



## **Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council**

*Councilor David A. Murphy, Chair  
Councilor Maureen T. Carney  
Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge  
Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra*

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

Meeting Date: March 15, 2018

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 10:54 p.m., Councilor Murphy called the meeting to order.
- 2. Roll Call:** Present were committee members David Murphy, Maureen Carney, Marianne LaBarge & Gina-Louise Sciarra. Also present from the City Council were Bill Dwight, Jim Nash, Ryan O'Donnell, Dennis Bidwell and Alisa Klein.

**Also present:** Mayor David N. Narkewicz, Planning Director Wayne Feiden

- 3. Minutes of February 15, 2018:** Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of February 15, 2018. Councilor Carney seconded. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.
- 4. Financial Orders:**

**A. 18.058 Order To Waive Chapter 61A Right Of First Refusal At 508 Sylvester Road**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

The request is somewhat unusual in that the forty-three acres on Sylvester Road was put into Chapter 61A but included a dwelling that is not eligible for 61A protection, Councilor Murphy observed.

Only a small portion of the property (1.858 acres) contains the dwelling and other buildings not eligible for 61A conversion. The property owners are selling the house to a family member but the remaining land will remain in 61A.

The house being removed from Chapter 61A never should have been included in the first place but, because it was, the city is being asked to release its right of first refusal, Councilor Murphy clarified. He

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expressed his understanding that the city does not have an interest in acquiring the house, and Mr. Feiden confirmed that is the case.

Councilor Sciarra moved to recommend release of the city's right of first refusal of the property on Sylvester Road. Councilor Carney seconded. The motion carried on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

**B. 18.059 Order To Expand Parsons Brook Greenway With Land From Former Bill Willard, Inc. Property**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Sciarra seconded.

To be clear, the city is still negotiating for the property but obtaining approval to acquire the land allows city officials to start the process of applying for grants, etc., Mr. Feiden explained. Planners actually received permission to buy the land 20 years ago through a bankruptcy auction but were outbid at the time by Bill Willard, so the city has been interested in this property for a long time. The Willard family never did anything with the 87-acre parcel; it was added to the Willard property but did not become part of the sand and gravel operation. Planners still do not know what is going to happen to the gravel pit itself but would be interested in the part that is wet as it is great for fishing and wildlife habitat.

If approved, the city will almost definitely buy the 87 acres but whether it acquires the additional land (roughly 40 acres) will depend on what the Willards decide to do with it.

Councilor Klein noted that the order proposes to acquire the land for "conservation and passive recreation purposes." She asked if this would rule out the land being used for hunting.

That is the standard language used for purchase of conservation land, Mr. Feiden said. The Willard family has discussed the possibility of putting a condition on the sale preserving the land for hunting purposes. Planners do not usually put language in the order regarding hunting because they want to leave it to the city for future decision-making, he advised. As councilors may be aware, in the discussion about hunting, planners have clearly heard that opponents would feel differently if the seller of certain land had a condition requiring hunting to be allowed. Planners "are trying to leave this option open," he advised.

Councilor Klein asked if the city would ever take the initiative to preclude hunting given the stated use of the land by wildlife and hikers. City officials would not usually do this by means of a deed restriction unless the seller required it because they would want to keep the options open, Feiden stressed. They wouldn't want to impose a restriction for all time that couldn't be changed based on changing conditions.

Councilor LaBarge said she has concerns about hunting because of the number of people that walk on the trails. She expressed hope that Mr. Feiden could talk to the Willards to see if they would agree to no hunting on the property.

The city is often approached by sellers seeking both to preserve hunting and to prohibit hunting on land offered for sale, Mr. Feiden responded. The city's standard position is that 'we are open to any restrictions but it has a valuation effect,' he volunteered. In this case, the Willards have proposed insuring that hunting

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continue to be allowed, and planners have said the city accepts restrictions but it makes the property less valuable. They would prefer it to be up to the Conservation Commission to make such decisions.

Councilor Murphy asked if there are pieces of the land that are potentially developable to offset the loss of tax revenue from placing the land under conservation restriction.

It would be extremely difficult, Mr. Feiden suggested. When two adjoining subdivisions were developed – Sovereign Way to the south and Plantations to the east – developers were required to extend rights of way to the property boundaries so a road could potentially be constructed. The only way to develop the land would be to extend a road from Cardinal Way to Sovereign Way. Besides neighborhood opposition, a developer would face construction costs of \$650 to \$800 a linear foot for a gain of six lots. He can't imagine a developer in his right mind financing it because the return would be so small. The city did not express interest in buying the gravel pit itself because that is where the development value lies, he pointed out. City officials did not want to take that property off the tax rolls.

Councilor Murphy called the motion to a vote, and it passed on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

**C. 18.060 Order To Authorize Northampton School Committee To Accept Gift Of New Floor From Jackson Street School PTO**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Sciarra seconded.

Administrators have an order that authorizes acceptance of up to \$25,000 in real property, Mayor Narkewicz said. This gift exceeds that threshold. Councilor Murphy called the motion to a vote, and it passed on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

**D. 18.061 Order To Reprogram River Road Retaining Wall Balance To Paving Projects**

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Sciarra seconded.

Councilor Klein wondered how so much money was left over from that project.

It was a large project (\$2.3 million dollars). Miraculously, it came in lower than projected and the weather was not as much of a factor as expected, Mayor Narkewicz explained. Councilor Murphy called the motion to a vote, and it passed on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

**E. 18.062 Order To Authorize Payment Of A Prior Year Bill**

Councilor Murphy read the text of the order.

The invoice is for asbestos testing and removal, Mayor Narkewicz confirmed. Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Carney seconded. The motion passed unanimously on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

5. **New Business**

*-Reserved for topics that the Chair did not reasonably anticipate would be discussed. None.*

6. **Adjourn:** At 11:14 p.m. Councilor Carney moved to adjourn; Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

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