



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*

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

Meeting Date: February 20, 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 7:17 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, Karen Foster, Alex Jarrett, Rachel Maiore and Jim Nash.
3. **Approval of Minutes From The Previous Meeting**
 - A. **Minutes of January 14, 2020 Organizational Meeting and February 6, 2020**
Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of January 14, 2020 and February 6, 2020. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.
4. **Financial Orders**
 - A. **20.025 An Order to Adjust Income Limit For Senior Tax Deferral Program**
Councilor Sciarra read the order.

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

This is an extension of an existing exemption program which the city has been offering for years, Mayor Narkewicz explained. Under the base law, the maximum income limit is set at \$20,000 in gross receipts from all sources. Anyone over 65 who meets the income limit can essentially defer taxes until such time as he or she transfers the property or becomes deceased. When the property is eventually transferred, then the taxes are paid to the city.

In doing research on this as part of the very well-attended property tax relief workshop, Mayor's office staff determined that the city had the ability to extend it even further. The order essentially allows the city to set the income limit at the highest possible level, which is the state 'circuit breaker' limit which is currently

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\$60,000. Seniors with gross income from all sources that does not exceed \$60,000 would be eligible. He brings this forward and requests City Council approval in the spirit of making every effort to extend all possible tax relief to seniors in the community. Seniors can choose to defer all or just a part of their taxes.

Per Massachusetts General Law, 5% annual interest is charged on deferred taxes, he confirmed.

The goal is to enable seniors to stay in their home by using the equity in their home to defer taxes until the end of their ownership. Household income cannot exceed \$60,000, Mayor Narkewicz clarified. Rather than being a fixed amount, the limit on gross receipts is tied to the income limit for a single person not head of household under the state 'circuit breaker' program, he reiterated.

Councilor Nash said he thinks it is a great idea since sometimes in the past seniors may have been forced involuntarily into arrears because of not having the ability to pay. Having a program to allow people to legally defer this expense is ideal.

Mayor Narkewicz agreed, noting that, in the case of back taxes, the interest rate is much higher.

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

Mayor Narkewicz noted that a video of the tax relief workshop is available for people who were not able to attend.

B. 20.026 An Order To Accept DA Sullivan \$10,000 Gift For Digital Display And Presentation System

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

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

DA Sullivan and Sons, Inc., the city's oldest business, has had a practice in recent years of making generous donations to the city for various things such as the desks at which councilors are sitting, Mayor Narkewicz related. For those who haven't been to a School Committee meeting recently, JFK Middle School still has the 'old school' a/v system in the community room with an LCD projector hanging upside down from the ceiling. The proposal is to upgrade the community room to a digital display system similar to the one in council chambers that Open Media can tap into as part of its live broadcast of School Committee meetings. He brought the issue to the School Committee at its last meeting and members unanimously supported it.

Councilor Sciarra called the motion to a vote, and it passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

C. 20.027 An Order To Grant Easement To National Grid In Conjunction With WWTP Upgrades

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

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

Those who toured the Waste Water Treatment Plant recently know that massive electrical upgrades are planned there to bring the outdated circuitry and wiring from the 1960's and '70's up to modern code, Mayor Narkewicz reminded. The utility poles to be installed by National Grid are to bring a new feed into the plant.

Councilor Jarret asked if there is a current easement and Mayor Narkewicz said he is not sure. If there is a prior easement, he believes it would just become null and void.

Councilor Jarrett asked if there is a desire on the city's part to encourage or require underground power lines as opposed to overhead.

He doesn't know if they have a formal policy of encouraging underground; he thinks it's judged on a case-by-case basis, Mayor Narkewicz responded. It's obviously more expensive, but, in a perfect world, in New England, if they could go back and do it over they'd probably put them underground.

On that point, they have had discussions about pole placement down in the Meadows and trying to create standards about where underground wires would be appropriate, Councilor Dwight advised. The problem in the Meadows is that it is historical floodplain and putting electrical service underground is virtually putting it underwater. In that case there is a policy but there is not an overarching policy about underground wiring, he confirmed.

Councilor Sciarra called the motion to a vote, and it passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

D. 20.028 An Order Authorizing Acquisition Of Easements for The Laying Out of Finn Street As A Public Way

Councilor Sciarra read the order. Members agreed by consent to waive the reading of the metes and bounds description of the easement.

Councilor Sciarra read the list of titleholders and lien holders to the right-of-way.

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

City officials are just laying out and accepting Finn Street as a public way as they should have when it was first constructed, Mayor Narkewicz explained. Occasionally in preparation for a project staff will find that a record is missing. It is clearly a public way; the city has been maintaining and plowing it. Because the city is receiving funding as part of the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a review of records determined that Finn Street and a small section of North Street were never formally accepted. They are asking the council to go back and correct a historical omission so they qualify for state and federal funding.

The Planning Board positively recommended the street's acceptance in October of 2019 and the City Services Committee held a public hearing in November, Councilor Sciarra noted.

At the street layout public hearing, DPW Director LaScaleia presented the street acceptance petitions, Councilor LaBarge reported. There were no objections whatsoever although two abutters attended to ask general questions about the King Street reconstruction project.

Councilor Thorpe informed those present that he filed a disclosure of a potential conflict of interest because the title holders at 166 King Street, Northampton are his current landlords at 97 South Street and allowed

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him to put a sign on their property for the election. He feels he can perform his official duties objectively and fairly, he confirmed.

Councilor Nash confirmed Councilor's LaBarge's account of the hearing and assured his colleagues that no concern has been expressed around the order of taking.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

E. 20.029 An Order Authorizing Acquisition of Easements for The Laying Out Of North Street As A Public Way

Councilor Sciarra read the order

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

This is the same exact process for a different street, Mayor Narkewicz advised. The order applies to the small section of North Street off of King Street that goes under the overpass.

Councilor Sciarra pointed out a discrepancy in the dates listed for the plan referenced in the order. Mayor Narkewicz said he would verify the correct date with the city solicitor for second reading.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice vote.

F. 20.030 An Order To Accept Donation Of Voting Signs

Councilor Sciarra read the order

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

Mayor Narkewicz said he was just in Boston and noticed 'Vote – there is an election March 3rd' signs around town. Coincidentally Rigali Walder Orthodontics offered to donate 'Vote Today' signs that could be put out around the city reminding people to vote on the day of the election.

Councilor Quinlan asked if there is a plan to put them out and where. The City Clerk's office will be in charge of that but he would assume they might be placed at key intersections and possibly in front of voting locations, Mayor Narkewicz responded.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by voice 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 LaBarge moved to adjourn. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion carried on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

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