



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 31, 2022

Note: The Finance Committee Meeting took place during a special City Council Meeting (FY2023 Budget Hearing) as announced. The City Council Meeting began at 6 p.m.

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 6:04 p.m. Chair Rachel Maiore convened the meeting.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were Councilor Rachel Maiore (Chair), Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge (Vice Chair), Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III and Councilor Jim Nash. Also present were City Council members Jamila Gore, Karen Foster, Garrick Perry and Alex Jarrett. At-Large Councilor Marissa Elkins was absent on roll call but joined at 7:38 p.m. Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra, Finance Director Charlene Nardi, DPW Director Donna LaScaleia and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler were also present.

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

3. **Public Hearing on FY2023 Budget**
Councilor Maiore introduced the hearing by reading the legal notice.

Councilor Nash moved to open the public hearing. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote. The public hearing was opened at 6:05 p.m.

Councilor Maiore explained the format she would use in conducting the hearing. Department heads will make presentations, councilors will be given the opportunity to comment and ask questions, and then public comment will be accepted. She mentioned that comments should pertain to the subject matter of the hearing and asked speakers to please limit comments to three minutes.

CENTRAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Councilor Jarrett disclosed that as a member of the Pedal People Cooperative he cannot participate due to a conflict of interest as Pedal People has a pre-existing contract with Central Services. He said he would be turning off his video, although he might pop in to ask a question unrelated to the contract.

Central Services Director Pat McCarthy gave an overview of departmental responsibilities. Central Services oversees grounds, maintenance, heating, cooling, plumbing and electrical, security, fire detection and protection, custodial, renovation, construction and capital programs for city and school buildings. The City Council Committee on Finance Meeting Minutes for May 31, 2022

department maintains approximately 792,000 square feet of facilities including City Hall, the municipal building, Memorial Hall, main and Florence fire stations, the senior center, James House, the Academy of Music, six schools in the Northampton Public School district and DPW facilities. It operates the municipal mail delivery system, manages the city and school facilities office and custodial supplies program, solicits and secures natural gas and electrical supply contracts for municipal and school buildings and houses the energy and sustainability officer. It also oversees maintenance and capital improvements for the E.J. Gare Parking Garage (approximately 168,000 square feet) and Gothic Street parking structure (52,000 square feet) and coordinates upgrades to city streetlights.

Since former Director David Pomerantz's retirement in February, he has spent the last several months becoming familiar with both the Central Services and Parking Maintenance budgets, Director McCarthy related. Both fiscal year 2023 budgets are straightforward with no major changes.

As far as Central Services Personnel Services (PS), there are no changes to the number of staff, he reported. There are presently three full-time and one part-time vacancy comprised of 2.5 custodians and his previous position as Project Facilities Coordinator. There is a small increase for the internal hire of a new department administrative assistant. Overall, there is a two percent (2%) increase in PS basically related to COLA increases.

OM for the most part has remained level with some line item reductions to offset other line item changes, he continued. Increases in the following line items are related mostly to utility increases: electricity, gas, Stormwater, grounds and architectural/engineering. Electricity has increased by \$40,467 to accommodate the increased cost of electricity, which is due to the volatility and upward trend in the current energy market. Staff are presently reviewing existing electrical supply contracts which are expected to expire in November of 2022.

Gas is being increased by \$4,819 for the same reason. Present contracts are good until December of 2023. The cost of water increased, so they have adjusted the FY2023 water and Stormwater budgets accordingly.

The grounds budget was increased by \$6,000 due to the increased cost of keeping the main campus clean and increases in grounds-related materials. Lastly, architectural/engineering services increased by \$10,000 to cover costs related to upcoming projects; i.e. – the proposed dog kennel, 33 King Street, the resilience hub, etc.

For parking maintenance, payroll will increase by \$26,253 due to changing an existing part-time position to full-time, he advised. The employee was previously partially paid through the Tax Collector/Parking Enforcement budget but is now paid out of parking maintenance. The overall OM budget has actually decreased by \$24,568 to offset other line item changes. The only three increases are in electricity (\$8,006), gas (\$416) and trash removal (\$5,000).

The OOM budget was increased by \$15,000 for increased costs in parking equipment related to what's known as the Parkeon Pay by Plate system.

Capital projects in the schools include energy management system upgrades at JFK Middle School, ventilation and greenhouse gas emission reductions work at Leeds and Jackson Street schools and the purchase of an electric maintenance van. City-side capital projects include the parking lot expansion at main fire headquarters, ventilation upgrades at the DPW, heating system upgrades at the municipal

building and the purchase of a hybrid city maintenance vehicle. They are also buying a new electric skid steer.

Members asked questions and offered comments.

Mayor Sciarra said she's exhausted from listening to director McCarthy outline everything Central Services does. She thanked him for all his work.

With regard to the ventilation upgrades mentioned, Councilor Nash said he knew a portion has to do with energy efficiency and meeting climate goals but he wondered how much actually relates to COVID.

The Locust Street administration building is in sore need of ventilation, Director McCarthy responded. It is going to be an ERV (Energy Recovery Ventilator) so it is going to be energy efficient. It is directly related to COVID too, he confirmed. The ventilation work at Leeds, Jackson and Bridge Street schools are actually part of greenhouse gas emission reduction projects.

Councilor Moulton thanked Director McCarthy for the detailed presentation. He said he didn't quite understand his mention of a study of the city's electricity contract later in the year.

Central Services solicits and secures natural gas and electricity supply contracts for municipal and school facility operations, the director clarified. They are presently under separate contracts with an electricity and gas supplier through each utility - National Grid and Eversource. They buy electricity from the supplier at a set rate under contract. They are trying to be proactive as they look towards November to see if they can lock in figures now that will be potentially better than later in the year.

Councilor Foster asked if there is maintenance or electricity costs associated with EV chargers. She also asked about the possibility of adding fast chargers.

Central Services does pay for the EV chargers as well as for recharging electric bikes, Director McCarthy confirmed. Workers are putting extra EV chargers in the Roundhouse parking lot and at the main fire station with the expansion of its parking lot. He would have to rely on Chris Mason to answer whether they are the trickle or fast chargers. One of the EV chargers at the fire station will be a pay-to-use meter.

Councilor Foster asked where charges for clean-ups of camp sites, included disposal of sharps, is reflected in the Central Services budget.

In both budgets this charge comes under trash removal, Director McCarthy said. They may end up taking it out of another line item next year.

Director Nardi said she thinks they have also used the grounds and maintenance line item for this expense.

In response to a question from Councilor Maiore, Director McCarthy said the rule of thumb is that costs associated with buildings are charged to Central Services.

Councilor Jarrett asked how the custodians are divided up.

A full-time custodian works second shift at the police station and another works full-time at the senior center, McCarthy said. A part-time custodian takes care of the JFK pool on the weekends. There is no

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dedicated custodian for the fire department but custodians assigned to other buildings go over there during the week.

There being no more questions, Councilor Maiore introduced the next department.

FIRE/RESCUE

Chief Davine clarified that the custodian mentioned by Director McCarthy takes care of central dispatch on the second floor; firefighters do all their cleaning and maintenance in house. He presented an overview of the FY2023 budget, which increased slightly from last year, as follows.

The Fire Department operates out of fire stations on Carlon Drive and Maple Street in Florence which house four fire engines, one rescue vehicle, one ladder truck, a command vehicle, a boat and five staff vehicles, so maintenance costs are pretty significant. The department employs 68 full-time sworn firefighters, one full-time mechanic and one full-time administrative assistant, and those numbers will not change next year. He currently has two vacancies. They hired four firefighters at the beginning of May who are finishing up their training this week and will be heading out to shift. There is a potential applicant for one of the vacancies who hopefully will start in the next couple of weeks but he has an upcoming retirement which will create the second vacancy.

The department runs four shifts: A Group, B Group, C Group and D Group, each of which are assigned 16 personnel. Members work 24-hour rotating shifts. Minimum daily staffing is 13. The groups regularly staff one fire engine and one ambulance in Florence and two fire engines, two ambulances and a command vehicle at headquarters.

Last year was a record year for their department with the highest call volume they've ever seen. They answered 7,645 calls for service, including 5,701 EMS calls and 52 fires for an average of 21 calls each 24-hour shift. 55% of the time last year they had multiple calls for service at the same. One thing they have noticed and are keeping an eye on is their mutual aid to other towns. Last year, the city provided fire mutual aid 22 times, but they went out of the city 400 times for ambulance mutual aid, representing a pretty significant increase. They have never seen mutual aid numbers for EMS that high. When they leave the city to answer calls in other communities, it obviously increases their costs for equipment and fuel and causes increased wear and tear on their vehicles.

They also had to call for EMS mutual aid 88 times, which is pretty high for Northampton. Running three ambulances 24/7 they very rarely need that much assistance but when they're leaving the city and get a call, they have to call for help too.

As call volumes increase, obviously costs increase too. Equipment and operating costs have increased significantly over the last couple of months. Some vendors have told them to prepare for a 10 to 20% increase this year. They ordered a brand new ambulance in July of 2020 and still have not received it due to part delays and other circumstances beyond their control. They are expecting the ambulance to finally arrive in June.

Monthly and sometimes weekly price increases and equipment delays are frustrating and difficult to budget for so it has been challenging. They are going to try to lock in some long-term contracts at a lower price, so they are doing their due diligence and are hopeful.

In response to a question from Councilor LaBarge, Chief Davine said the department's total budget is \$6,653,149. They had six vacancies at the beginning of May but have filled four of them, he clarified.

Councilor LaBarge asked how COVID-19 affected his department

The last time he looked, the number of people transported who were COVID positive was over 600, Chief Davine said. Now it is probably over 700. He is proud to say that, throughout 2020, only six department members came down with COVID and it was mostly those in the office. With the new Omicron variant, several more people came down with COVID and right now, he has one firefighter out with COVID.

Other than transporting sick people, they were lucky in that they didn't have a bunch of folks get sick and have to miss work.

Councilor LaBarge thanked the chief for the department personnel who went down to the senior center to help administer shots.

Councilor Nash asked for an update on the ladder truck.

The mechanic was able to locate a part out of state for the ladder and get it working so they did operate it up at Smith Voke. They are going to continue to bring in Hadley and Easthampton when a ladder response is needed. They were happy to get it working since they are trading it in for the new ladder so it has to be operational.

DPW

The Pedal People Cooperative has a financial interest in decisions made regarding the Locust Street transfer station which the DPW oversees, so he will be recusing himself but may come in at the end to ask questions unrelated to the Solid Waste enterprise budget, Councilor Jarrett disclosed.

The DPW's General Fund (GF) budget is separated into several divisions: Administration & Engineering, Highways (streets and fleet maintenance), Snow and Ice and Forestry, Parks and Cemeteries, Director LaScaleia presented.

Within the GF, the DPW maintains more than 150 miles of paved and unpaved roadways, 85 miles of sidewalks, almost 40 bridges, more than 30 signal-controlled intersections, more than 150 vehicles and pieces of specialized construction equipment, more than 10,000 public shade trees, 240 acres of athletic fields and parks, four cemeteries all of which are active burial grounds with more than 20,000 monuments and more than 11 miles of bike paths. As items of note, the department has contractual obligations to employees belonging to one of three unions so, on the PS side, they will see some increases related to these contractual obligations. Also, there are slight increases in overall OM primarily due to the rising cost of gasoline and diesel. They are paying about double what they were paying last year for diesel and close to double for gasoline, so that is a really significant expense. They are also seeing substantial increases in the price of electricity, propane and oil and, across the board, goods and services.

In the Highways OOM section, the road improvements line funds the purchase of asphalt to patch potholes, repair trench cuts, etc. The price of asphalt has risen by nearly 30%, leading to a considerable increase given the city's use of 2,000 to 3,000 tons of asphalt annually. The Roadway Markings line pays for roadway markings; i.e. - all the paint they see on pavement everywhere: double yellow center lines, left and

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right turn arrows, etc. They will be putting out a contract within the next few weeks to restripe the entire city, including about three-quarters of a million linear feet of markings.

For enterprise funds, they talked about water and sewer revenue, operations and capital projects in detail during the rate setting process, she reminded. The DPW operates and maintains very expansive and complex water and sewer systems. The water treatment plant in Williamsburg flows nearly four million gallons of drinking water a day through 160 miles of water mains and related equipment, and the sewer system includes more than 110 miles of sewer lines in addition to seven pump stations and the waste water treatment plant (WWTP) which is undergoing significant renovation. For FY2023 they have submitted level-funded budgets in the water and sewer enterprises and utility rates remain unchanged.

They are nearing completion of the \$10 million Phase 1 of the WWTP project but this time next year they will be starting Phase 2 which will cost in the neighborhood of \$20 million. They are also engaged in engineering design for a couple of significant projects on the water side: improvement to their reservoirs and improvement of the water transmission main that runs to the city limits. It bears repeating that, with the imminent closure of Coca-Cola, they will be looking at reductions in revenue starting early next calendar year. They have engaged Tighe & Bond to look at utility rates and make some recommendations for how to best move forward. The capital needs of the system remain the same regardless of Coca-Cola's presence in the city, she pointed out.

Like water and sewer, the Stormwater and solid waste enterprises are similarly level-funded.

She publicly thanked the men and women of the DPW who work every day to provide essential services to the city and said she appreciated the council's ongoing support of its operations.

In response to questions from Councilor LaBarge, she confirmed that they have quite a few vacancies throughout the department. There is ongoing recruitment to fill these vacancies but one of the challenges is that they require a commercial driver's license (CDL) and licensure to operate specialized equipment. There is currently a little over 15 vacancies.

Councilor Moulton said he counts five vacancies among the 16 positions in the highway department. He asked her to speak a bit more to the impact of this on the ability to get the work done, prioritizing the work and morale.

Vacancies are one of the biggest challenges now, Director LaScaleia acknowledged. The volume of work never lets up so they have to prioritize based on safety first and foremost. Over the years, there has always been some level of vacancy. They have never achieved what she would consider to be full staffing but this is a particularly trying time. The way they deal with it is with overtime. Ultimately, getting a job done is about man hours. Employees tend to stay late or work on weekends and holidays to backfill what they would typically be doing in a 40-hour week. She does need to be careful not to overwork the remaining staff. It is particularly difficult during the winter so she is extremely hopeful the situation will move towards resolution as it gets later in the year. She can choose to contract out some of the work but this is not preferable particularly in this inflationary environment. She tries to contract out common sense things as a stop gap. They appreciate people's patience as they work through a backlog of work orders.

In response to a question about recycling, the director reminded councilors that she had to insert a line item in the budget (\$110,000) a couple of years ago to begin paying for recycling. Shortly after, everything

shifted and they are now back to receiving revenue for recyclables. Right now, there is no expense and a limited revenue stream associated with recyclables, she confirmed.

Councilor Maiore asked about progress on the cold storage facility approved in the budget several years ago.

As context, some years ago there was discussion of building a brand new DPW facility, but city officials transitioned away from that idea to the concept of adding cold storage to get DPW vehicles out of the weather, Director LaScaleia reminded. The cold storage facility at the water treatment plant in Williamsburg is functioning beautifully. In 2019, Mayor Narkewicz proposed two additional cold storage buildings: one at Spring Grove Cemetery and one on Locust Street. The DPW has done significant design and permitting since then. No money is reflected in this budget for those projects and they are still in the permitting stage.

Councilor Nash expressed appreciation for being kept so well-informed about DPW activities.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (DHHS)/COMMUNITY CARE DEPARTMENT (CCD)

Councilor Maiore welcomed Health Commissioner Merridith O'Leary, Deputy Health Commissioner Michelle Farry and Department of Community Care (DCC) Implementation Director Sean Donovan.

Commissioner O'Leary thanked councilors for being such faithful stewards of the city's fiscal resources. Not having been part of the hearing process in past years, what she learned tonight is what a vital role the council plays in making sure they allocate their resources properly with a view to their community values.

On May 19th, the City Council approved the mayor's first administrative order restructuring the health department to be the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), she recounted. The mission of the DHHS is to protect, preserve and promote the health and well-being of all Northampton residents, particularly the most vulnerable. Members achieve their mission by providing and supporting accessible, high-quality community-based health and social services, community engagement and advocacy, development of health-promoting policies and regulations, disease and injury prevention, emergency services, culturally-competent health promotion and health education services.

Under the DHHS umbrella, there are six divisions including environmental health, public health nursing, emergency preparedness, substance use prevention, public health excellence and the newly-developed Department of Community Care (DCC). The DCC will be a well-supported branch of the department due to access to other department resources (i.e. - nursing, Hampshire Hope and DART administrative staff) and better-poised to access grant resources.

One of her first tasks as commissioner was to develop a FY2023 budget inclusive of the DCC. With that in mind, she has come up with an FY2023 operating budget of \$1.868 million, \$1.7 million of which is for personnel services (PS). Of the \$1.7 million, \$1.1 million will come from the general fund and the remainder from grants. The significant increase in PS comes from: 1) salary increases for increased roles and responsibilities, 2) overtime and 3) seven new positions created for the DCC; in particular, Implementation Director, Peer Outreach Coordinator, three peer outreach workers (referred to as community responders), a full-time social worker and a program coordinator/administrative support staff.

All positions other than the implementation director are vacant and will be posted in the very near future.

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Three positions will be shared by the DCC and DHHS: the Public Health Technology Manager, whose salary is 30% from DHHS and 70% from grants, a Grants Manager (funded 20% by the GF and 80% by grants) and the DCC Program Coordinator, where 60% of salary is GF and 40% grants. Seventy percent (70%) of Deputy Commissioner Michelle Farry's salary also comes from grants.

The overall OM budget is \$166,000, with the biggest increase being for contractual services. The DHHS will be contracting with a software company for \$82,000 to help build out its health information exchange data base, contracting with a vendor to assess dispatch data to identify calls for the DCC and contracting with trainers to help build special skills and create a training curriculum for DCC peer outreach workers.

The DHHS has a total of nine vacancies, including the seven for the DCC, and administrators have set benchmarks for hiring. They will hire right away for the program coordinator and in July-August they will advertise for the community responders and outreach coordinator. They are currently advertising for vacant director positions for the Substance Use and Public Health Excellence divisions.

In addition, a public health nurse - Vivian Franklin - is leaving and there will be upcoming vacancies for DART coordinators.

Councilors asked questions and offered comments.

Councilor LaBarge asked if, after the new department gets off the ground, Commissioner O'Leary would be working with councilors to help resolve problems in their wards with agencies that operate residential programs in the community.

Commissioner O'Leary said it is definitely her intention to sit down one-on-one with councilors to hear what they perceive as community needs once she is settled in. It is not her role to fix agencies that might be defunct but she will hopefully be able to act as a conduit to provide additional resources, she clarified.

One of the things he feels is important in staffing the DCC is providing competitive salaries so that they attract top candidates, Councilor Moulton volunteered. He wondered what metrics were used to determine the salaries listed in the budget and if the commissioner feels they will be competitive.

This is something that keeps her up at night, Commissioner O'Leary admitted. She doesn't set the metrics; rather, Human Resources has developed and applies a grading system for new positions. It is her job to write the job description and they see where it falls for grading. Sometimes the grading system relies on special skills, training, education, work experience, etc. For community responders, they're not looking for a real litmus of those experiences but are looking for people with lived experiences and will provide the training needed to do the job. She is afraid that if they don't get support from HR in regards to pay equity they will be setting the DCC up to fail. She thinks with the Mayor and council's support in advocating for pay equity they can meet the necessary salary standard.

Councilor Nash said he is wondering where HIV fits into all of this. His godson is saying HIV is through the roof in Boston and he's wondering if they are seeing that here.

The state Department of Public Health has a whole HIV division and Northampton doesn't actually get the numbers of Northampton residents infected with HIV. They do partner with agencies which do harm reduction and one of the focuses is HIV and other blood-transmissible diseases. The substance use team's

philosophy is all about harm reduction. HIV is not so much siloed but is grouped together under their harm reduction umbrella.

He asked if they are seeing an increase in the area.

Region 1 which is Western Mass does have an increase, Commissioner O'Leary confirmed. It's not granular data so she doesn't have numbers just for Northampton.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MA DPH) takes the lead around HIV but the local health department incorporates a lot of discussions around harm reduction and safe injection practices, Deputy Commissioner Farry added. She cited a partnership with the UMass School of Nursing to train emergency department personnel to talk to substance users being treated about safe practices for injecting as an example. Hepatitis A, B and C is also a big talking point.

Councilor Nash said he is glad to hear it's on their radar and that everybody is on the same page about getting information out there.

Councilor Elkins joined at 7:38 p.m.

What she wants for the DCC is for it to grow at a reasonable rate, Councilor Maiore volunteered. She said she wanted to check in with Director Donovan to make sure he feels like the budget as presented allows it to grow at a reasonable rate without being slowed down.

He doesn't know if they would be at the point of actually expanding the department without working closely with Deputy Commissioner Farry and Commissioner O'Leary so he's very grateful for the way they've been working together so quickly and so rapidly, Director Donovan responded. He feels really good about where they're at although there are still unknowns. He feels like they have a big task ahead of them but they're not building the DCC from scratch since they will be sharing a wealth of information and expertise. "It's a big task ahead, but we have the tools we need to move forward," he asserted.

Councilor Foster asked what ideas Commissioner O'Leary has/funding she may be seeking for prevention initiatives.

Behavioral health-related issues are at the forefront of where she wants to invest their time and resources, Commissioner O'Leary responded. Her vision is to start at the root and help children when they're at formative ages. The past couple of decades have seen a huge shift in behavioral health-related diseases that they really didn't see 30 years ago. She really wants to focus on that in the first year when she's instituting programs.

The DCC has incredibly broad community support and enthusiasm, Councilor Foster noted. She expressed her faith that, by this time next year, they will be calling on assistance from DCC responders. It's really something to see the broad community support for this work.

Councilor Jarrett asked if the role the DHHS will play in the resilience hub is reflected in this budget.

It is absolutely something they are talking about as they are discussing the budget, Commissioner O'Leary said. Part of her vision is that they actually have office space within the resilience hub for community responders.

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The city is committed to creating the home for the resilience hub but they are not the lead agency to operate the facility; Community Action is the lead agency, Mayor Sciarra reminded. They are hoping to eventually have a home for the resilience hub which will have space for the DHHS and DCC, she confirmed.

Councilor Nash said he just wanted to say how exciting it is to be talking about all this new programming.

As no members of the public were present to ask questions or comment, Councilor Maiore announced that the public hearing would resume tomorrow night (June 1, 2022) at 6 p.m.

4. **New Business**

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

None.

5. **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 Finance Committee meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

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