



*CITY COUNCIL MEETING
CONDUCTED AS AN ON-LINE ZOOM MEETING
Northampton, MA*

Roll Call

A special meeting of the City Council (FY2022 Budget Hearing) was called to order by City Council President Gina-Louise Sciarra. At 5:01 p.m. on a roll call the following City Councilors were present:

At-Large Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra	At-Large Councilor William H. Dwight
Ward 1 Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.	Ward 5 Councilor Alex Jarrett
Ward 3 Councilor James B. Nash	Ward 7 Councilor Rachel Maiore
Ward 4 Councilor John Thorpe	

Ward 2 Councilor Karen Foster and Ward 6 Councilor Marianne LaBarge were missing on roll call but were present when the meeting when it reconvened at 5:30 p.m.

Appointment of Charlene Nardi as Finance Director

21.232 Appointment of Charlene Nardi as Finance Director

Mayor Narkewicz said it was his great pleasure to introduce Charlene Nardi, his appointee to become the city's finance director effective June 30th upon the retirement of current Finance Director Susan Wright. As many may know, Ms. Nardi has served as the town administrator for the Town of Williamsburg since 2011 and prior to that served for four years as town administrator in Chesterfield. She was formerly the Town Clerk in Williamsburg and an elected school committee member. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in business from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and will bring a wealth of administrative, budgetary and leadership skills to the city's financial team. He is honored to present her for appointment tonight.

Councilor Dwight offered his unequivocal endorsement and moved to request approval of Charlene Nardi's appointment as the finance director of the City of Northampton. Councilor Quinlan seconded.

Councilors expressed their pleasure at meeting Ms. Nardi in person. As a member of the screening committee, Councilor Sciarra commented that she was impressed by Ms. Nardi's poise and depth of experience and her perceived patience and willingness to explain complex financial procedures. As a member of City Services, the standing committee that reviews appointments, Councilor Quinlan commented favorably on Ms. Nardi's humility in acknowledging that she doesn't yet know everything there is to know and is prepared to accept whatever professional development opportunities are available to equip herself to handle the job.

The motion carried 7:0 by roll call vote with Councilors LaBarge and Foster absent.

Recess

Recess

The City Council recessed at 5:12 p.m. and reconvened at 5:32 p.m.

Public Hearing on FY2022 Budget

Public Hearing on FY2022 Budget

Councilor Sciarra read the legal notice for the FY2022 budget hearing. Councilor Dwight moved to open the public hearing. Councilor Jarrett seconded. The motion passed unanimously 9:0 by roll call vote.

Councilor Sciarra announced that the meeting is being audio and video recorded.

Tonight is the first night of the budget hearing, and the hearing will continue tomorrow night at 5:30 p.m., she advised. She thanked all those present from the public and the city. The hearing will begin with presentations from department heads, after which she will open the floor to public comment.

Departmental Budget Presentations

Health Department – Health Department Director Merridith O'Leary

Director O'Leary briefly summarized her department's accomplishments over the past fiscal year and explained plans for increasing health department staffing to expand its capacity.

In the past three years, Massachusetts has declared five public health emergencies with COVID-19 being the latest and the one that has shed light on how important it is to have public health infrastructure in place to prepare for and respond to such emergencies, Director O'Leary related. Public health itself has been perennially undervalued throughout the state, region and nation. When public health is working, it is invisible and what's invisible is almost always taken for granted. By supporting her request to add an assistant director, a second full-time equivalent (FTE) public health nurse and a youth prevention coordinator to her budget, the Mayor has shown his appreciation for her department and the work they have done over the past 15 months in the best way possible.

The department's focus over the past year has obviously been COVID-19. They have responded to over 3,000 COVID complaints, launched a county-wide public health nursing collaborative, investigated over 2,500 COVID cases, provided COVID-19 testing for Northampton residents, municipal employees, schools, businesses and residents and stood up a regional vaccination site which has administered over 30,000 vaccines. In addition, the Northampton Health Department prevention team continued its multi-sector collaborations as part of its substance abuse and opioid prevention services, including providing support to families and the recovery community. This year alone, the department has been awarded over \$2.5 million in grants with a grand total of over \$6 million since she started with the city 10 years ago. They have received grants for emergency preparedness, operational readiness, substance abuse prevention and response and a shared health information data base. Just a week ago, they were awarded a Public Health Excellence grant to allow them to expand that database to provide Hampshire County health departments with timely data in regard to infectious disease and management.

Throughout the last 15 months, if she could have one wish for her department it would have been to have an assistant health director, Ms. O'Leary continued. Northampton is a leader in the field of public health, and its constituents, businesses and visitors alike expect the standard of care and service they have been able to provide. Having someone versed in all operations of the health department and able to provide support both on COVID and on normal health department operations would have helped immensely. Moving forward, she sees the assistant health director as an extension of the health director and responsible for the planning, implementation and enforcement of public health and environmental laws and regulations. He or she would design and implement preventative health and environmental programs, be a direct support to the director, establish long- and short-term plans and objectives and work on big-picture public health interventions. This person would be able to step in when the health director is not available.

In support of the second public health nurse position, throughout COVID-19, the public health nurse stood on the front lines educating the public, tracing contacts, giving quarantine and self-isolation guidance and providing vaccinations, Ms. O'Leary reminded. This was not anything new to public health nursing job descriptions but was just highlighted during the pandemic with words like contact tracing and isolation becoming part of everyone's vernacular. With COVID-19 not being eradicated anytime soon, they will definitely still need support to continue to provide these services to residents and businesses along with other public health nursing responsibilities.

The role of the public health nurse is to provide and promote public wellness, prevent disease and reduce health risks through evidence-based care and education. A principal goal is also to address health disparities within marginalized communities, she added. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommends communities have .09 FTE public health nurses for every 1,250 residents in a community, which adds up to well over two FTE public health nurses for a city the size of Northampton. With a population of almost 29,000 they are long overdue and two public health nurses represents bare bones staffing.

In support of an in-house prevention coordinator, the Northampton Prevention Coalition (NPC) was launched in 2008 due to an identified need for youth substance use prevention, Director O'Leary reminded. Between 2010 and 2019, NPC received the maximum 10-year funding allowed under a Drug-Free Communities (DFC) grant program. In year 11, the program is currently operating on carryover funding from year 10. With an experienced coordinator and active steering committee, NPC would be well-positioned to carry on the work it has been doing for the next 10 years. With federal funding coming to an end, the city is no longer able to apply to

this funding source to support the NPC coordinator position.

The mission of the NPC is to collaboratively initiate, coordinate and sustain prevention and intervention efforts that reduce teen substance use. To demonstrate the impact of the NPC, student health survey data from the 10-year period of 2010 to 2019 shows that the NPC made great strides in driving down the 30-day use rates of alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana and prescription drugs in Northampton, Director O'Leary reported. Looking at 10th to 12th graders from Northampton High School and Smith Vocational School from 2009 to 2019, the reported use of the following substances in the past 30 days indicates that alcohol use was down by 29%, marijuana use by 21% and cigarette use by 60%, so impacts have been huge.

Those are the large increases to her budget which she is asking the mayor and the council to support.

Councilors asked questions and offered comments, including elaborate praise for the work of the health department in general and the director in particular over the past pandemic year.

In response to a question from Councilor Nash, Director O'Leary described mosquito control measures taken with the \$25,500 line item for mosquito prevention. The City of Northampton is a member of the Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District and, in exchange for dues, the district provides mosquito surveillance and collection and mosquito identification, as well as community outreach and education. Once collected, mosquitos are sent to a state lab for testing in the hopes of identifying any type of disease-carrying mosquitos before they cause disease in humans, she explained.

In another use of this line item, the city hires a contractor every year to do larvaciding in the 594 catch basins throughout the city. The contractor puts briquettes in the catch basins to eliminate breeding habitats for mosquitos and also does ditch maintenance work. As part of the contract, workers also treat part of the Meadows with the larvacide briquettes, Director O'Leary confirmed.

Public Hearing on
FY2022 Budget
(cont.)

Northampton Public Schools – Superintendent John Provost

Superintendent John Provost presented the FY2022 budget for Northampton Public Schools. City schools are in a much better position than they were last year when he came to speak to them, he reminded. Last year, they were shuttered and not even certain they could find a way to safely acknowledge their graduates. This year, school is in session in grades pre k through 12 with the overwhelming majority in in-person instruction. Staff who wish to receive vaccinations have received them and an increasing proportion of students have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

During the shutdown, the schools provided over 280,000 emergency meals for school-aged children and partnered with local businesses to provide emergency meals to some student family members, he reported. They are currently partnering with the health department to provide vaccines in conjunction with their meal program via small, pop-up clinics. The goal throughout the reopening process was to prioritize services for those in greatest need. They actually started providing in-person instruction for a small number of students in July. In September, they were able to expand that number to include more than 250 of their most vulnerable students. In November, the reopening process expanded to include their youngest students who also were at risk because they truly struggled to benefit from remote learning. Every few weeks, they added more students and more days to the in-person learning schedule until finally everyone was back five days a week. Their health protocols have been effective and, to date, there has not been a single case of Corona virus transmission in the schools. They have had students and staff who have been sick, but contact tracing has always showed that the source of infection was not within the schools.

That's all true, but it is also true that they have had less instructional time this year due to the school year being reduced from 180 days to 170 days and part of the 170 days consisting of remote instruction that was not always efficient or effective for all learners. He will be sharing some data with the School Committee this Thursday showing that students made progress in basic academic skills from September through January but did so at less than typical rates as expected with less days in the semester and a portion of that time being remote. However, there were disparate effects and differential impacts, he acknowledged.

In general, the largest gaps were for their youngest students and for Latinx students of all ages. As a result, they are proposing an equity-based academic recovery budget that focuses on accelerating learning for students who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. It includes both academic and social/emotional supports they feel are needed to get students back on track for success. The requested amount is \$33,461,896, which is an increase of 4.04% over the current year. They plan to braid these funds with state and federal COVID relief funds to make a multi-year investment in helping students recover academically and socially from the difficult period of isolation they've experienced.

The superintendent personally thanked Mayor Narkewicz for supporting this budget and every other budget he's brought forward during their joint tenures. The mayor has never asked them for a cut or a level-funded budget. During the past seven years, they have gotten two schools out of Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) monitoring status, increased graduation rates in the aggregate and, for subgroups, found a way to safely and responsibly reopen schools in the wake of a pandemic. These are successes that would not be possible without the mayor's commitment to the schools and he hopes he'll reflect on this good work with satisfaction in future days.

At the conclusion of his presentation, Superintendent Provost entertained questions from councilors.

In response to a question from Councilor Dwight, the superintendent drew attention to two items in the budget intended to address social/emotional needs exacerbated by the pandemic: creation of the position of a 'culture coach' at the middle school and \$100,000 of contracted services with the Collaborative for Educational Services (CES).

The culture coach is in addition to a team that deals with students in crisis, he noted. Counseling services are available for students in the middle school and all schools, but, if counseling is ineffective because a student is in a state of acute crisis, the next step is the principal's office.

The culture coach will provide a stop gap which will focus on getting students regulated and back in the classroom and relieve principals of providing that sort of instruction so they can spend more time in classrooms supporting teachers in implementing the curriculum. They currently have an in-house suspension room which they think they will be able to close by adding the culture coach, but they're not eliminating that position. The person in that position is a math specialist so he will be used to support students who may be lagging in math skills due to the closure. Being in that type of a setting is not helpful to begin with and doesn't usually result in changes in behavior; being behind academically is often what makes people feel disengaged, etc. At the high school, they had already added an additional counselor but didn't have time to see the impact of that position last year. The addition of \$100,000 in CES services will support students with social/emotional needs at the high school and middle school, which they think may be the areas of greatest need since students there were out of school the longest.

The report from schools and his observation is that students so far are demonstrating tremendous resilience. For many students, the strongest intervention was just reopening school. He thinks that in itself will have a strong impact in supporting students' social and emotional development.

Superintendent Provost fielded additional questions about the schools' updated code of conduct and the district's transition to organic pest management for school playing fields, among other things. What differentiates the new code of conduct from what came before is an explicit emphasis on restorative justice practices as opposed to more punitive practices, he asserted.

Councilors universally praised the superintendent's handling of the pandemic. Councilors Quinlan and Maiore pronounced themselves 'moved' and 'heartened' by his budget message and its emphasis on equity and assisting communities most in need.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

Fire Chief Jon Davine presented the Northampton Fire Rescue budget by reviewing the department's activities related to its response to the pandemic. For the past year of the shutdown, in addition to firefighting and emergency medical response, firefighters ordered and distributed personal protective equipment (PPE), assisted with the opening of emergency shelters at the high school and First Churches, did regular disinfection/spraying of the Fire Department, Police Department and DPW and administered vaccines at the city-run clinic.

He expressed appreciation for Health Director Merridith O'Leary, noting that if it wasn't for her and her team, the mayor and support received from the city, they never would have been able to do what they have done. He's proud of the work they did this year.

Councilor LaBarge said she is glad to see the department is continuing at full staffing with 70 employees (68 sworn positions and two civilians – an administrative assistant and a mechanic).

Chief Davine cited recruitment of paramedics as one of the department's challenges. With the exception of a few basic EMT's and first responders left over from years past, everyone in the department is dual-trained as both a firefighter and paramedic. In the latest hiring round, due to the scarcity of paramedics, they hired some basic EMT's who were enrolled in a paramedic program. Statewide, only 200 students took the civil service paramedic exam.

CENTRAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Councilor Jarrett disclosed that he cannot participate in this item because he has a conflict of interest as a member of the Pedal People cooperative which has a contract with Central Services. He recused himself.

Director David Pomerantz presented highlights of the department's activities over what was admittedly a challenging year. A number of Central Services employees contracted COVID-19 but the department basically continued to work throughout the shutdown, he reported. There was one period when they were rotating staff on an as-needed basis into the buildings for security checks, maintenance and monitoring of energy management systems, but, for the most part, everybody worked straight through.

Mr. Pomerantz particularly recognized the efforts of school custodians for their work in supporting the operation of an emergency shelter at the high school and city custodial staff for helping stand

up the vaccination clinic at the senior center. At the high school, a team of custodial staff worked seven days a week cleaning and maintaining the shelter, while at the senior center, city custodial staff basically emptied out the building and kept it clean and stocked with supplies to insure the success of the vaccination clinic. They are now preparing to bring everything back into the building in preparation for opening it back up to seniors.

Mr. Pomerantz reminded councilors of the ingenious move back in 1997 when the city created the Central Services Department to combine maintenance and custodial operations for both city and school facilities. The city does a lot more in-house building, electrical and HVAC work than ever before. The department also runs a centralized photocopying system, inter-city mail courier program and energy management systems. Handling cleaning and maintenance in a centralized manner provides cost-efficiencies and efficiencies of operation. The city did a scaled back version of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) last spring and summer but has a robust capital program already in the ground this year covering the parking garage, city buildings and school buildings.

Central Services is essentially at the core of the city's response to the climate crisis, Councilor Dwight pointed out. Director Pomerantz's department is in charge of implementing all the policies and making all the changes needed to city-managed properties within the municipality. He asked the status of this process.

The city has been a strong member of the green communities program for a number of years, Director Pomerantz related. Through the successful efforts of Energy Coordinator Chris Mason, they have brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants for energy management system upgrades, lighting upgrades, etc. They have an application into the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) now for the next round of funding, so that's an ongoing effort.

The police station was a Gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building when built and the senior center was Platinum LEED. They have a policy that all new buildings be LEED-rated, he advised. They are constantly trying to reduce the city's energy consumption by managing energy management systems, and the city did an LED street light conversion program back in 2017 that has resulted in significant reductions.

The mayor issued a net zero by 2050 policy two years ago. To help plan for meeting that goal as far as city operations are concerned, consultants are now finishing up a seven-building assessment of both building shells and building infrastructure to prioritize projects for capital improvement. The seven building reports will be done this summer so they will be using those for capital planning for the fall schedule. They will be starting on three of the schools this summer – Bridge, Leeds and Jackson - and will do the high school, Leeds (sic) and Ryan Road in 2023.

It's important to note that at one point Northampton distinguished itself by being the first five-star energy rated community in the country, Councilor Dwight reminded.

Director Pomerantz fielded additional questions.

Recess

Recess

The City Council recessed briefly at 7:26 p.m. The council reconvened at 7:38 p.m.

Public Testimony

At 7:38 p.m., Councilor Sciarra opened the floor to public comment. Over the next hour, 20 speakers gave testimony. For a full transcript of their comments, please see the recording on the Northampton Government Archive page of YouTube. Highlights of each speaker's remarks are transcribed below.

Dana Goldblatt commented that, in listening to the presentations, it was really moving to be reminded of what government can do and what their budget can and should be in terms of public health and public infrastructure. In that context, she was particularly angry at how the mayor dealt with the policing review commission's recommendations. She is angry because the initial pushback - that they shouldn't defund or reduce the police department, that the police are the only people that can deliver groceries to the homeless and inspect people's car seats, etc. - seems to have been dropped and they've gone into the endless cycle of 'No, we need to study more' as the reason they can't fund a community care department. It's been a year. It's just a matter of moving services from one place to another and having them done by people without guns. It's not actually that enormously difficult. The response initially of "we need to study it" seemed like a delay tactic. Now, after a year of study, what's being proposed in the budget is a position for someone to consider how implementation of the things first proposed a year ago might work. She imagines that after that person produces their proposal, there will be a new person to study whatever they've produced. This goes on forever! This is endless! She exclaimed. And the actual substantive debate about the importance of a community care department just gets buried beneath the 'study of the study of the study.' Get a group of people to study all the studies and produce a report, then hire somebody to study the report that the people wrote who studied all the studies. . . That is literally what the proposal is right now.

There are very few people for whom 'study the study of the study' sounds like anything other than BS. She is angry and wants them to turn down this budget until there's a real proposal.

Dory Graham, Ward 3, agreed with Dana Goldblatt that the delay tactic that was used when they first brought this issue to the forefront is not going to sustain itself any longer as a means to explain away the proven fact that community members who do not carry guns would be better equipped to deal with many different calls. Last year, she overheard a serious domestic argument and feared for the life of the person being victimized. She called the police and her worst nightmare happened. Three squad cars showed up, six officers arrived on scene and at no point did they separate the aggressor from the person being attacked. By the time they decided that they couldn't do anything, they had to leave this person in this situation and the reason given was that she didn't say anything. Any social worker, any therapist, any de-escalation expert would have separated the two parties, and six police officers with guns and protective equipment abandoned somebody whose fate she doesn't know. She works in the Northampton Public Schools, and they have to ask parents to bring in paper towels for use in their classroom. They should not have to do that. The cruisers look fine; they need paper towels. They need more staff people at every public school and these are things that should be at the top of the budget.

Hondo expressed concerned about the lack of intercity transportation in Northampton due to the pandemic. As of this Saturday, restrictions are going to end and the state of emergency will end June 15th. Peter Pan has been 'slacking' on Hampshire County with only one trip per day and it's not acceptable. Some other bus companies service this area such as Max bus and Megabus, but Peter Pan keeps chasing them away. Also Amtrak – one train per day going to DC and back is not enough. With restrictions being lifted, residents need more transportation. He is aware of the pilot program with PVTA going from the Academy of Music to the Holyoke Mall to Union Station in Springfield. He is more interested in keeping public transportation statewide to benefit all small businesses. He sees a lot of people struggling, especially in Northampton. He also agreed more paper towels are need in the schools and city buildings.

He would like the city to step up to help out more. As far as the police, today outside of City Hall a massive fight broke out.

Shelby said she would like to join those before her in asking councilors not to pass this budget. They know that policing is not synonymous with public safety. The Northampton Policing Review Commission has done the work and compiled and presented research that shows unequivocally that policing is, in fact, quite the opposite of public safety. In 2012 she was in an abusive

relationship with someone with a known history and criminal record of physical assault and violence. One night, the violence in her relationship reached a pinnacle that forced her to run out of her house barefoot in the middle of the night after being physically assaulted. She sought the help of the local police department who assured her they would help her and that she would be safe. She received a text message a few days later that the person would be coming to her home to get his things and she immediately rang the police department and requested their assistance. Police said they would be in the area but refused to prevent his arrival or even speak to him beforehand. They said this because they knew it would be a better outcome for them if they waited for this person to harm her again. If they arrived while he was harming her they could arrest him and charge him with assault. But what about her and her immediate safety? It didn't matter. "They would rather have me brutally mangled so they could point to me and my injuries and say, 'See, he needs to be arrested and we did our job,'" she alleged.

The budget of this town currently reflects the values of this town's administrators and not the values of the community. The community is saying we want to fund a Department of Community Care yet this proposed budget continues to increase funds to a department that clearly does not work and is incredibly wasteful.

Erin Zeiss of Northampton said she would like to see more action on the part of the city. They would like existing and new community services funded to address mental health and substance use crises. They are asking that more money be diverted from police who are answering mental health crisis calls and that that money be used to fund community crisis services with mental health workers and medics who have gone through years of training. Places like Oregon have adopted programs such as CAHOOTS to provide such services and they have the opportunity to do something similar and better. She asks that councilors use their influence to bring attention to this problem and make Northampton a leader in solving it.

Gabriel Peeples, Ward 2, (they/them) seconded what had been said about supporting funding for mental health crises and other services currently housed by police sooner than next year. They got really concerned when hearing fire/rescue Chief Davine talk about the use of sick time by staff at fire rescue services. They don't think it is something to tout or brag about that staff aren't taking sick time or that placement on a specialized team takes into account how much sick time someone has used. Sick time is really important for staff and prioritizing folks who aren't using sick time is a really able-ist and terrible system. They have a friend whose husband is a lieutenant in a neighboring fire department and he was denied vacation time three times in the same month so he could get married. They don't think commending people for not using sick time is appropriate. Supporting and applauding people for not using sick time is terrible and able-ist and disgusting and they'd appreciate if that didn't continue to happen at City Council meetings.

Calvin Brower, Northampton, said he is here to talk about police corruption and claimed that five police officers in Northampton are corrupt. He named Officer Andrew Kohl and displayed a picture of Officer Kohl on what he referred to as a 'bad conduct card.' Andrew Kohl is one of the officers named in a high-profile civil lawsuit for the systematic intimidation and retaliation against a brown and indigenous homeless resident of Northampton. He has a history of violence and misconduct, including the unlawful search and arrest of a former judge, Mr. Brower claimed. In another arrest, Officer Kohl repeatedly punched and pepper-sprayed a suspect in what he claims was self-defense. A restraining order was placed against him and the judge who granted it ruled Kohl posed an immediate danger of abuse to his victim. Last summer, he was at the courthouse when Officer Kohl came by and stopped his car. He saw two bags of marijuana on the bench and asked him to bring them over to him. He sniffed the first bag and didn't like it and sniffed the other and said it was good stuff and that he needed to confiscate the bag.

Mr. Brower said he told him he couldn't confiscate it because it was legal and it didn't matter that he didn't buy it from a dispensary. Officer Kohl said he was going to take it anyway. Mr. Brower said he'd better call his sergeant because if he tried to take it without calling him the two of them were going to have a fight. So Office Kohl called his sergeant who told him yeah, he had to take it. Mr. Brower told the sergeant and Office Kohl that he would file lawsuits against them for illegal search and seizure of his marijuana and trying to arrest the couple he got the marijuana from. It was illegal to use him to get to them, he alleged.

Aaron Clark, he/him, lifetime Northampton resident and homeowner in Ward 7B, read from a short prepared statement. In the words of the great James Baldwin, 'we need to cease fleeing'

from the reality and begin to change it,' he quoted. The current proposed budget is an example of fleeing from reality, not an example of changing that very tangible reality for so many. He is here to echo others in calling for following the commission's recommendations and fully funding the Department of Community Care by at least \$860,000 so that at least the full amount cut from the police budget last year is reallocated. Any change is meaningless without accountability to the people impacted by state violence, Mr. Clark asserted, noting that he says this on the anniversary of George Floyd's death. If Black Lives Matter, then Mayor Narkewicz needs to truly commit to defunding the police with the goal of investing in meaningful community-led safety strategies.

He closed with a quote from Todd Nehisi Cotes: "Amongst a large swath to a majority of black people in this country, the police are illegitimate. They are not seen as a force that necessarily causes violent crime to decline. Oftentimes you see Black people resorting to the police because they have no other option. But they're not seen with the level of trust that maybe Americans and other communities bestow upon the police. They know they could be a victim of lethal force because they used a \$20 bill that may or may not have been counterfeit, because you were asleep at night in your home and someone got a warrant to kick down your door without knocking. If you look at communities of human beings as natural creatures who tend to react a certain way when put under 'x' number of pressures, I think it becomes more understandable what happens to a community of people who are policed arbitrarily and with violence, not just in the moment but historically, whose great grandfathers and grandmothers can tell stories of police officers either stopping lynchings or jumping into lynchings. They see law enforcement as illegitimate and other members of the community as more legitimate than cops."

Jose Adastra, Ward 1, said he has also heard several accounts of Officer Kohl asking people on the streets to identify the people they got drugs from so he could arrest them. They should listen to him. People have been talking to them about Andrew Kohl for years.

They have gotten the bare minimum from the mayor at this point, Mr. Adastra claimed. They can't even talk about what the money should go to and be creative and compassionate about it. "We should be going into the homes of the disadvantaged children in Northampton and the people who the therapists are observing in the schools and supplying them with more stimulus money... but instead we're here having a conversation about the bare minimum we can get."

He is not surprised by .033% David Narkewicz. This is super insulting. They've been working so hard for the past year. He takes time away from his family every time he hears about an officer abusing somebody in town. What does it look like when you are just allowing your community members to sacrifice their own well-being to be a shield? People like him are still here, eyes clear, knowing that the police are abusing them.

"I promise that we are going to get equality. I promise we're going to redirect the tax money that is being gained by the marijuana companies. . . You should be worried about how we get it."

"You can vote for it or we're going to take it," he concluded.

Rye of Ward 3, thanked Councilor Sciarra for making their remote participation as a group possible. He is very white and largely benefits from policing in the U.S. He had a recurring nightmare as a child after a police officer confronted him in a parking lot while he was waiting for his mother and asked him what he was doing, he related. It was like the scariest thing that had ever happened to him in his life. He was six. He distinctly remembers the officers told him they were going to take him away from his family. It was scary and he had a recurring nightmare about it. His family was never wealthy and they got pulled over for a lot of things, having a loud tailpipe, etc. It was always so scary. He was afraid his dad was going to be taken in to the station for the night, leaving him on the side of the road. He doesn't think these were bad cops; he thinks they were doing their job. He doesn't want people to have to do that job. He lamented the damage it must do to their psyches and the damage it does to the community. Here they are tonight one year after the death of George Floyd. He beseeches, begs, pleads with the council and the mayor, please reduce the fear we all feel from policing. At the same time please create this new department that can actually care for us and keep us safe.

Donovan Lee, an Easthampton resident who works in Northampton, said he fully supports fully funding the Department of Community Care. He is an experienced 911 responding EMT. He has been in many situations where the police have told someone their options are to go to the

hospital or go to jail. He thinks their community deserves more than those two options when they're having an emergency.

Northampton resident **Steve** said he has been to many of the Black Lives Matter protests in Northampton. Jody Kasper's proposal to put surveillance cameras on every light pole on Main Street was a big waste of money. Referred to the potential value of a surveillance drone, he suggested that demilitarizing and selling all of Chief Kasper's military equipment would allow them to drastically cut the police budget. He has watched her almost incite a riot because she so overreacted to people coming to Northampton to exercise their constitutional first amendment rights. Rather than fund the police, "let's get rid of all their military-grade hardware that they don't need, sell it and then use that money for social services," he proposed. The last thing this town needs is more money for the police.

A woman identifying herself only as **Jane Doe**, a Northampton resident, said she is a victim of sexual assault presently in a safe, secure location. She just wanted to reiterate that the police department in Northampton saved her life. Because of continued threats on a 209A order of protection she still needs their protection every single day. She opposes the funding of the Department of Community Care for a number of reasons. There is quite a lot in the policing review commission report that really needs to be looked closely at. There was a real failure around exploring rape and sexual assault and domestic violence. The funds that were taken last year from the Northampton police were unwarranted. Anecdotal evidence without a substantive pattern of wrongdoing by their police department doesn't justify the cut. Chief Kasper managed to keep them safe this year when crime and violence against police themselves increased across the country. It was their officers who really didn't have the choice to shelter in place because they were first responders. They even sustained injuries while on duty and have been unjustly vilified.

Residents have been without devices and broadband because of the digital divide and couldn't engage the police commission during the pandemic. Public comment to that body was less than 90 in total in a city of 30,000. Only six were able to submit online responses. One abolitionist spoke to the body 19 times. The commission failed to locate evidence of egregious violence, problematic policies or procedures and then mischaracterized its responses to sexual assaults. It focused on improving conditions for batterers, which is extremely re-traumatizing. The language on domestic violence and rape is pro-abuser, biased and does not reflect her lived experience. Creating supportive environments for sexual offenders, abusers, rapists and batterers and advocating a decriminalized approach shows little concern for the laws of the Commonwealth or victims, and commission rhetoric about police escalating domestic violence is false.

Please deescalate them by stopping the batterers. The report also omits the local sex offender registry that's managed by the police, sex trafficking, predators and online pedophiles. The commission may not have wanted to look at these things but the detectives and other members of the police department do and must. One of the commissioners said that when the police are involved, survivors are stripped of control over their safety, and this is false because she was shown how to protect herself.

G from **Montague** (she/her) said she is very angry. "The mayor of Northampton has absolutely screwed us over." It seems that to him the unpaid work of BIPOC voices on the commission was a distraction to the white supremacist "democracy" that they have here. We are here because policing is harming the community, and we are here in front of city hall because policing is a legacy to slavery: to police the poor body, the homeless body, the female body and more. If you have said tonight that you feel safe with the NPD, you have not been listening to your community. If you fail to listen to your black and brown community you are selfish, you are ignorant and you are racist. Any type of safety you have felt from the police department can also be provided by the Department of Community Care.

She related her personal experience of being at a protest when someone began screaming 'tear gas' and everyone started running in the opposite direction. It was one of the scariest days of her life. It was pepper spray, but even that fear should not exist. That video shows the fear we feel when police officers are using weapons of murder and harm to control our right to protest. We are literally screaming for our survival. Yes, there is an issue in Northampton, for instance, heavy victimization of black and brown people. Police do not protect the homeless community, people struggling from poverty, mental illness black and brown and indigenous people.

That day she spent nearly an hour comforting a member of the Northampton community with pepper spray in his eyes. That is not community safety. She absolutely supports defunding the police by 50% leading to eventual abolition. What are councilors going to do to support your BIPOC neighbors? She asked.

Pesha Black, Ward 3, said she has learned a lot this year as have many of them. She is speaking tonight to urge them to meaningfully fund the Department of Community Care (DCC) so they can take on the community support and wellness responsibilities they don't actually need the police department to do. She works in grant funded programs from DESE, and they are funded at more than twice the rate the mayor has proposed for the DCC. She would ask them to please increase the funding for the DCC so they can meaningfully start work in this new fiscal year and reject the mayor's budget if necessary in order to increase that funding.

Jenna, she/her, said she is a resident of Turners Falls who is in Northampton frequently for work and recreation. A lot of people have spoken to why it's important to fund the DCC fully and to defund the Northampton police budget by 50%. She would like to speak in favor of fully funding the DCC with at least the \$800,000 figure. It needs to happen by divesting from the NPD and needs to be funded this fiscal year. She thinks it's frankly disgusting that they are sitting here on the anniversary of George Floyd's murder and no action has been taken to keep the community members of Northampton safe from policing. It's appalling. Northampton is made out to be this really progressive place. If that's important to you; show it. Show us that you care about the community by funding the DCC fully this fiscal year, defunding the Northampton police and acknowledging that the police are not safe. Invest in a safe system that is going to work at prevention rather than taking punitive actions against your community members and show us that you care about the safety of your community. Defund the police budget by 50% and invest fully in the DCC this year.

Ryan Wadsworth panned upward with his device to show the George Floyd memorial behind him at city hall, saying he wanted to give viewers a sense of this community event. It is an historic moment in which they have a duty to be bold and to make change. This is an intergenerational struggle. At other times he's spoken to City Council he's been optimistic. He's appealed to their shared humanity as 'a guiding light that is going to move this forward' but also acknowledged an 'institutional inertia.' It would be a lie to say that he is overly optimistic but he does think it is valuable for them to at least attempt to connect as humans and to make this a collaborative process. If it is not, the consequences will continue to be political and also spiritual. Speaking as a white person who dearly loves people of color who have directly experienced police violence, who upon seeing a cop feel it in their gut, he would invite them to connect as humans to, yes, avoid the political consequences. . .

These are coherent demands that people understand and want applied. This over-policed context is something that is culturally specific. He has never lived in a place with as many police as Northampton. He has lived in other comparable socio-economic countries where social services are provided by the government, not punitive incarceration that targets sectors of the population.

Sasha Dunbar, Ward 5B, said part of the reason she moved to Northampton is because she is an aspiring social worker and has experience in mental health as both a patient and a person in institutions, meaning she's had experience in involuntary incarceration. She was super excited to find out there was a peer respite program in Northampton since it represents an alternative to police, and that made her feel really safe. Then she noticed there were police everywhere. As a black and biracial person who's been unwillingly forced into an institution, she feels unsafe in her body. She grew up in communities that were over-policed, most of them a lot more diverse. To see a sea of white faces and BLM signs, so few people of color and so many police cars is a sign to her that there are too many cops and too much money. She smokes a lot of CBD to deal with chronic pain which means that she often smells of marijuana. Often police don't need much of an excuse to hurt people like her, to put them in places they don't want to be. She loves to be in one of the only places in the world that has a peer-run place people can go when they're in mental health crisis. She was excited to find out there was this proposal for community care and it is beyond devastating to hear that there's a proposal to give more money to the cops.

Ezekiel Baskin of Northampton said he wanted to talk about the long-term plan in this budget and beyond and really embracing the recommendations of the policing review commission which fundamentally talk about reducing the scope and footprint of policing. One thing that really

concerns him in this proposal is the police chief talking about the departure of nine officers taking with them \$414,000 in hiring and training costs. There are three vacancies currently with over \$200,000 in the budget as well as a discussion of three more positions that are going to be vacant in early FY2022 due to retirements. He is confused about the logic of spending a large sum of money filling, hiring and training for these positions, when, even if they're not necessarily reducing the size of policing in this budget, that's the commission's ultimate recommendation. Why spend a lot of money to hire and fill for vacancies that probably will be cut in next year's budget? He is curious why it's necessary to fill those positions now. Why couldn't they have a hold on hiring while they start ramping up to the Department of Community Care so that down the line there are less layoffs? To him it seems ideal for officers to find positions in other communities and see that the department is beginning the process of downsizing rather than ultimately having to lay off more people next year, which is harder for everyone involved.

He also expressed disappointed about the 1.5 FTE staffing for the DCC, saying he thinks that was the level of staffing needed this past year to support the commission's work. Building the department in a way that it can really be responsive to and accountable to the communities most impacted by policing can't be done with just two people. They need a diverse range of voices to staff the department and plan for it. He would love to see a larger group of people, including a project manager and assistant project manager, because one and a half people can't do everything they're asking this year.

James Lowenthal said he noticed the #1 line item in the Central Services budget is \$195,000 for electricity. There are several mentions of lighting upgrades for city buildings. He is sure a good chunk of that \$195,000 and other funds allocated by the City Council are going to go to complete waste. Why does he say it's going to waste? You can tell it's going to waste by looking down on Northampton from space and seeing all the light that's going up into the sky. That's taxpayer money going to fund the purchase, installation and operation of lights all around the city that are going up into the sky. Any time you can see light from a street light or city building poking you in the eye, it's not light that's being useful; the light should go down only. He is concerned that the city is forging ahead with projects to install new lights to replace old lights without thought to this waste and the collateral damage it causes. Light pollution is bad for public health. This has been known for decades and recently studied extensively. A new report to the United Nations describes the ill effects on humans of light pollution, ranging from sleep deprivation, melatonin suppression and cancer to elevated rates of diabetes and obesity. It's also terrible for wildlife. There is no species that benefits from light pollution; it's only harmful. He mentioned the Roundhouse parking lot as an example of a project which will have lights much, much brighter than they are now or need to be. He is concerned that the city is not listening to voices to protect public health, public safety, wildlife and the aesthetic beauty of their downtown. He hopes City Councilors and Central Services will consider this in the form of an advisory committee. They've certainly heard many of them speak to this before, and he thinks now is the time.

There being no further comments, Councilor Dwight moved to continue the public hearing to May 26, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. Rachel Maiore seconded. The motion passed unanimously 8:0 by roll call vote with Councilor LaBarge absent.

<u>Motion to Adjourn</u>	Upon motion made by Councilor Maiore and seconded by Councilor Jarrett, the meeting was adjourned at 8:42 p.m. The motion carried 9:0 by roll call vote.
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Attest: _____	Administrative Assistant to the City Council
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