryan's let them know what was going on. They had a couple of inches of water in their cellar and a couple of inches of sand and salt came into their front yard, which is her garden. In addition, they had a secondary flood when the DPW fixed the street after the water main break since they didn't quite grade it properly. A small lake formed in front of their driveway and they got flooded the next time there was a thunderstorm.

They definitely would like to have this resolved as expeditiously as possible and hope the city and the Nieboers' can work something out without lengthy litigation. History repeats itself and they have had too much history of repeat flooding on Winter Street, Mr. Freedberg said. Another year with the infrastructure in its present condition would be setting them up for more damage and ultimately more cost to the city.

[Councilor Moulton was experiencing some technical difficulties and had to exit briefly.]

The Northampton Conservation Commission is holding a public hearing tomorrow, May 12, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. on a Notice of Intent for drainage improvements on Winter Street, Councilor LaBarge advised. The scope of work includes disconnecting storm drains from the sewer system and installation of a gravel Stormwater spreader.

The motion to continue passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

6. Meeting schedule

May 24th and May 25th are the City Council's FY2023 budget hearings, Councilor Maiore noted. They will first convene as a full council before recessing for the Finance Committee to conduct the hearings.

She proposed setting the Wednesday after regular City Council meetings as regular Finance Committee meeting dates for a tentative schedule as follows: June 8th, June 22nd, July 20th and August 24th. Members agreed on the dates and a start time of 6 p.m.

7. Scope and responsibilities of the Finance Committee

Councilor Nash said he thinks the best thing to do is to reflect on the process they're involved in right now. The mayor has sent them an administrative order relative to the budget in that it has to do with creating a new department. The budget will roll out and councilors will get their budget books next week. Under the council's new rules, the timeframe for approval is a little more compressed than in the past and he think it's good to be thoughtful about that. The FY2023 budget could be finalized June 2nd, which is earlier than usual. As they're going through, he suggested collectively witnessing 'what's working.' They have a new mayor and new rules and his sense is that it is changing some of the timelines. With regard to the recent introduction of the Department of Community Care (DCC), this is a direction they wanted the mayor to go in and they're seeing the realization of that directive, he commented appreciatively. He encouraged fellow councilors to take note of how changes that have been made have played out and what future changes

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they may want to see. He thinks having this discussion is really beneficial and the fall is when they are going to want to start digging into other issues that relate to the budget.

Councilor LaBarge said she received a phone call from a former police officer in Ward 7 very concerned about where the money for this new department is coming from.

There is also some confusion about the new process for considering financial orders and why the council is voting to send items to the consent agenda rather than voting to approve them at the time of first reading, she noted.

Councilor Nash agreed it is confusing and suggested the possibility of calling it something other than 1st and 2nd reading since the orders aren't actually 'read' the second time. He threw out the terms 'introduction' and 'consideration' as possible alternatives to 1st and 2nd reading.

"We're using old terminology with a new process," Councilor Moulton agreed. "The terminology needs to be clarified."

Councilor Maire said she would put 'scope and responsibilities' back on the agenda in the fall. In earlier discussions, Councilor LaBarge suggested having the Finance Committee take up discussion of the Stormwater fee structure. Barring the establishment of a free-standing committee for this purpose, she thinks this is an excellent idea. Another specific idea was keeping Finance Committee members apprised of the impact of Coca-Cola's departure on water and sewer rates, Councilor Moulton added.

Councilor LaBarge said she thought they could be in a recession. Councilor Nash agreed with Councilor LaBarge around concern about the city's revenues. It's important for them to be really tracking these things as they consider budgets coming forward, he suggested. He appreciates the updates from the finance director and thinks the mayor's office will be letting them know when there are shortfalls.

8. Structure and Line-up of Budget Hearing - Departmental presentations

Members discussed the format for the upcoming budget hearings and the order of presentation for the departments scheduled to present. These will be special City Council meetings so they won't need to have public comment in the beginning, Councilor Nash noted.

Councilor Moulton offered to facilitate by making note of recurring questions from the public during public comment to present to department heads after the presentations.

Councilor Nash said he is comfortable with the idea of councilors having the opportunity to ask questions of department heads and then opening the floor to public comment. Questions from the public will then be tracked by Councilor Moulton and directed to the mayor at the conclusion of public comment.

Councilor Maire said she wasn't planning to limit the comments in terms of scope but is comfortable with limiting individual comments to three minutes.

Councilor LaBarge said she thinks the biggest issue will be the school department. She got 22 emails today just about the schools.

Regarding the order of presentation, Councilor Nash said he and Councilor Maire would decide the 'batting order' with the idea of making the first night the easier night.

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Councilor Maiore asked if Councilor Moulton could report back about the process of the ARPA committee.

Councilor Moulton said he's happy to report to the Finance Committee. The ARPA committee is the mayor's advisory committee which will be making recommendations on the \$4 million dedicated to direct community impact. All ten members are community members except him and Councilor Foster. They have met twice and their immediate task is to schedule and hold some listening sessions in the community. They are talking about having them in community centers like the schools and public housing projects and making them about the kinds of projects that would provide help and relief. Parallel to that is the task of developing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to be issued this summer.

Councilor Nash requested that updates from Councilor Moulton on the ARPA Committee be a running agenda item.

9. **New Business**

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

None.

10. **Adjourn:** There being no further business, Councilor LaBarge moved to adjourn. Councilor Moulton seconded. The motion carried on a roll call vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

Contact: Rachel Maiore @rmaiore@northamptonma.gov or (413) 923-4318