



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
Northampton, Massachusetts

Roll Call

A special City Council meeting for purposes of the FY2023 Budget Hearing was called to order by Council President James Nash at 6:00 p.m. Upon a roll call, the following City Councilors were present:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| At-Large Councilor Jamila Gore | Ward 4 Councilor Garrick Perry |
| Ward 1 Councilor Stanley Moulton, III | Ward 5 Councilor Alexander Jarrett |
| Ward 2 Councilor Karen Foster | Ward 6 Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge |
| Ward 3 Councilor James Nash | Ward 7 Councilor Rachel Maiore |

Announcement that Meeting Audio/Video Recorded

The meeting of the City Council Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council was held via remote participation. Instructions for how the public could participate in the meeting were included on the agenda that was posted on the city’s website and in the City Clerk’s Office.

Recess for Committee on Finance Meeting

At 6:01 p.m., the City Council recessed for the Committee on Finance to hold a public hearing on the FY2023 budget. The Committee on Finance adjourned at 7:52 p.m. The City Council reconvened at 7:52p.m.

Councilor Maiore announced that the meeting was still being audio and video recorded. On a roll call by Clerk Powers all members were present (LaBarge, Maiore, Moulton, Nash).

Councilor Maiore announced that the public hearing was being held in accordance with the Charter of Northampton, Article 7 (Finance and Fiscal Procedures, Section 7-4): Action on the Operating Budget, (a) Public Hearing. The Committee was convened to consider the proposed FY2023 and to hear all person who wish to be heard thereon. The budget was available for inspection on the city’s website and in the City Clerk’s Office.

On a roll call vote the committee opened the public hearing @ 6:04 pm. The chat feature was set so that the public could communicate with the host and co-host to address technical questions. Councilor Moulton tracked questions from the public. Each department head gave a presentation and then Councilors and the public were allowed to ask questions. Councilor Foster asked the public to limit their comments to three minutes.

NPS Presentation

Northampton Public Schools Superintendent John Provost gave a presentation about the schools budget. The total amount of the school budget for FY2023 is \$35,159,372 which is broken down by cost center in the budget book (pg. 105). Referring to the graph on page 106 which shows the budget again by cost center, Superintendent Provost pointed out that the budget is actually \$42,236,850. The difference is approximately \$7mil for indirect costs, including employee benefits such as health insurance. The costs are covered in the city budget; however they are considered school costs which contributes to net school spending.

There are FY budget staffing changes that are listed in the budget book (pg. 107) and these were approved after the FY22 budget was approved. The vast majority of the positions were for ESPs who were added as a result of students coming to the schools presenting with problems that weren’t there prior to COVID. For FY23, there is a reduction of 5.94 FTEs. On page 112 of the budge book there is a list of expenditures that will be funded using COVID Relief Funds. After these funds are expended, there will be approximately \$1.7 remaining for use in FY24. The full school budget can be found on the district website.

Finance Minutes
NPS Presentation

Councilor LaBarge wondered if the proposed increase was going to be enough for teacher salaries. She is wondering what the plan is to retain teachers. She has heard that they are leaving the district because they don't make enough money here. What can be done to offer a competitive salary? Superintendent Provost responded that over the course of the past two collective bargaining sessions there has been an effort to raise the wages of school teachers. The goal of the last contract was to get teachers to the median or above for Hampshire County. That goal was reached and the goal of the current discussion to push this even further. Superintendent Provost feels that the retention of licensed staff has been good; staffing retention rate information is available on the Department of Education website. The FY22 retention rate is 90% compared to a statewide average of 86.8 %. The most challenging area is unlicensed staff. ESPs are one of the lower paid positions in the district.

Councilor Moulton commented that he is glad that there has been a focus on increasing pay for ESPs because they have shouldered a lot of responsibility during the pandemic. Looking at the budget staffing changes between FY22 and FY23 regarding ESPs, he wondered what the rationale was for reducing ESPs since this is the most challenging area to staff. In the COVID relief fund, there is a proposal to spend \$99k to reinstate Grade 1 ESPs only. Superintendent Provost noted that the needs of the school population change almost on a daily basis. When developing a budget, the specific ESP assignments are evaluated to see if a particular need will exist in the following year. Based on that analysis, it was felt that there was flexibility to do the proposed reductions in ESPs. The first grade ESPs historically did not exist in the budget. They were added last year to help support first grade classes. The 1st grade ESPs were being pulled on a regular basis to fulfill a more critical role. The reality is that they weren't being utilized in the way that was planned, so it was an easy decision to remove these positions from the budget. The School Committee accepted that these positions were not as critical as other positions in the district. He feels that there is enough turnover in ESPs in a given year that it is unlikely that this will result in layoffs in FY24.

Councilor Nash reports that a member of the Bridge Street School Council provided a spreadsheet from DECI that allows for ranking districts in terms of per pupil spending. Using the 2020 numbers, Northampton ranks in the lower 1/3 for total per pupil spending @ \$15,929. Superintendent Provost commented that this comes down to regional variability and district type. It costs varying amounts of money for education in other parts of the state. The main reason is that the cost of living is different as are wages. He notes that the other school systems in the bottom 1/3 of the list are also from our part of the state. Northampton is 121 from the bottom. Other districts are Easthampton (45 from the bottom), West Springfield (57 from the bottom), Belchertown (65 from the bottom), Hatfield (66...), South Hadley (72...), Granby (76...), Westfield (99...) and Longmeadow (102...). All of these communities are right around this area and they are preK-12 districts. Dr. Provost indicates that the type of district that a municipality has will affect the per pupil cost. Those districts in the top 1/3 of the list may be regionalized grades 6 – 12 but may still have their own district below grade 6. A smaller number of students will drive up the per pupil cost. The top 1/3 is also dominated by vocational schools. The cost for a vocational education is inherently higher than a traditional preK – 12 education. Vocational schools have two faculties, academic and vocational. They also have more expensive equipment. In terms of adequacy, Dr. Provost looks at actual net school spending as a percentage of the required net school spending. In FY19 Northampton was spending 125% of the required amount. The statewide average for that year was 126%. He feels that the minimum required amount is not adequate. He feels that 125-126% is a good place to be. He notes that every district has a different minimum number.

Councilor Nash asked about the contract step system and how annual increases might play out. Dr. Provost focused on the teacher contracts which is the most

Finance Minutes
NPS Presentation

complex of the bargaining units. There is a salary grid that is based upon steps and lanes. A step is a year of experience in education. Every year a teacher is employed they move up a step until they reach the top step. The movement between each step is 4-1/2 percent. When they reach the top they are “stepped out”. Teachers that are stepped out only make COLA. For teachers who are stepping up, they make 4-1/2 percent plus COLA. There is also a column system and teachers can move into different columns by getting higher levels of education. In order to remain licensed, a teacher must earn educational credits. Teachers make wage increases in one of three ways: continuous employment in the district (steps), increasing education (columns), and COLAs. Other units in the district don’t have a column system for higher levels of education.

Councilor Nash asked about the NPS efforts during the pandemic, how effective were the efforts, and how many remain in place. Dr. Provost focused on 3rd grade reading. Each year the school put a number of resources in place to help students recover. At the beginning of the year, 25% of the 3rd graders were at moderate or high risk for reading problems. Through a new program called Lift Off Learning, the moderate or high risk level was reduced to 18%. For math, 36% started 3rd grade at with moderate or high risk for math problems. By the end of the year, this has been reduced to 14%. Resources are being flexed by reprogramming from middle school. Regarding social/emotional support, screeners for problems found that younger students bounced back more quickly than older students. The district has entered into collaboration with CSO to address the middle/high school gap in social/emotional risk behavior at the middle and high school level.

Councilor Nash raised a question about the narrative in the budget book pertaining to NPS. Dr. Provost suggested that there are indicators that state and federal funding will be level funded or will experience modest reductions in aid over the next few years. He wondered what cost containing measures are necessary to avoid a funding cliff in 2024 or 2025. Dr. Provost reports that the amount of state support being received in Northampton is less than it was 20 years ago. He believes that the future will be much like the past. He hopes that the fair share amendment will result in an infusion of cash. Dr. Provost builds his budget based on funds that are available. He believes that Northampton will likely experience a \$300,000 shortfall next year (more likely in the range of \$400,000 - \$600,000 range) which will equate to 6 teachers or 16 ESPs. In upcoming years 5-1/2 – 6% per year will likely be needed to keep the same level of services in future years.

Mayor Sciarra notes that this year’s budget increase is the second largest increase in 15 years.

Councilor LaBarge asked Mayor Sciarra why she voted against the increase in the School Committee budget. Mayor Sciarra commented that the school committee acknowledged that there were no recurring funds to back up the budget; Mayor Sciarra feels that this is not a responsible way to budget. Creating a larger budget hole that will affect people’s employment is concerning to Mayor Sciarra. Moving forward the problem will be compounded. The schools are feeling like they need the support right now. Mayor Sciarra notes that there will need to be work done to figure out how to make up all of the one-time funds that are being used.

Councilor Elkins states that she is really concerned about the projections and the deficit that the city is placing itself in. She had bought into the city’s long term financial plans with the recent overrides; she holds out hope that the sheer force of communities hurt by the unfair funding formula will somehow force a change at the state level.

Councilor Moulton concurs with Councilor Elkins. Mayor Sciarra reported that delaying borrowing is one way in which additional money is being provided. By not having borrowing hit the FY23 budget, the city will be saving over

Finance Minutes
NPS Presentation

\$500,000. Cutting requests from other departments is another way that the additional money was obtained. \$230,000 was scheduled to be added to the fiscal stabilization fund, and this will not be happening. The city will bond in September, and this may result in paying ¼ percent more on borrowing. Mayor Sciarra explains that because the city has maintained a high bond rating, the city can borrow at the lowest possible rate. The city was also able to refinance some of its debt and will be saving approximately \$430,000 over the next 10 years.

Councilor Gore thanked Dr. Provost for his presentation and the Mayor for approving the school committee budget. Councilors got a lot of e-mails explaining that the city loses ESPs because they don't get paid enough. She wondered where the additional funds that the Mayor has added will go. Dr. Provost explained that the additional funds were not for positions that currently exist, but were added to create flexibility for negotiation. Where the money ends up will be determined by the negotiation process.

Councilor Foster is frustrated with the funding formula. She comments that teachers are leaving the profession in record numbers. She also is concerned about keeping students in the district.

Councilor Foster recalls that there was talk about delaying use of pesticides on school playing fields. Dr. Provost explained that the School Committee adopted a resolution to end the use of pesticides on school playing fields, and notes that the only fields where pesticides are used are a crabgrass pre-emergent at the high school playing fields. There is a plan to go fully organic, but the cost is \$71,000. The policy that was adopted by the School Committee provided for a three-year implementation plan. This amount will need to be absorbed to do the transition to organics. Councilor Foster wondered about the plan to restructure teams in grade six. Dr. Provost reports that a sixth grade teacher position will remain, but the team structure will be reduced from three teams to two teams. By restructuring the teams, teachers will be able to reduce the number of subjects that they are required to teach.

Mayor Sciarra feels that the formulas at the state level are completely unfair and this has had a huge impact on Northampton. There is huge money elsewhere and yet schools still need to fight for funding.

Councilor Maiore noticed that there is a reduction in ESP staffing in grade six and wondered if this was as a result of restructuring. Dr. Provost stated that it was; each team had one ESP assigned, and having one less team meant one less ESP was needed. Councilor Maiore hopes with the new administration coming in at the governor's level, that there will be some changes made.

Chief Jody Kasper was present to talk about the Northampton Police Department Budget. She notes that there are very few changes to the upcoming budget. The proposed budget is \$6,201,817. The personnel budget remains unchanged while the ordinary maintenance budget includes a \$31,434 decrease. The IT department took over IT services for the police department; the OOM budget remains at \$0.00 with vehicles now being part of the capital improvement plan. To advise on the upcoming budget, Chief Kasper did a two-year lookback. Supply costs will be increasing, including fuel costs; however the Chief has not asked for an increase in her budget. She knows that the city is under financial strain from all departments and she will work with what she has.

NPD Presentation

Chief Kasper reports that there are mental health clinicians working alongside the officers and some cases calls have been rerouted to the restorative justice program. The department has updated its policies and procedures to comply with the police reform law, and the department continues a commitment to transparency by releasing information through its open data portal. Northampton was also the first PD in the Commonwealth to join the 30X30 initiative committing itself to diversity in hiring. The department has

Finance Minutes
NPD Presentation

maintained accreditation status since 2002. Chief Kasper is concerned about the department's ability to respond to calls for help; when people call for help, they expect and deserve prompt response by highly skilled officers.

Councilor Gore asked what impact the Dept. of Community Care will have to alleviate the calls that the police department has been unable to respond to. Chief Kasper is unable to say what the impact will be. The Dept. of Community Care is still in the dev Last year Chief Kasper talked about the impact of defunding the police department in FY2020, and she feels that the department has still not recovered from this. Five police officers were cut as was the entire vehicle budget. The losses have had a significant and long term impact on NPD in terms of employee morale and employee retention. Twenty-eight percent of the staff have left (including fourteen resignations and three retirements). Those who resigned took with them thousands of hours of academy and field training. Conservatively, it costs the city \$46,000 to train a single officer. The department is struggling currently to maintain staffing levels and is forced to use overtime to meet the staffing requirements. Between April 16 and May 31st, officers were forced to work 16 hour shifts over eighteen times and 12 hour shifts twenty-six times to meet minimum staffing levels. This current conditions are contributing to loss of morale, burnout and loss of trained officers. There has been a thirty-two percent decrease in applications since FY 2020.

Chief Kasper reports that the department is not meeting community demand. Since May 20th, (eleven days) there have been no officers available to respond to fifty-three calls, including medical calls, intrusion alarms, 911 hang-up calls, trespassing calls, traffic collisions, thefts, and disturbances. The department typically handles about 33,000 calls per year.

elopmental stage and there is a lot of work that needs to be done. What she can say is that as of July 1, 2022, there is no one available to help the police department with calls. She is looking at other agencies that have alternative models of policing to see what types of calls alternative responders will be able to handle.

Councilor Foster asked about the clinicians within the police department and wondered how they are funded. Chief Kasper states that it is a Department of Mental Health grant. Councilor Foster appreciates that the Chief has sought this option for Northampton. Councilor Foster wondered how the restorative justice program was funded. Chief Kasper notes that it is a \$2,500 annual fee to participate. Volunteers run the circles where the mediation is done. The program is called C4RJ and is run out of the eastern part of the state. Councilor Foster wonders what has been done to support the officers who have stayed. Chief Kasper notes that many people don't want to be in the field any longer or may not want to work in this particular community. There are officers who are committed to the profession. She continues to be a voice for everyone in the department. She states that having to force people to extend their shift an additional eight hours per day is not good for morale, liability, safety, mental health, etc. The department is understaffed. She also feels it is important to provide them with the training resources that they need.

Member of the public Gwen Nabad asked how people in the community could not use the police resources as much, perhaps considering neighborhood watch or a direct line to the Dept. of Community Care. Chief Kasper feels that the Dept. of Community Care is being developed to explore just these types of options. Today there is no answer to this question. Chief Kasper states that neighborhood watch programs typically increase work; police officers liaise with community leaders, when neighbors are looking for crime this tends to increase calls to the police because there are more eyes out there to look for things that are suspicious.

Finance Minutes
NPD Presentation

Councilor Elkins points out that the question of overtime and how this relates to a safety factor that is not often talked about. It is a real compromise in terms of safety and judgement. She wonders how this community stacks up against other communities in the area of recruitment. Chief Kasper noted that years ago former Chief Sienkiewicz made a decision to leave civil service. Those who are working in civil service communities are required to pick from a list of individuals on the civil service list. They can't consider an otherwise great recruit. Because Northampton is not part of the civil service process, there is more flexibility in hiring. Candidates with unique skills might be a great fit for this community and this is advantageous for Northampton.

Councilor Nash reports that councilors can be involved in the interview process for hiring new police officers. He can attest to the ways that the department is trying to draw in candidates. It is a progressive forward thinking police department. He has witnessed the harm that has gone on in the department as a result of the cuts, and feels that one of the ways to begin healing is to approve the proposed police budget and to think of other ways to help with morale.

Councilor LaBarge thanked the Chief and the staff for the time that the department has been spending in Ward 6. She wondered if the cost of supplies had increased and the Chief responded that the cost of supplies has increased, including fuel. Chief Kasper reports that there are usually 4 – 5 officers out on the street during the day. At night that number can drop to 3 officers and this is not adequate for a city with 30,000 people. Councilor LaBarge asked why people have left the department and Chief Kasper reports that it was a combination of not feeling valued by the community any longer and pay.

Councilor Maiore agrees that the Dept. of Community Care should be able to help with the call volume. This is why she was so concerned with the budgeting for that department. Mayor Sciarra states that there has been some initial work done to look at call logs to determine which types of calls could be handled by the Department of Community Care (DCC).

Items Referred to
Committee

Items Referred to Finance Committee on 5/19/2022

- 22.111 An Order to Approve FY2023 General Fund Budget
- 22.112 An Order to Approve FY 2023 Sewer Enterprise Fund Budget
- 22.113 An Order to Approve FY 2023 Water Enterprise Fund Budget
- 22.114 An Order to Approve FY 2023 Solid Waste Enterprise Fund Budget
- 22.115 An Order to Approve FY 2023 Stormwater and Flood Control Enterprise Fund Budget
- 22.116 An Order to Approve FY2023 Revolving Funds

Councilor Nash made a motion to move all of the orders forward to the full city council with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 Yes (Moulton, Nash, LaBarge, Maiore), 0 No.

Councilor Nash feels that the Council/Finance Committee has done superior outreach; the hearing was very well publicized and has been run in an orderly way. He feels that he has the bulk of information needed to move forward on next year's budget.

Councilor Moulton states that the presentations were impressive and there was a lot of information provided to the committee. Councilor Maiore agrees.

Motion to close the public hearing was made by Councilor Nash and seconded by Councilor LaBarge. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 Yes (Nash, LaBarge, Maiore, Moulton), 0 No.

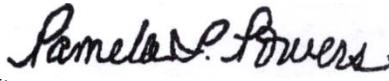
Adjourn Finance

Motion to adjourn the Finance Committee was made by Councilor Nash and seconded by Councilor LaBarge. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 Yes (LaBarge, Maiore, Moulton, Nash), 0 No.

Adjourn

Adjourn

At 7:53 pm Councilor Moulton moved to adjourn the City Council meeting; Councilor LaBarge seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 9 Yes (Foster, Gore, Jarrett, LaBarge, Maiore, Moulton, Nash, Elkins, Perry), 0 No.



Attest: _____, City Clerk