



Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council

Councilor David A. Murphy, Chair

Councilor Maureen T. Carney

Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge

Councilor James Nash

**City Council Chambers, 212 Main Street
Wallace J. Puchalski Municipal Building
Northampton, MA**

Meeting Date: December 15, 2016

MEETING MINUTES

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 7:46 p.m. Councilor Murphy called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** On a roll call the following committee members were present: Councilor Murphy, Carney, LaBarge and Nash. Also present from the City Council were: Councilors Bidwell, O'Donnell, Klein, Sciarra and Dwight.
3. **Approve Minutes Of November 17, 2016 Meeting:** Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.
4. **Financial Orders**

A. 16.216 An Order To Authorize The Purchase Of 5.5 Acres On Burts Pit Road

Councilor LaBarge moved to return a positive recommendation back to the full City Council; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Sarah LaValley was present to talk about the orders before the committee this evening.

This order is the only order discussed tonight that is not a Community Preservation Committee recommendation. It is also the only acquisition that has not yet been approved by the City Council. The property sits directly adjacent to the Burts Bog project. The owner came in to talk about possible development of the 5.5 acres. The land is developable; it would require a wetlands crossing which he would be able to do by law. There is enough space on this lot to build a house. The owner has also expressed an interest in buying a piece of developable land that is part of the Burts Bog project.

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Ms. LaValley explained that the Burts Marsh name will be changed to Burts Bog as a result of the land status. The bog itself sits between Stone Ridge Road, Crestview and Ellington. Councilor LaBarge recalls that there are houses that sit in close proximity to the bog on Ellington. There were problems with beaver dams in this location in the past.

Ms. LaValley explained that the property is formerly a peat bog that was part of the Northampton State Hospital property. The state hospital dug up the peat for farming. It is the only such bog in Northampton and in western Massachusetts.

Councilor Dwight asked what the difference was between a bog and a marsh. Ms. LaValley explained that bogs have more acidic environments and as a result they do not have as many species as a marsh would. There is definitely less plant growth in a bog.

**B. 16.218 - 16.225 Community Preservation Committee Recommendations
For Funding**

**16.218 Beaver Brook/Broad Brook Greenway
Improvements, Broad Brook Coalition and Leeds Civic
Association: \$16,947**

Councilor LaBarge moved to return a positive recommendation back to the full City Council; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

A map shows that the land represented in this order sits near Route 9. Between Route 9 and the parcel there is a wetlands area that is not easily accessible. The Broad Brook Coalition and the Leeds Civic Association have teamed up to put together a proposal to add a small parking area, a corrosion control facility, trails, picnic areas and other amenities to allow visitors in this area. Even with the trails, it will still be difficult to access the wetlands. The plans show that the upgrades will take place between Route 9 and the wetlands only.

Councilor LaBarge thinks that the project is excellent. She notes that the Leeds Civic Association is comprised of volunteers working together. Ms. LaValley agrees. She notes that the property was acquired in 2010 and the Community Preservation Committee felt this was a great collaborative project. Councilor Klein agrees; people who live in Leeds have an enormous amount of pride and involvement with the natural environment around the neighborhoods. Everyone in the Association works hard to keep the woods pristine; this is a perfect example of a community group contributing to the City in an incredible way. Councilor LaBarge reflected that it has always been this way in Leeds.

Councilor Bidwell asked about the timetable for the project. Ms. LaValley explained that all of the permitting requirements have been met; the project will begin in the spring once the snow melts.

**16.219 Burts Bog Affordable Housing and Open Space, Office
of Planning and Sustainability: \$234,700**

Councilor LaBarge moved to return a positive recommendation back to the full City Council; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Ms. LaValley explained that this project is in the same area that was previously discussed this evening. The project has already been approved by the City Council. Ms LaValley presented a map showing the areas that will be preserved as “open space” and the area that will be sold at market rate as well as three affordable housing lots. The affordable lots may go to Habitat for Humanity and will be in perpetuity making them affordable to future buyers.

Councilor Murphy asked whether the plans included land on Overlook that was to be made affordable; Ms. LaValley explained that the developer is retaining some lots that are not shown.

Councilor LaBarge believes that the project is very valuable especially adding affordable homes. By preserving 114 acres everything is starting to flow with the trails reaching Mineral Hills and other areas.

Councilor O'Donnell asked how the 100% of area median income was decided upon. Ms. LaValley explained that some of the SRO units go down to 60% AMI, but because these are single family homes, 100% is generally the standard. It is also the most that can be used for CPA awards. Councilor O'Donnell recalls that affordability is defined as 80% of area median in City codes, which is just for rental, while home ownership can extend up to 100%. Ms. LaValley notes that under the CPA law homeownership or rental could be 100% of AMI. The market forces that drive this make 100% a lot easier to work with. She also notes that it goes even higher for senior affordability units.

Councilor Murphy understands that the value is capped; appreciation cannot skyrocket. These are not subsidized so homeowners need to be able to afford to buy them. When they are sold they have to remain affordable to the next buyer. Ms. LaValley notes that there will be a deed restriction placed on the property. Any future buyers will also need to qualify to buy the home.

Councilor Dwight asked what the AMI is for Northampton; Ms. LaValley believes it is around \$40,000 for one person. She will double check the numbers to be sure.

Councilor LaBarge asked if there were a few homes that were classified as affordable. Councilor Murphy stated that there were. Ms. LaValley stated that in this area there will be market rate properties as well as affordable. Councilor Bidwell asked whether the RFP will be sent out; Ms. LaValley stated that it would. Councilor Bidwell noted that likely Habitat for Humanity would be one of the organizations that would be qualified to respond to the RFP.

16.220 Broad Brook to Beaver Brook Acquisition, Northampton Conservation Commission: \$80,000

Councilor LaBarge moved to return a positive recommendation back to the full City Council; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

This property sits between the Fitzgerald Lake conservation area to the east and the Broad Brook Greenway to the west. This parcel will fill the gap between parcels that are protected on Route 9 and North Farms Road.

**16.221 Connecticut River Greenway Improvements,
Northampton Office of Planning and Sustainability: \$90,000**

Councilor LaBarge moved to return a positive recommendation back to the full City Council; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Ms. LaValley reports that this project has been in development for many years. The initial project had some cost overruns due to unforeseen circumstances. This resulted in paving projects left uncompleted as well as incomplete work to the dock to make it handicap accessible. The City has already received a grant in the amount of \$90,000. This order will address the matching contribution required by the City.

Councilor Bidwell remarked about the property in general. It is been a long time since the sighting of the property and the completion of the project; he feels it is important to complete the remaining paving work.

Councilor Murphy asked if there were plans to put restrooms at the site. Ms. LaValley stated that Northampton Community Rowing is responsible for the programming at that location and she is not sure what their plans are. Councilor Bidwell did not see any plans developing to install bathrooms in the foreseeable future. Currently there is no plumbing available at that location for water and sewer.

**16.222 Hampshire County Courthouse Restoration,
Hampshire Council of Governments: \$100,000**

Councilor LaBarge moved to return a positive recommendation back to the full City Council; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Ms. LaValley reports that CPA funds were used in a previous project to refurbish the courthouse steps. The Council of Government's next plan is to deal with the building's tower. Ms. LaValley provided pictures showing that there were plants growing out of the parapet, damage to the mortar, and daylight coming in through cracks in the walls. These monies will be used to match bond bill funds that are not currently available. If the funds are not available from the state, then these funds would be returned to the committee.

Councilor LaBarge asked the age of the courthouse; Ms. LaValley stated that the building is post Shay's Rebellion which took place on the lawn at that location.

Councilor Dwight reports that the courthouse is 129 years old.

16.223 51 Main Street Historic Building Study, Smith Charities: \$10,000

Councilor LaBarge moved to return a positive recommendation back to the full City Council; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 3 Yes, 0 No, 1 Abstention (Councilor Murphy).

Smith Charities has requested funds for a study of the building. The will of Oliver Smith prevents Smith Charities from using any of its funds for anything other than charitable purposes. Repairs to the historic building are necessary as the brownstone is flaking apart and on the second floor there is evidence of flaking paint and other damage.

The monies would only be used to fund a study to find out what the needs are. Additional funds would be required to perform the actual renovations. Smith Charities is also prevented from using any of its funds for the purpose of capital projects. Councilor Klein asked whether Smith Charities wanted to apply for funds for repairs. Ms. LaValley states that while the organization could come back and ask for funds to undertake the repair projects, the CPC made it clear that it was highly unlikely that funds would be available for this purpose.

Councilor Murphy indicated that he is Northampton's elected representative to Smith Charities. It is for this reason that he will be abstaining from this and any other vote for this organization.

Councilor Dwight asked about the repair process for the flaking brownstone. Ms. LaValley indicated that Smith Charities would need to seek expert opinion about this. Councilor Murphy noted that the brownstone would need to be treated so that it will stop flaking. He notes that it is the same stone that is in the Smithsonian. It comes from a quarry in Glastonbury Connecticut. The quarry is no longer operating and will not allow any further brownstone to be taken. It is the oldest building on that block along Main Street. Oliver Smith died before the civil war and his will is very specific. The funds must be invested in real estate mortgages and then all of the proceeds are supposed to be given away to beneficiaries. A small portion of the funds are used to sustain the operations, while most of the funds are given away. A small amount of money goes to Smith Voke school each year.

Councilor Klein asked if there was a long range plan once the study is produced. Ms. LaValley notes that Smith Charities intends to address funding the improvement projects once the study is complete. They are not sure what the results will be nor do they have a clear understanding about what their options are moving forward.

Councilor Murphy points out that the building has its original slate roof. Windows have been replaced and other work has been done. What has really hindered the organization is the real estate market.

Councilor Klein's concern is that if monies are being used to fund a study, she wonders if the organization has been thinking about how the money is going to be raised to complete the projects. When looking at a capital improvement plan, you think long range about the

kinds of things that need to be done. She is surprised that this wasn't done hand-in-hand with the study.

Ms. LaValley points out that there is underutilized space in the building that could be rented out in the future.

16.224 Mineral Hills Acquisition, Northampton Conservation Commission: \$240,000

Councilor LaBarge moved to return a positive recommendation back to the full City Council; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Ms. LaValley presented a map showing the location within in the City. It has frontage on Glendale Road and Route 66. The location was previously approved for a 25 house subdivision. It includes a cold water stream. There are four adjacent lots being developed for affordable housing.

Councilor LaBarge went to a hearing where changing the 25 housing subdivision was discussed and changed to four affordable homes. If the fifty three acres are not kept as open space then there is the threat of the land being developed. The land has abundant wild life and it is critical to protect the 53 acres.

16.225 Conservation Fund, Northampton Conservation Commission: \$80,000

Councilor LaBarge moved to return a positive recommendation back to the full City Council; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Ms. LaValley points out that this request has been made each year; this is the eleventh CPA request to fund this for "fast action" transactions.

Councilor O'Donnell asked about the statement "meets the goals of the Northampton sustainability plan"; Ms. LaValley indicated that each project that comes forward will meet the plan. Councilor O'Donnell asked about the amount; Ms. LaValley noted that this was the amount requested based on projections. The requests have been as high as \$100,000 and as low as \$10,000.

Councilor Bidwell asked if funds were used for items like option payments, due diligence expenses, etc. Ms. LaValley explained that options payments are generally not required because the Community Preservation Commission has a good track record for pre application things. The monies will be used for surveys, title searches, hazardous waste assessments, etc. Councilor Bidwell wondered what happens when final decisions are made and the acquisitions come through. Ms. LaValley explained that the funds are not replenished as the account is not a revolving fund.

Councilor LaBarge reminded the committee that this is something the committee votes on yearly.

5. New Business: None

6. Adjourn: At 8:25 p.m. Councilor LaBarge moved to adjourn the meeting; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Prepared by:

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