



**Committee on Legislative Matters
and the Northampton City Council**

Members

Councilor Laurie Loisel, Chair
Councilor Garrick Perry, Vice Chair
Councilor Rachel Maiore
Councilor Chris Stratton

MEETING AGENDA

Date: March 9, 2026

Time: 6 p.m.

**Council Chambers, 212 Main Street
Northampton, MA**

The March 9, 2026 Legislative Matters Committee organizational meeting will be conducted in hybrid format with the option for both councilors and the public to attend in person or participate remotely. The public can follow the committee's deliberations by attending in person or joining the virtual meeting by phone or by computer. The meeting will be recorded for later broadcast on Comcast Channel 15 and uploaded to the Northampton Government Video Archive on YouTube.

Live public comment will be available using zoom link or telephone call-in beginning at 6 p.m.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CALLING IN OR JOINING THE MEETING

[PUBLIC MEETING LINK](#)

For telephone call-in, call:

+929 436-2866 US

MEETING ID: 832 2233 1279

PARTICIPANT #: #

PASSCODE: 382350

- 1. Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call**
- 2. Announcement that meeting is being audio/video recorded**
This meeting is being audio and video recorded.
- 3. Public Comment**
- 4. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting**
 - A. Minutes of July 17, 2025 Joint Planning Board/Legislative Matters Committee**

meeting, November 10, 2025 LM Meeting and February 9, 2026 Organizational Meeting

Documents:

[11-10-2025_Committee_on_Legislative_Matters.pdf](#)
[07-17-2025_Joint PB-Legislative_Matters Minutes.pdf](#)
[02-09-2026_Committee_on_Legislative_Matters_Organizational Meeting.pdf](#)

5. Items Referred to Committee

None.

6. Set Meeting Schedule and Format for 2026 - 2027

Documents:

[Legislative Matters Meeting Schedule 2026-2027.pdf](#)

7. New Business

8. Adjourn

Contact Laurie Loisel at
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City Council Committee on Legislative Matters

Members

Councilor Marissa Elkins, Chair

Councilor Garrick Perry, Vice Chair

Councilor Alex Jarrett

Councilor Rachel Maiore

MEETING MINUTES

Date: November 10, 2025; 5:30 p.m.

Council Chambers, 212 Main Street

Northampton, MA

1. **Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call:** At 5:31 p.m., Councilor Marissa Elkins convened the meeting. On a roll call, the following members were present: Councilor Marissa Elkins, Chair; Councilor Garrick Perry, Vice Chair, Councilor Alex Jarrett and Councilor Rachel Maiore. Also present was Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.

2. **Announcement that Meeting is Being Audio/Video Recorded**
Councilor Elkins announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

3. **Public Comment**

Chris Stratton, Ward 6, noted that, while he will be serving in government next year, he is speaking right now as a private citizen. The city has recently been through the most contested election in some time, capping off an 18-month period when the people of Northampton have grown wonderfully interested in understanding the function of their government. As they move from contest to collaboration, he hopes they can bring the people of the city along on that journey by continuing to encourage and support broad civic interest in both the bounds of decisions available to local vs. state or federal government, and the process by which conclusions are reached.

All-way stop signs are a topic of the moment. Many believe that their placement is a political decision, unaware that there are objective federal and state criteria, called traffic warrants, which are supposed to guide the decision. It's raised some eye brows that an intersection near the Mayor's home is about to be upgraded to a four-way stop.

He hasn't been able to find the specific engineering study, but from his own searching of state data, it appears that the crash warrant likely was satisfied during a bad stretch a few years ago, so that process is as it should be.

Tonight, this committee will deliberate an intersection in Leeds. During the Traffic and Parking Commission's (TPC's) recent consideration, a retired traffic engineer raised concerns if a crosswalk in the post office exit might be too close to the intersection. He also requested the engineering report, which does not appear to have been made available.

And in his own Ward 6, residents have ongoing concerns over the terrible intersection of West Farms and Glendale with Westhampton Road. He's confirmed by his own search that the crash warrant does not appear to be satisfied there. It is bad, but not bad enough. He doesn't believe the traffic volume warrant is satisfied either. "That does leave open the possibility of a sight occlusion issue, or just an engineering judgment determination," he acknowledged.

He did not come tonight so much to debate the details of these, but is here to suggest that their civic process would be best-served by posting the engineering reports and then walking the public through the process by which a decision is reached. This is especially true so that if people are dissatisfied with an outcome, they can focus their attention either on reform of the external guiding principles or on improvement of their local implementation.

Heather Craig, thanked sponsors for looking at bus stops in Florence. She sent some photos and a transcript of a voice recording she made with observations about the bus stops. She is hoping that, in addition to the stops themselves, people will take up asking PVTA to change its route so the bus doesn't turn where the Pie Bar is but instead makes that turn right near the Florence Bank bus stop. She has a video of literally sitting and waiting for 15 minutes while the 44 bus is blocked both by traffic and loading/unloading at Cooper's. The information she sent to Councilor Jarrett is available if anybody wants to take a look at it, she said.

Benjamin Spencer, Rust Avenue, said he is checking in to offer his support for these improvements. He thinks it is really great to see their public transit elevated; it is such an important resource for so many in the city and it is great to see a continuation of the improvements coming for Main Street downtown. Where the stop signs are going makes a lot of sense to him, so he is here to voice his support for what's on the agenda.

4. Approval of Minutes

Councilor Jarrett moved to approve the minutes of the October 9, 2025 Joint Planning Board/Legislative Matters Committee meeting. Councilor Maire seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote.

5. Items Referred to Committee

A. 25.320 An Ordinance Relative to Bus Stop Locations

Councilor Elkins reviewed the legislative history, noting that the ordinance received a positive recommendation from TPC with the request to expand the bus stops beyond the actual length of the buses.

As a regular bus rider himself, Councilor Jarrett said he noticed that many of the city's bus stops are 'stealth' bus stops; i.e. - unmarked. He is excited to move this project forward so each of these are properly signed so they can enforce no parking restrictions and make a few adjustments. He was happy to work with the planning department and, in particular, ADA Coordinator Keith Benoit.

Keith Benoit referred to three documents he sent out. The city has 83 bus stops and only about 20 are officially designated in the ordinance on a schedule for that purpose, thereby defining them as 'no parking' areas. If the stops are signed 'no parking,' parking enforcement officers can issue tickets. All the bus stops are operational. Some currently on the ordinance have been shifted due to changing street patterns but 63 are not currently in the ordinance at all, so he and Councilor Jarrett went out and measured them so they could be defined by a distance from a fixed reference point. It is mostly an administrative exercise but they have worked with PVTA, which advised them to remove two bus stops and shift others. The removals are to consolidate stops to avoid duplication and the shifts are for safety reasons. PVTA prefers their buses to stop after intersections and some stops were before intersections.

In measuring the stops, they took the length of the buses into consideration; all are 60 feet except for the B43, which is 80 feet and only stops at a few stops. All stops have numerical ID's now for easy identification for communication with PVTA.

In shifting any bus stop locations, they were looking for places optimized for safety and to not remove parking spaces. They are not proposing to remove any parking, and some stops have been shifted further to avoid loss of spaces, he stressed. They want to be respectful of businesses and the users of those businesses to maintain their parking.

The ordinance is not proposing physical upgrades, he clarified. He had the opportunity two years ago to do a full accessibility analysis of a few bus stops for a grant and it's very labor intensive. There is no staff time for similar analyses and funding is not available for the improvements, so no physical upgrades are proposed. They are also not looking at accessibility although they tried to line stops up with a curb cut if possible. Where there are obstructions, bus drivers are very good at making sure to come to a stop in a safe place.

The Transportation and Parking Commission (TPC) asked that they look at enforcement. No enforcement mechanism is proposed in the original schedule and they are not proposing one here. TPC also asked for installation of signage. They noted where no signage currently exists and PVTA has some money to install new signs.

For this ordinance, they are just trying to formalize the location of the stops so they know where there's no parking.

There was some concern about the location of bus stops in Florence and on King Street, Mr. Benoit continued. On King Street, they are proposing to move one of the benches at 129 King Street in front of Servicenet because there is no good alternative for a bus stop there that doesn't remove parking.

Councilor Jarrett expressed his understanding that, although no enforcement mechanism is specifically mentioned, once 'no parking' zones are created, they can be enforced by the parking department.

Clearly, there is more work to be done, but getting every stop designated and signed with route numbers is a great step, he observed. They do need to do the work of upgrading the stops, installing sidewalks around them and shelters in places of high ridership and advocating for increased service, he confirmed.

Heather Craig has a number of good suggestions, but most of them involve changes PVTA itself would have to make, Councilor Jarrett said. This is not something they can do in the short time they have and changing the route is a more time-intensive process. He said he would certainly bring those issues up to PVTA.

She also talked about the stop closest to Parson's Block where Bird's store is. There was some talk about shrinking the size of some of the parking spaces there, Councilor Jarrett recollected.

There is space to shift them without reducing any parking, Keith confirmed. That would be a conversation with the DPW, he said.

Councilor Jarrett said that in the time between Legislative Matters and the City Council meeting, perhaps they could have a conversation with the DPW to see if it is possible to do some shifting to give the bus stop a little more space.

Councilor Maiore noted that the relocation of the bus stop in front of Tandem Bagel was brought up by a local business as being problematic.

Councilor Jarrett explained the rationale for shifting the Tandem Bagel stop further down the street as being so as not to have to eliminate a parking space. If no one is parked there, bus drivers can lower the ramp to let people off onto the sidewalk, he explained. If people are parked there, the bus has to park in the middle of the street. Shifting it would require eliminating a parking space so they decided instead to move the stop down the street toward Florence Hardware.

Councilor Maiore said she is concerned about conflict with the hardware store's loading area. She asked the number of times a day buses use the stop.

Councilor Jarrett screen-shared a photograph of the proposed location to show that the stop is being moved just beyond the entrance to the Florence Hardware loading area. It starts just beyond the telephone pole and ends at the 35 mph sign. The bus comes once an hour. He believes trucks unloading items for Florence Hardware don't on the street but pull into Florence Hardware's loading area. "I'm not aware of direct conflicts," he said.

Councilor Maiore said she thinks some concerns may or may not come to fruition, such as concern for products stacked there. Maybe someone could put something there to divide the stop from stacked supplies.

Councilor Jarrett said he also heard concern that people would leave trash. They have to balance various needs. Wherever this is located, there may be impacts, he acknowledged.

There will be some people waiting at this stop but a lot of folks will be getting off here after coming down from Leeds. This isn't set in stone, they could make another adjustment, he observed.

Councilor Perry said that when he was campaigning, he watched as a number of trucks pulled into this space to unload.

Councilor Jarrett said he wasn't aware trucks were stopping there given that it's a 'no parking' zone.

He and Mr. Benoit will work with PVTA to make sure signs are posted letting people know the stop will be moving, he assured.

Councilor Elkins noted that anyone who's stopped in at Tandem knows there is a conflict between parking and the bus stop. If there has to be a balancing, she would balance in favor of the bus stop and safe disembarkment for people with disabilities.

She thanked Councilor Jarrett and Keith Benoit for working so hard on this.

They are not adding bus stops on private property; i.e. Meadowbrook, the VA Medical Center, the Hampshire County Jail, etc., Mr. Benoit noted.

Councilor Jarrett said he would be happy to talk more with Councilor Maiore about the Florence Hardware stop.

Councilor Perry moved a positive recommendation. Councilor Jarrett seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

B. 25.331 An Ordinance Relative to Crosswalk Parking Prohibition Enforcement

The ordinance received a positive recommendation from TPC October 21st, Councilor Elkins reported. The gist of the change is to strike the words 'where posted' in §312-27 C indicating that no parking is allowed "Upon any crosswalk or within 10 feet of either side of a crosswalk ~~where posted.~~"

Councilor Jarrett explained that this came out of discussion with Parking Administration, DPW and the Planning office about the crosswalk near Chestnut Street and the rail trail. People tend to park along Chestnut Street near the crosswalk, creating some sight line issues. At TPC, members discussed that education about the change would be important, such as news alerts and posting of parking rules on the city website. Parking administration seems amenable to issuing warnings for a period of time, he volunteered.

Councilor Elkins asked if there was any thought of mailing notices to properties near the crosswalks. Councilor Jarrett said 'yes,' but he thinks that number would be quite large. It would be a challenge so issuing warnings would be a good way to go instead.

Councilor Perry asked if they considered having signs for problem areas such as Chestnut Street.

Councilor Jarrett said that is an implementation question for Parking Administration and the DPW. It is an option but there is an expense. He hopes they would be amenable to taking some kind of action for problem areas.

Councilor Maiore said she suspects some parkers may be Pie Bar customers so she suggested having the Pie Bar distribute flyers.

Gwen Nabad, Ward 1, said her idea is to spread the word through a public relations campaign such as through the city newsletter.

Chris Stratton expressed his understanding that the goal is to be able to enforce violations without it having to be explicitly marked. He doesn't think that means it couldn't be temporarily marked with a ground-mounted sign where there are recurring problems. Particularly for the Chestnut Street rail crossing, he has long had a concern that two-thirds of people would imagine a stop sign being on the road when it's actually on the rail trail. He worries that the degree to which drivers imagine a stop sign on the road invites people to think it's okay to proceed into the intersection when it isn't. He mentioned the importance of thinking about whether they are encouraging a behavior that's not quite safe. He would love to put a stop sign on the road but he doesn't think they could satisfy the warrants for it. He supports this, he said.

Councilor Jarrett moved a positive recommendation. Councilor Perry seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

- C. 25.335 An Ordinance Relative to Stop Control on Bedford Terrace, City Council referral pending - 11/6/2025
- D. 25.336 An Ordinance Relative to Stop Control at Various Locations, City Council referral pending - 11/6/2025.

Councilor Elkins proposed taking these together.

With regard to the proposal for stop control on Bedford Terrace, the intersection is at an angle and there is a wide turning angle, Councilor Jarrett explained. The city contracted with a firm to do a study of a number of problem intersections. Here, consultants identified that the city would be better-served liability-wise to have a stop sign. Improvements are coming to this area to tighten up the intersection to make the crossing distance shorter and prevent people from taking the turn too quickly, he volunteered.

For Corticelli Street, it is presently missing a stop sign on one side.

Re: the proposal for all-way stops at Mulberry, Audubon and River Roads and Blackberry Lane and Prospect Avenue, these intersections met warrants for all-way stops, Councilor Jarrett advised.

Councilor Maiore said she got a lot of feedback on the Mulberry, Audubon and River Road intersection and everyone was overwhelmingly in favor of adding the two stop signs. She mentioned hearing a concern about exiting the post office but said she doesn't think adding the two signs will make anything worse. She said she didn't know if that was addressed in the safety assessment, and it may be something she wants to follow up with the DPW director about. She wholly supports the additional two signs there and the sign at Corticelli.

Councilor Jarrett says he has requested those studies in the past and the DPW has given them to him. He agrees with Chris Stratton that these studies should be posted to the website since they are very helpful in showing that data has been collected and warrants have been met. He encourages the DPW to do that.

Councilor Elkins said she agrees these changes look like very straightforward. They are known trouble stops so the recommendations make sense.

Councilor Maiore moved to send a positive recommendation for the two as a group to the full City Council. Councilor Perry seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

6. New Business

None.

7. Adjourn

There being no new business, **Councilor Perry moved to adjourn. Councilor Jarrett seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call. The meeting adjourned at 6:24 p.m.**

Prepared By:

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Joint Meeting of the Northampton Planning Board and the City Council Committee on Legislative Matters

<i>Legislative Matters Committee Members</i>	<i>Planning Board Members</i>
<i>Councilor Marissa Elkins, Chair</i>	<i>George Kohout, Chair</i>
<i>Councilor Garrick Perry, Vice Chair</i>	<i>Stacy Dakai</i>
<i>Councilor Alex Jarrett</i>	<i>Cameron Roach</i>
<i>Councilor Rachel Maiore</i>	<i>Chris Tait</i>
	<i>Sam Taylor</i>
	<i>Janna White</i>

MEETING MINUTES

Date: July 17, 2025

Time: 6:30 p.m.

212 Main Street, Northampton, MA

- 1. Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call:** At 6:32 p.m., Councilor Marissa Elkins called the meeting to order. On a roll call, the following councilors were present: Councilor Elkins, Chair; Councilor Garrick Perry, Vice Chair and Councilor Alex Jarrett. Councilor Rachel Maiore was absent. Also present was Office of Planning and Sustainability (OPS) Director Carolyn Misch and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.

Planning Board Members present: Chris Tait (Chair), Stacy Dakai, George Kohout, Sam Taylor and Cameron Roach, Associate Member.

- 2. Announcement that Meeting is Being Audio/Video Recorded**

Councilor Elkins announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

- 3. Public hearing on proposed zoning change**

Public hearing notice published July 3, 2025 and July 10, 2025 in the Daily Hampshire Gazette per M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 5.

- A. 25.251 Petition to Amend Chapter 350.4 Zoning Map to Rezone Parts of CB-Side to URC, referred to Planning Board and Legislative Matters by City Council May 21, 2025**

Councilor Perry moved to open the Legislative Matters hearing. Councilor Jarrett seconded. The motion passed unanimously 3:0 by voice vote with Councilor Maiore absent. The hearing opened at 6:35 p.m.

Member Kohout moved to open the Planning Board hearing. Member Dakai seconded. The motion passed unanimously 5:0 by voice vote.

Councilor Elkins explained the procedure she would use in conducting the hearing, noting that the petitioner, property owner and planning department, each represented by one designated person, will all have equal time (five minutes) to present their position on the legislation.

The petitioners indicated Dan Breindel will be speaking for them.

Following the presentations, they will hear from the public. Folks will have three minutes to speak to the petition and ask questions. Members will take notes of questions raised. Following public comment, the deliberating bodies will discuss and pose questions raised by the public to the person best able to answer them.

After the deliberating bodies are satisfied that they have gathered enough information and that questions have been answered, the public hearing will be closed. Deliberation will be wholly internal with the Planning Board and Legislative Matters Committee. After closing the hearing, they will not be recognizing additional people to speak.

The vote each body will take will be for a recommendation back to the full City council either positive, negative or neutral. The Planning Board recommendation is merely advisory and neither recommendation is binding on the full council or even on the individual participants here today. Votes can change between the committee meeting and the full council meeting.

This hearing pertains to the proposed zoning change brought by the petitioners. The proposed project which is the subject of ongoing litigation is not the subject of the hearing tonight.

She encourages all to focus on what is persuasive, factual and explanatory and reminds all that, in addition to being kind and neighborly, being civil is also persuasive.

PRESENTATIONS

Councilor Elkins recognized Dan Breindel.

Dan Breindel thanked councilors and Planning Board members for hearing the petition, noting that he has been working to get this consideration since February when he and his neighbors first found out about the zoning changes. A lot of members of the public are interested and prepared to speak but he knows a lot will probably not be able to because they are pushing into kid's bath and bedtime.

Mr. Breindel shared his screen. They face existential crises in this country and the city, including an affordability crisis in housing, a climate crisis all around them and a city that is increasingly inaccessible and unaffordable to both people wanting to move here and folks who have lived here forever, he stated. Residents need policy and planning that meets this moment. They need their city government to use its power to require that any new land use serves the public and helps preserve the planet. Housing needs and environmental concerns are very often presented as being in conflict; understandably so. Balancing those interests can be a complex and delicate dance. He believes deeply that the URC regulations developed and amended over time do a pretty good job of responsibly serving these interests while balancing these concerns. By taking the step of returning this parcel to the URC district which it borders and was always a part of until 2022, they can re-impose widely agreed-upon, common sense, already on the books, tried and true regulations with protections and requirements that make life better for everyone; that serve affordability and environmental needs and protect the community and residents who are going to move into this building or anything else built on that lot.

Mr. Breindel screen-shared excerpts of the URC Table of Use and Dimensional Regulations – Attachment 8. URC regulations require appropriate massing and height, have construction regulations that minimize impact to the neighborhood character and include visual buffers that protect abutters from headlights, noise pollution, light pollution and actual pollution. A minimum of one parking space per unit is required which makes a lot of sense considering that at least 90% of Northampton households have at least one car. Other regulations mitigate traffic, limit commercial use, limit carbon emissions (he referred to the city's focus on carbon reduction), require green space to the tune of 30% and have a lot of affordability controls baked in.

11% of units in a URC zone are required to be affordable or built small enough that it is conceivable that they would be affordable. [Editor's note: This requirement specifically applies to a special permit provision for multi-family or townhouse projects creating seven or more units or 14 or more half-scale units.] Beyond that, other protections make sure people in affordable units have full access to amenities (such as internet) that other residents have. By contrast, the brand new Central Business-Side Street (CBss) regulations strip all of these regulations. There are no affordability and no green space requirements at all and maximal massing requirements with footprints explicitly designed to maximize developer profit while staying just short of necessitating more expensive high-rise construction.

[He was told it was time but he requested to be allowed to continue as he was almost finished.]

CBss has none of those requirements or protections for affordability or the environment, he reiterated. Zero parking spots are required no matter how great the density of the building, transferring up to 200 cars from high-density buildings from carefully controlled and concealed parking lots under URC regulations right onto their public roads. They should be prioritizing getting cars off their roads, not moving tons of them onto their roads permanently. There are far less controls than in even the Central Business-Core (CBc) designation.

In 2025, with all the issues to be faced and problems to be solved, "we cannot afford radical deregulation; nor can we ignore the chance to impose meaningful controls on new construction. . ." The city is understandably interested in infill. However, when they increase and expand a commercial district and lift regulations for newly-zoned spaces, that's not infill; it's called urban sprawl. This is an expansion of their downtown at a time when they should be protecting their delicate communities. This parcel is an official detour route for tractor-trailers that can't make the clearance on Bridge Street. Even with current URC regulations, these roads are always densely parked to the point of not being able to move. [He screen-shared a video showing parked cars along Hawley Street.] "We are losing whole lanes in this neighborhood. That's a real danger." The bottom line: they can vote for affordability and environmental controls, neighborhood protections, safety and security and saving the city significant infrastructure costs, or they can vote against that and move to this de-regulated CBss zoning.

In 2022, he believes the majority of people hearing this moved to lift all of these controls. He would encourage them to vote with their hearts and their consciences and serve the people of Northampton.

O'Connell Development Group President Sarah Stein informed members that **O'Connell Hawley II LLC**, a fully-owned subsidiary of O'Connell Development Group, is the owner of the lot in question. As property owners, they ask that existing zoning, which was studied in 2011 and again in 2022, remain as it currently stands - Central Business-Side Street (CBss).

The .037-acre parcel (approximately 16,000 s.f.) is currently a parking lot and previously served the adjacent Catholic Church. Earlier this year, O'Connell submitted a site plan and special permit application for a 51-unit apartment building. The lot was previously designated 32A-170 and 32A-197 with the larger of the two (32A-170) located at the corner of Phillips Place and Hawley Street. It was changed to CB zoning in 2012 as part of a larger rezoning effort which impacted five other areas in the city, including seven lots on Hawley Street.

O'Connell purchased the property from the Catholic Diocese along with other vacant diocese properties in March of 2020. At that time, the former church, parish center and rectory had been vacant for 10 years. The existing zoning has been studied by the city. She spent time reviewing community outreach presentations from 2011, 2020 and 2022. This zoning was thoughtful and it was talked about. The 2012 zoning was in direct alignment with a Housing Needs Assessment and Strategic Housing Plan published in 2011. The 2022 change was in alignment with the Sustainable Northampton Comprehensive Plan.

As the property owner of the single parcel, she asks that city officials do not change the current zoning.

As background, Director Misch explained that, upon adoption of the Sustainable Northampton Plan in 2008, committees were formed to do outreach on implementation strategies based on the plan's policy sections. Part of that was looking at downtown and how to encourage land use changes to promote housing. Even before that, a housing crisis had been building along with the need to look for opportunities for creating housing in different ways. The broad scale policy directive was to make and implement zoning changes in accordance with the future land use map, which focuses development in and around downtown and village centers. Towards that end, a rezoning committee was formed. Many zoning amendments came on the heels of adoption of that plan. One recommendation was to look at ways to encourage economic development and housing and see where it made sense to expand those in the CB district.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church was going through a retraction of its properties. There was concern that these big buildings would not be able to be re-used and efforts were made to find creative regulatory solutions to enable the properties to be redeveloped. The downtown has had bits and pieces of expansion on its edge for the last 20 years, one, two and four parcels at a time. In 2012, this particular expansion was targeted at church holdings at this corner. It grabbed one parcel on the north side of Phillips and two on the east. However, it quickly became apparent that it didn't capture all that was necessary to help facilitate development there and instead created impediments to redeveloping the whole parcel. At various times, there were conversations about rezoning the remaining portion of that church-owned property (32A-197).

Different development scenarios were presented, including a mixed commercial/residential project. Knowing it made sense to add the second portion of the east side parcel (32A-197) to CBss, a package was about to be introduced in 2018 but was pulled back when planners started discussing the form-based code. They decided instead of pushing it ahead to wrap it into the entire conversation about the form-based code, since it actually created many more protections and design criteria to create compatibility with other properties within the downtown. The form-based code transitioned the city from a use-based system to something more based on design, character, massing and architectural integrity. Its adoption was a four-year process with over 20 meetings. In that process, they wrapped additional parcels into the CB zone. The purpose was to direct changes and improvements in accordance with the land use map and use more densely-developed areas to encourage higher density housing and infill and create and preserve high-quality built environments. An associated goal was economic development to insure a vibrant downtown. Supporting infill in downtown and on its edges has a positive impact on business development downtown; i.e. - restaurants, offices, etc.

This led to adoption of the form-based code which divided the CB district into three zones (core, gateway and side street) recognizing that each of these have slightly different characteristics. This is CB-side because it is not on Main, Pleasant or King Street but still has some characteristics that help support downtown viability. That was 2022, and they have since seen a few projects come in.

Director Misch countered Mr. Breindel's assertion that the URC district has a strict affordability requirement. She clarified that instead there is a special permit provision that multi-family or townhouse projects creating more than seven units must meet certain standards, including that either 11% of the units must be affordable or that

25% must be less than 1,200 square feet. There is not otherwise a general mandate to build affordable housing, she stressed.

She also identified misrepresentations about protections CBss lacks. The district continues to have lighting standards effective across the entire city as well as tree protections and parking screening requirements.

With the presentations concluded, Councilor Elkins opened the floor to comments from the public.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Harold Wolfe, 28 Phillips Place, proposed a thought experiment; he asked members to imagine that everyone who recently received an unsolicited cash offer on their house accepted it, so that the city is now majority owned by private equity. Central Business zoning crept into their neighborhood like the camel's nose under the tent, first one lot, then two, he asserted. Now, with the wave of a magic wand, the Planning Board has made it into one big lot. What was once 0 Phillips Place is now something Hawley Street. This peninsula, this thumb in their eye, is its own proud CB-Side Street (CBss) parcel. Cram it full of monthly renters; just make sure the sidewalk goes to the curb and to put in a few trees surrounded by flexible paving. The point of the form-based code is to make development easier. There is an affordable housing crisis but this is about enlarging the city's tax base. To make that happen, the city is more than willing to roll out the red carpet to developers. They've been told by people in this room that the city has wanted to develop this for a long time and that the form-based code makes it a lot easier. Most of the people in this room were here in 2022. He and they know what's going to happen.

He read aloud something Gerry Budgar wrote to Carolyn Misch in 2013: "I do have some concerns about the legislation and the process of bringing it to the City Council. There is great concern that developers will begin intensively searching for parcels in URB and URC so they can tear down or build around existing structures and construct much larger, disproportionately-sized buildings that shoehorn as many units as possible on the property." Mr. Budgar voiced concern that existing ordinances for townhouses and attached structures were not reviewed with respect to the proposed zoning. These sorts of developments are routinely the most controversial, and many people are worried they are further inviting this kind of infill without a public discussion, he wrote.

It's been over 10 years of people saying the same thing, Mr. Wolfe noted.

Councilor Elkins told Mr. Wolfe he could submit the full statement for inclusion in the public record.

Colin Hoffmeister, Phillips Place, said he would like to have the parcel zoned back to URC. A zoning change is a major regulatory action and the neighborhood was not informed, he asserted. In 2020, O'Connell purchased this lot when it was URC. It's interesting that, in 2022, without public notice or abutters being notified, the zoning was changed. Doesn't it make sense to notify abutters of something that is going to radically change the value of their property, their privacy and access to sunlight and increase traffic? That's why he's asking them to support returning this to URC. They're told it meets the Sustainable Northampton Plan. He read it, and it says that any commercial project introduced to a residential area shall coincide with major road improvements and that development should improve the character of the neighborhood. There is nothing about a 65-foot tall building 28 feet from his house and 188 feet long that is going to improve the character of the mid-1800's neighborhood. The original intent of O'Connell was to build housing. That script got flipped. When the legal notice came out in 2022, it said downtown Florence Center and downtown. Phillips Place is *not* downtown. In the 128-page document he went through, there is not one mention of Phillips Place or the parcel number. That's not sufficient notification, that's lack of notification.

He thinks they owe a responsibility to their positions to notify the public. On a major regulatory action, a non-transparent government did not notify them. From 2022 to March of 2025, the city and the developer worked in

cahoots on this but none of them knew. It also says residents should have a voice. "We've been throttled," he stated. They're going against a major developer. He asked for their support. This project is very detrimental to his personal property, sunlight, privacy and air. That's why he's here.

Alex Bowman, Market Street, said he has been following this and thinks the boards here have an opportunity to right a wrong instead of doubling down. This one lot down Phillips Place is unlike any other in Northampton in that it is not actually directly on a side street yet is in the side street district. Other lots are split so that even if one section is on a side street the other section is still designated URC. This one lot is completely different; it doesn't make any sense. To him what would make the most sense is for the front lot be side street and the back URC. It's okay to make mistakes but you have to fix them when things are done incorrectly, he suggested.

Nina Shield, Northampton, expressed support for the rezoning, saying she appreciated the chance to clarify a 'distressing amount of misinformation' about the Phillips/Hawley project. As they've heard, the zoning of 2022 rolled back many protections they claim to want in new construction, from affordability to green space. She knows parking is not a popular suggestion, but cars are a necessary reality for most. In fact, she knows several people who work downtown and park on Phillips Place. She was surprised at a councilor's suggestion on a site visit that workers could park in a downtown garage instead. They park on their street because it's free while a downtown garage could easily cut into an hour's wages, she pointed out. She thinks zoning needs to be thought of holistically rather than as just affecting one neighborhood. If they need affordable housing, they should require it and not offer it up to developers and hope they do the right thing. As Councilor Jarrett recently noted, there were no applications for affordable housing credits this cycle, and why would there be when new zoning encourages them to build without it?

A recent Letter to the Editor in the Gazette quoted the architect of another development as citing the use of front porches and front stoops to "retain the idea that this is a residential neighborhood." A return to URC would signal a return to contextual, historical and respectful architecture that is a boon rather than a burden to the entire city, she suggested.

Matt Hoey, 16 Butler, said he can throw a baseball off the planned project. He read excerpts from a Gazette article about 111 Hawley Street describing parking and trash collection arrangements. It said each unit would have a single-car garage and an additional parking space in an adjacent driveway. No bicycle racks or centralized dumpster were proposed because residents were expected to store their bicycles inside and garages enable the units to have their own waste and recycling.

According to Architect Scott Laidlaw, the building design is townhouse-style, inspired by houses on nearby Eastern Avenue. In coming up with the design, project developers were influenced by the character of the neighborhood and style of existing buildings. They used sidewalks and front porches to mirror the streetscape and retain the appearance of a residential neighborhood.

Referring to the goodwill reflected, "We're not NIMBY's; what we want is good will," he volunteered. They got their extra floor; they know there's not enough parking. "We know they did the parking study during inclement weather in late December when people were out of town and the students are away," he asserted. He and his neighbors have been left to beg, fundraise, hire lawyers and come here and waste their evenings. . . Why no good will on this one? What about the citizens, the people who live here? All they wanted was some good will, to be treated with respect and for *some* of their concerns to be responded to. It's been a humiliating experience. "We live there and we feel like we're not being represented," he contended. "You shouldn't have to beg for good will." It should be a mutually beneficial relationship like it was at 111.

Dan Breindel raised a point of order. As the sponsor of the legislation, he asked if he's there to also answer questions. He voiced his perception that his credibility was 'sort of challenged' by the planning director. "I feel uncomfortable about having the basis of why I drafted this so challenged without an ability to respond."

Councilor Elkins said if questions are posed that are appropriately directed to him, he could respond. She said he could take three minutes to speak now if he wished.

Mr. Breindel said he finds it funny that the planning director who drafted this legislation and sees this as being an oversight of her judgment pushed back against many of his claims about affordability and environmentalism. Yes, if building more than six units, some of them have to be affordable, he acknowledged. It is true the form-based code gives a little bit of flexibility to the Planning Board for architecture and matching the neighborhood. As Planning Board members know, [this is] not the case for CB-side; there's very little flexibility and it's mainly geared towards maximizing the footprint and the platform. As an additional concern, he said he doesn't know how normal it is for a legislative process for so many people to speak against a legislative proposal before the public is even allowed to state their opinions. In terms of presenting this initial legislation, he feels it has been underserved by some of the information and the public was underserved by significant misinformation.

Meg Robbins, a resident of greater downtown **Northampton**, which she referred to as "a prime neighborhood for chaotic developers," said she supports this amendment. She posed the following questions:

- ❖ How has the planning committee interacted with impacted city residents on this request?
- ❖ How many members of this committee and City Council have visited the site and met with residents?
- ❖ For those who have heard from residents, how have they brought their concerns into their decision-making?
- ❖ Does it matter?

She said she would like to hear from petition signers about their experience with council and Planning Board site visits that engaged their input.

The 2008 Northampton Sustainability Plan was created from over 3,000 residents responses to a survey and multiple meetings during a 28-month planning process, she reminded. In contrast, the recent Picture Main Street survey had only 62 city resident undisaggregated responses. The sustainability plan was created by a broad array of city voices and brought back to residents for two 'did we get it right?' sessions.

She heard Director Misch refer to the updated plan, which was not a product of a community process.

The comprehensive plan required annual evaluation and mandated recognition and fostering of the unique history, character, and function of each residential, commercial, mixed use and open space neighborhood. It was pre-form-based code. Those participating in that discussion were thrilled by the sense of empowerment it gave them and the meaningful ways it provided to consider where and what kind of development worked best for individual neighborhoods.

"Those of us who were dumbfounded by the steamrolling of city vs. neighborhood in Warfield Place realized that this community-created agreement meant nothing when power overran people," she stated.

Phillips Place is a beautiful and historic district. The proposed O'Connell building is neither and is an example of what would be allowed without acceptance of this amendment, she asserted.

Northampton can create housing that is affordable, accessible, beautiful and historically complementary with the architecture of the neighborhood. Axing zoning requirements and expanding downtown building acceptability is

incredibly out of sync with what brings visitors and dwellers to their city and is irreversible. She heard Director Misch mention parking requirements for these buildings, which seems to fly in the face of Councilor Jarrett and Councilor Elkins proposed ordinance to reduce parking requirements for developers.

This is a citywide discussion. She would ask this group of appointed and elected representatives to put this out to the general public.

How do we want our city to be? Where is the voice of citizens in the decision-making? At what point do we say that resident voice and resident vision matter?

Speaking as the Ward 3 City Councilor, **Councilor Rothenberg** explained why she thinks this was not an appropriate zoning change in the first place - which supports changing it back to URC - and why she thinks they may have hesitations about doing that.

To her, this looks like a case of potential spot zoning, which is a problem for the city in terms of legal liability. If they changed this parcel for the financial benefit of the owner, that is a serious problem, she asserted. She expressed her understanding that, in the context of a larger conversation, many of them feel like it's a greater good to pack apartments in there, so they're pushing onward. The conversation this community is just beginning to have, and will have in much greater scope during the election, is that these policies and this zoning change - the way it's being enacted and its loopholes - are *not* meeting that greater good; in fact, they are really quite doing the opposite.

In this development, they see luxury, small condos. The concept of trickle-down housing - the idea that people would move out of houses at retirement age and those would then become available and be affordable - is easy to debunk but she understands their planning director has espoused it. "You haven't done the kind of assessing to see if that's really happening," she alleged. What seems to be happening based on changes she sees in Ward 3 is that they just have wealthy people moving into expensive condos from other cities, which is fine; they welcome them. But, it doesn't achieve the greater good of making more attainable, affordable housing available. She says this because she wants them to slow down and take a pause when they think they are doing this for the greater good.

Since it is not a proper or correct change of zoning and is not serving the greater good, please don't charge forward with leaving the zoning as it is. Please change it back, she urged.

Councilor Jarrett asked Director Misch to speak to how zoning changes affect future use. How would this change affect any previously-approved plan or plan in progress? He asked.

Zoning is forward-looking, so any approved change would apply to projects approved in the future, Director Misch clarified. The Planning Board approved a project for this site and it is going through its process. Its special permit was appealed.

If a use is already in place that doesn't meet the new zoning, it is considered a pre-existing nonconforming use.

If the current project doesn't go through, he asked if the developer has any rights to propose a new project under the old zoning.

Once a permit is approved, an applicant has three years to initiate the project. If the permit is not exercised within three years, the new zoning would be applicable.

Councilor Jarrett noted that a statement he made at an earlier meeting about there being no applications in the most recent Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding round for affordable housing seems to have been mistakenly conflated with this project.

For the benefit of the public, Councilor Elkins said the two bodies are now talking and directing questions to people most appropriate to answer them and will not be taking further public comment.

Mr. Breindel asked if he could speak to that, and Councilor Elkins said 'no.' She said that if a question is posed to him, she would allow him to answer.

At Councilor Elkins request, Director Misch recapped the history of the subject parcel, which formerly consisted of two separate parcels (32A-170 and 32A-197) but merged through the Approval not Required (APR) process.

Since only the front portion of the combined parcel was rezoned Central Business (CB) in 2012, the smaller portion at the back part of the property remained URC until its rezoning in 2022. When a split-zoned parcel is owned by one entity, dimensional requirements for the larger part of the parcel govern, Director Misch advised. For the back URC portion, the same uses are allowed but URC density and setback requirements would apply.

Under zoning, if one lot is nonconforming, the lots merge. Since it's easier to receive one tax bill, many people come in every year and eliminate the line in between lots. That's what this property owner did.

If the back portion were to revert to URC, in addition to density and setback requirements, that portion of the lot would be subject to the maximum height restriction for URC, which is 50 feet. The maximum height allowed in CB is 20 feet higher, or 70 feet.

Mr. Breindel asked if he could speak to this question. Councilor Elkins said she was satisfied with Director Misch's answer.

Councilor Elkins recognized Harold Wolfe. He asked who was responsible for the rezoning of the lot in 2012.

Councilor Perry commented that, as they pull back and look at this area, he understands it to be unique. He asked what the city's vision is for it.

Market Street was the original downtown and the area has been coined 'Paradise City East,' Director Misch related. Energy has waxed and waned over the years, but, coming out of COVID, there has been real interest in trying to stand up and bring their downtown back. There has been a little bit of a disconnect with the bridge. The idea of the bridge lighting was to reknit the two parts of downtown, encourage this area as part of downtown and encourage both business and housing to support the economy.

Post-COVID, the city sought expertise from the state for a rapid recovery plan. One recommendation was to look at how to support all the opportunities in their downtown and connect them. The Climate Resilience and Regeneration (CR&R) plan update in 2021 talked about linking housing to economic development and trying to build and sustain a strong business community.

Central Business side streets do not have one uniform character and, in fact, change across block faces. The end towards Bridge Street has higher buildings of greater mass. Farther down Hawley Street is lower-scale development. Lower density parcels along the railroad provide opportunities for additional development. The point of the form-based code was to have a community conversation to identify the important elements of downtown character and what features they wanted to reflect in new projects. The idea is to set up parameters

in a community conversation before development even happens to provide a clear 'cookbook' so everyone is aware what the city wants. Having all those conversations about where to direct new growth is why the process took four years. There was a lot of discussion about edges as well and how to encourage the type of housing they want but recognize that it may be on a different scale than what's on the immediate street next door.

Affordable housing needs public funding to offset the cost of building it. The cost of housing has been going up dramatically since 2019. One way to allow people to enter the market is to allow flexibility to build smaller units.

Councilor Perry assured people that all of their comments are being heard and processed. He reminded those listening that buildings are not the city's character; its character is determined by the people living there.

Members sought to address questions raised in public comment. Alex Bowman said his question was whether there are any other lots in the side street district that are not on side streets.

With regard to Meg Robbins' questions, Councilor Elkins said she did not think they are relevant to tonight's agenda item since they relate to a specific project.

Member Kohout said the great majority of Planning Board members visit the site before any large public hearing. They are often cautioned not to speak to abutters or property owners so they can stay impartial.

As far as Mr. Bowman's question, Councilor Elkins said part of the property is on a side street (Hawley), but she doesn't disagree that it extends a little bit down Phillips Place.

This is an issue with parcels on the edge generally, Director Misch noted. Particularly if they are large or oddly-shaped, they often project into another district. There are examples of other side street or gateway parcels that are surrounded by residential properties, she confirmed.

In 2012, the property was owned by the church, Director Misch clarified. A previous project approved for the site fell apart. As to why both weren't rezoned in 2012, at the time, CB had a different buffer zone requirement. A new [stronger] buffer zone requirement was built into the form-based code so it made sense to pull the lot in at that time. Having a single zoning designation was less cumbersome for building out the property.

As to Colin Hoffmeister's question about notification, with zoning map changes, only affected property owners are required to be notified, abutters are not.

There being no further questions, **Member Taylor moved to close the Planning Board hearing. Member Kohout seconded. The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands.**

Councilor Perry moved to close the Legislative Matters hearing. Councilor Jarrett seconded. The motion passed unanimously 3:0 by voice vote with Councilor Maiore absent.

The hearing was closed at 8:13 p.m.

Chris Tait noted that one parcel sticks into the residential zone a little more. The proposed ordinance in front of them is to change both lots back to URC, which he thinks is slightly incorrect since the other has been in the CB district since 2012. From his perspective, he could see switching the one that was URC back to URC but he wouldn't support at all switching the one that's been CB since 2012 back.

Member Taylor expressed the opinion that these types of petitions are not how good legislation is crafted. He knows this is something that was thought over for a long period of time; it didn't just come out of a vacuum. The result of voting 'yes' on petitions is what has led to the problem on King Street with the car dealership. He'd like to get rid of the ability for 10 people to sign a petition to change a law. He would vehemently vote against this petition.

Councilor Jarrett clarified that the King Street property owners have preserved the use for three years. That is not the reason they're not moving forward as he understands it.

Options for CB-side are a big change from the options for URC and can be a big change for the neighborhood, Councilor Jarrett acknowledged. City officials always have to balance the needs of the whole community and the needs of the neighborhood it affects. He recognizes the impacts this has. He highly recommends the book, "The Affordable City," by Shane Phillips. In it, he describes three different strategies for affordability: supply, subsidy and stability. Phillips argues planners need to do all three, including increasing supply so market forces are not pushing prices ever higher. The need for housing here is demonstrated every month by the higher and higher prices they are seeing. He wants to push back against the idea that more supply is raising prices; prices are going up because of enormous demand. However, increasing supply is just one piece. They also need to provide subsidies through federal, state and local grants, private donations and fundraising. If at all possible, the subsidy should be permanent such as a community land trust form with a 99-year lease. Finally, providing stability through rent stabilization, property tax exemptions, tenants' options to purchase, etc. is essential. Zoning is one tool to increase supply, but it's clear they need to do more. He supports state level change on rent stabilization and increasing subsidies for affordable housing, he confirmed.

Building densely means much less carbon emission per capita as compared to sprawling development, he continued. Looking at a map of carbon emissions, cities look terrible, but if looked at on a per capita basis, "cities are way greener." The amount of trees and green space lost to building homes on sprawling individual lots is enormous.

He thinks this lot is appropriate for CB-Side Street. It is in line with the Sustainable Northampton Plan, which, as described, was developed over decades with extensive public input. CBss characteristics include its proximity to downtown, including a short walk to public parking lots where it is possible to pay \$45 a month for parking spaces, and close proximity to regular and express bus service to Amherst. Its continuous use as a parking lot means it doesn't create an incentive to tear down existing homes. Retail or offices are allowed and expansion of those uses could create more vibrancy.

On street parking promotes traffic calming. Very real concerns about how parking is managed can be addressed with parking zone changes, time limits and residential permits. When more parking is required, the cost of housing is increased because it is required to be built whether or not it is going to be used and essentially invites people with more cars to live there.

When less parking is required, the cost of construction is less and it invites people with fewer cars to live there.

Councilor Jarrett said he does not support the proposed change. **He moved a negative recommendation to City Council. Councilor Elkins seconded.**

Going back to when she was on the Planning Board, one thing she has been consistent about as a general matter is favoring expansion of the downtown footprint, Councilor Elkins shared. She's also been heard to say that they are not going to cure a housing crisis by zoning alone but that it is one tool in the city's toolbox. On a project by project basis, she always steps back and thinks about what could be built by right as a single-family

home. Some examples of infill development are very big and built to the absolute maximum size and height. She always wants to think about that when incentivizing a builder to build that, as opposed to this.

She is not in support of this legislation. She thinks this parcel in this specific spot has shown up a friction point between the urban residential zone and the side street district. She always sees zoning as an ongoing discussion. This project has given them an opportunity to think about this friction point. A building built to the maximum height of seven stories in CBss at that location strikes her as obviously not correct. She's a 'no' tonight for some of the reasons Member Taylor gave, such as that zoning should be thought of more holistically. That said, she thinks they have had an opportunity to expose something that should be part of an ongoing conversation.

She would support taking a look at where CB-Side Street and URC come together to see if they are truly doing the best they can. The project in many ways appears to have dialed back to something in terms of density and height that could be built by right as a single-family home to the distress of neighbors without any kind of input. That's at the top end of what she thinks makes sense at the boundaries where CBss and URC meet.

She does think this conversation is going to be ongoing. It doesn't serve the whole city's needs to do something tonight that isn't likely at all to affect the project that brought this to their attention. To Alex Bowman's point, they should look at what could have been proposed, what doesn't seem to fit and make that adaptation.

Tonight, she is also in support of a negative recommendation.

Member Kohout said he remembers discussions around the form-based code. Did any of them have an image at that time of a 50-foot building with 51 apartments? He asked rhetorically. Probably not. But they did all understand that the city, especially downtown, needs to keep expanding and giving opportunities for more retail and housing. He appreciates that when they looked at Hawley Street, they really did go down the street from the lumberyard which is now the Center for the Arts to Hampshire Educational Collaborative and 111 Hawley Street.

Discussion took into account the Catholic churches that were starting to disassemble before their eyes. He doesn't want to step back from those discussions that happened at the Planning Board and City Council and at community meetings. He also would support a recommendation not to endorse this amendment. He thinks what they decided back then holds true for this parcel and for other areas of the city.

Stacey Dakai said she recognizes this is going to be a big change. She also lives in Ward 3 and a big development is proposed behind her house. She trusts the process that happened 13 years ago. Councilor Jarrett expressed a lot of the things she believes about housing and how they need to move forward with providing housing for people of different economic backgrounds. She does not think she would support the amendment.

Cameron Roach said he appreciates hearing everyone's thoughts and feelings, but he is going to agree with everyone he has heard more recently on this side and not support the proposal.

Chris Tait agreed there may be some tweaks to the side street district that the Planning Board could consider. He personally doesn't like that someone could put a six-foot fence up and reduce the buffer to 10 feet and might also support a height restriction to match the abutting zone. However, he doesn't think changing things back for one parcel affects the kind of change for the city they're looking for.

Councilor Jarrett said he appreciated the suggestion that they look at that interface because he agrees that 70' next to URC is [disproportionate].

Councilor Elkins called the motion to a vote, and **it carried 3:0 by voice vote with Councilor Maire absent.**

Member Kohout emphasized that there will be another opportunity for public comment at City Council.

Member Taylor moved to negatively recommend/reject the proposal. Member Kohout seconded. The motion passed unanimously 5:0 by a show of hands.

4. **New Business**

None.

5. **Adjourn**

There being no other business for Legislative Matters, **Councilor Perry moved to adjourn. Councilor Jarrett seconded. The motion carried 3:0 by voice vote with Councilor Maire absent.**

The joint meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

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City Council Committee on Legislative Matters

Members

Councilor Rachel Maiore

Councilor Laurie Loisel

Councilor Garrick Perry

Councilor Chris Stratton

MEETING MINUTES

Date: February 9, 2026 Organizational Meeting, 4 p.m.

Council Chambers, 212 Main Street

Northampton, MA

- Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call:** At 4:04 p.m., Acting Chair Rachel Maiore called the meeting to order. On a roll call, the following members were present: Councilor Rachel Maiore, Acting Chair; Councilor Laurie Loisel; Councilor Garrick Perry and Councilor Chris Stratton. Also present was Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.
- Announcement that Meeting is Being Audio/Video Recorded**
Councilor Maiore announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.
- Election of Chair**
Councilor Maiore opened the floor to nominations for chair.

Councilor Perry nominated Councilor Loisel.

Councilor Stratton nominated himself.

Councilor Loisel thanked Councilor Perry for his nomination, saying this was her top choice of committee as she is deeply interested in the matters that come before it (orders, ordinances and City Council rules). She knows it is not typical to have new councilors chair committees but there are a lot of new councilors, so sharing the work is necessary. She is good at knowing what she doesn't know and getting help to figure it out so she doesn't believe she would overstep. She has had a lot of experience chairing small and large boards, some unruly, some not. She would be honored to chair this committee.

Councilor Stratton commented that a constituent of his recently reminded him that they should be "hard on the problem and soft on the people." And, in a recent public forum, it was suggested that, as a community, they need to find their way back to being able to discuss uncomfortable topics productively. He came into the job of councilor very studied on the issues and their task but less familiar than he'd realized with some of the process. He'd already understood much of their functional job as councilors as being to translate constituent expressed concerns into the proper exercise of government function. But through a number of recent wonderful conversations, he has also come to understand a similar process of translating his concerns about process into

the process by which the government deliberates. His personal task of the moment is to exercise that same moment of translation introspectively towards developing that fluency with their process.

They are convened here today to organize one of the most critical committees on the council. The task of the committee is to dig into the depth of an issue on behalf of the council. While they will ultimately vote a recommendation, in many ways, that formalized opinion is incidental to their larger task of being finders of fact. When one reads the laws by which the Commonwealth delegates a small fraction of its power back to the municipal level, it becomes clear that a prime concern of the legislature was to prevent municipal government from engaging in adventurous or capricious legislation against its neighbors. For example, they are extremely limited in the forms of taxation and, by extension, tax relief, they can employ. In this committee, they will be revealing matters of profoundly powerful impact to the lives of their neighbors; i.e. traffic regulations and zoning rules. These regulations are highly technical, requiring willingness to study the material with which they are presented in depth and to seek out and examine supporting data. When they're presented with a product of hours, weeks or months of work from other branches of government, they should respect that effort, but they need to be that second set of eyes, finding key issues that may have been overlooked or understated. Therefore, he would propose that when they evaluate matters brought to them or consider writing legislation themselves, they should do so in a structured manner; first, endeavoring to identify the problem or concern that the legislation was intended to address. Next, they should examine the proposal for government action Is it a valid exercise of authority? Does it really address the problem? What other mechanisms could be used? Are they sure this one is the most appropriate? Will the impact on lives that is the inescapable consequence of their action be in balance with the legitimate government purpose the new rule achieves?

"When we have done our research, we will vote. But, as important as our vote, we should report our findings to the council."

Many times this could be the task of the chair. But they should leave room as well for a supplemental report from a member who feels there were findings not sufficiently captured in the report of the chair.

But most of all, as they deliberate as a small body, he wants to express a commitment he hopes they can all share to make sure people speaking are truly heard and not silenced. Parliamentary procedure has incidental motions, such as points of information, which force a pause. They need to remember that these are a pause; situations where a speaker must only temporarily yield the floor to the incidental motion, after which, in most circumstances, they should be permitted to resume and continue their remarks. They will hear remarks with which they disagree. He hopes they can commit as a body to hearing the public and to hearing each other out. Being heard is not just about being allowed to speak but is ultimately about the willingness to listen and to labor to understand the speaker.

Councilor Perry and Councilor Maiore shared one reason for supporting Councilor's Loisel's nomination as being her demonstrated experience chairing other committees, such as the Human Rights Commission. Garrick noted the committee's unique position in that, of its more senior members, Councilor Maiore is council president and already has a lot on her plate, and he is chairing another subcommittee and learning to take a step back. He believes whoever chairs this committee will have assistance from all of them. Councilor Maiore agreed part of her comfort in having a new chair is that she and Councilor Perry will be there to help and support them.

Councilor Maiore said she agrees with Councilor Stratton's description of subcommittees. Subcommittees are supposed to be a place with more latitude, more back and forth, more public input and diving more deeply into issues. Whoever chairs will have to be committed to understanding the difference with a more formal council meeting in terms of letting folk fully express ideas and accepting feedback. She was a member of the Human

Rights Commission under the chairmanship of Councilor Loisel and so has the memory and comfort of that experience.

She put Councilor Stratton on this committee because she thought his analysis and 'checks and balances' view would be a great asset. Her comfort level in terms of actually chairing would go with Councilor Loisel.

Councilor Stratton noted they are a new council. They have had two and a half meetings at this point and he thinks some mistakes have been made. He is troubled by an improperly executed attempt to clarify and find information on his part and he owns that. But he also saw a lot of disinterest in exploring issues and attempts to suppress speech and he is deeply concerned by that. [In committee] is "the primary representative democracy opportunity where the voice of the people is heard in the development of our legislation," he suggested. "We really need to be willing to take the time. . .and do the work and be facilitated by a chair who has the interest in that."

Frankly, he said he has concerns at the moment.

Councilor Loisel she also feels respectful of the need to dig into information. She actually agrees with every single thing Councilor Stratton said in his remarks in the beginning. He thinks this needs to be a fact-based committee and they need to work together well. She knows how to work with people. She believes in the democratic process as well and also really wants to hear from the public. Her training in journalism really taught her to know how to kick the tires and look under the hood and look for unintended consequences. She likes the idea of being on a smaller committee where they can roll up their sleeves and work together.

Councilor Perry assured he is not taking this decision lightly. He thinks any of them here would be worthy chairs. He likes what Councilor Stratton said about identifying problems, etc. They are young, a new council, and he is looking forward to finding out about new councilors. He has seen Councilor Loisel do that portion. He is certain she will not be derelict of their duties. While the chair of a subcommittee has some power it is not like council president.

Councilor Loisel referred to other chairing experience she has had, such as serving as president of the Board of the Council of Service Agencies of Hampshire County, a large board of varying opinions, and to her experience working collaboratively in the newsroom, where everybody has their own opinion. She also feels like it is their duty as councilors to help run an efficient city and she thinks constituents do too, so she thinks process is important and getting things done. She thinks they can balance those two things.

Councilor Stratton said he would be most comfortable with one of the senior councilors chairing as facilitators of their discussions. He's deeply concerned they may end up rushing through things too quickly. His ideal would be one of the two senior councilors as chair.

Councilor Maiore said she hears that, but Councilor Loisel has publicly committed to hearing feedback. She hears the concern but is hearing commitment to deal with that concern.

There being no further discussion, **councilors voted 3:1 by roll call vote as follows:**

Councilor Maiore – Councilor Loisel

Councilor Perry – Councilor Loisel

Councilor Loisel – Councilor Loisel

Councilor Stratton – Councilor Stratton

Councilor Loisel was elected chair.

4. Election of Vice Chair

Councilor Loisel assumed the position of chair.

Councilor Loisel nominated Councilor Perry.

Councilor Perry nominated Councilor Stratton.

Councilor Stratton accepted. He said his remarks were largely as before.

Councilor Perry accepted. He said he was very moved by Councilor Stratton's discussion/speech for chair. What was evident to him was his attention to detail. They do align on the core value of establishing facts here. The reason he accepted the nomination was the concern he heard of having a more senior person helping to rein in this committee. The reason he didn't nominate himself is that he is trying to be more aware of his work load and hold back. He has a tendency to volunteer for everything. He served as vice chair last term and that is why he is willing to step up and do that.

Councilor Stratton said it depends to some extent on what tasks they want the vice chair to fulfill. He could see a benefit to a coalition of opposites. He is somewhat curious as to the view of his colleagues on the balance of these roles.

Councilor Maiore thanked Councilor Perry for his willingness to serve, saying she has 100% faith in his ability. She does think having a senior person helping Councilor Loisel would be an asset. She frankly does have concern about whether a union of opposites would work out at this point. Her vote will be for Councilor Perry.

Councilor Perry said he thought he could handle this role. He thought it important to acknowledge Councilor Stratton's opinions and views. He can commit himself to trying his hardest to make sure the viewpoints and work ethic advocated by Councilor Stratton are facilitated. He does think Councilor Stratton could be a fine vice chair. He is moved by his research and his vision for this body. That being said, he is ready and willing to facilitate whatever makes this body work.

Councilor Loisel said she does feel it would be good to have a senior member as vice chair. She has a lot of respect for Councilor Perry's leadership and his experience on this committee.

She said she is a little perplexed by some of the things Councilor Stratton said about a coalition of opposites. She doesn't know why he is assuming that they're opposites. She thinks subcommittees are typically more collegial and [prone to] giving each other the benefit of the doubt and she hopes he would do that for her.

Councilor Stratton acknowledged they are engaging in an experiment. He sees the role of senior councilors as contributing their presence as opposed to a formal title. There is an implicit power in things that happen behind the scene.

To Councilor Loisel, he said he knows her mostly through their meetings and sees that they come to them with different intentions in terms of the depth with which they want to see things examined. He hopes she will prove him wrong.

Councilor Maiore said she thinks Councilor Stratton will be pleasantly surprised.

Councilor Loisel called the nominations to a vote, and **councilors voted 3:1 by roll call vote as follows:**

Councilor Perry – Councilor Perry
Councilor Loisel – Councilor Perry
Councilor Stratton – Councilor Stratton
Councilor Maiore – Councilor Perry

Councilor Perry was elected as vice chair

5. Public Comment

There was no general public comment.

6. Approval of Minutes of November 10, 2025

Members received an email earlier that day letting them know the minutes were not quite ready.

7. Items Referred to Committee

A. 26.010 An Ordinance Relative to All-Way Stop Control for Finn Street at Prospect Street, expected referral February 5, 2026

After clarifying the legislative process, Councilor Loisel proposed hearing from the DPW director. She voiced her assumption that they had all read the ordinance and the underlying study.

DPW Director Donna LaScaleia explained that the city contracts with a third party engineering firm to look at problematic intersections and roadways. The consultant's recommendations are vetted by the DPW, then moved to the Transportation and Parking Commission (TPC), which solicits feedback from the public and makes recommendations. TPC (which she chairs with the police chief as vice chair) then forwards them to City Council for referral to this committee.

This was part of a group of intersections sent to Fuss & O'Neill, transportation engineers who do work for a lot of municipalities and MassDOT. She asked them to review several intersections and tell the city if some sort of stop control is warranted based on their observations and the data collected. She wanted to be clear what she asked to explain why options such as geometric reconfiguration were not presented. The request was to assess for stop control recommendations. The study took several months to complete. Other ordinances have already made their way through council. The report generated is posted on the DPW's webpage.

At TPC, there was quite a bit of resident feedback on this intersection; it was definitely a popular topic of conversation. She had a follow-up conversation with Fuss & O'Neill after the meeting to request that they watch the recording and generate a short follow-up memo to talk through some of the things mentioned.

Director LaScaleia noted that, when talking about the installation of traffic control devices, warrants are used to determine if traffic control is warranted, almost like mathematical metrics listed in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). A list of metrics like crashes, traffic volume, etc. and something called engineering judgment is used to make the determination. Engineers are always looking at the MUTCD and using engineering judgment. Because some level of subjectivity is associated with these decisions, oftentimes there are different opinions, she acknowledged. She certainly understands that everybody can have an opinion and people can look at data and view it differently. Her job is to present the data.

Councilor Loisel asked how this particular intersection came to her.

Director LaScaleia said it was per request of residents.

Councilor Loisel proposed that councilors start by asking Director LaScaleia questions and save their opinions for deliberation.

Councilor Maiore said she is curious about the stop sign on Finn Street going away from town. Why a three-way instead of a two-way? She asked. She wondered if the decision was pedestrian-driven.

Fuss & O'Neill's recommendation was installation of an all-way stop, Director LaScaleia advised. Engineers called out deficient sight lines looking from the existing stop sign on Prospect Street where drivers take a right onto Finn Street to head towards King Street. Coming up Finn Street and turning onto Prospect Street to go towards the YMCA is also a deficient sight line because of a large house on the corner.

Fuss & O'Neill's justification is the presence of two deficient sight lines and that, in their engineering judgment, pedestrian safety in the area is poor because people are moving quickly, she stated.

Councilor Maiore expressed her understanding that Director LaScaleia identified the big house on the corner as being the visual obstruction for vehicles at the stop sign on Finn Street.

Councilor Stratton said he is a little dismayed that this follow-up memo had not been shared with this committee. He thinks it is needed to inform their decision.

Regarding Director LaScaleia's statement that there are two deficient sight lines, he said he has the report up and it says there is only one deficient sight line, an alleged 114 feet where they say 390 is recommended. The other sight line they are reporting as being 420 feet while the recommended distance is 335. He wondered how they got from one deficient sight line in the report to now saying two.

Director LaScaleia stressed that the follow-up memo is not anything different; nothing has changed. The original recommendations in the report stand. It is posted on their website. It's difficult for her to go line by line. She asked if he could tell her his specific concern.

Councilor Stratton said he would like her to please email him this memo.

The report did not make a judgment on the basis of engineering judgment, he observed. The report made a judgment solely on the basis of deficient sight lines.

The original report contains a comment about pedestrian safety, Director LaScaleia noted. When the DPW gets an original report from the consultant, they look at it and superimpose their own engineering judgment on it, she explained. Even if warrants are met, sometimes it doesn't make sense to install a stop sign. Engineering judgment is always the trump card even if warrants are actually met.

The only document he has to look at is from Fuss & O'Neill, and they specifically do not make an argument of engineering judgment, Councilor Stratton said. They just make an argument of one particular warrant, which they need to look at the evidence for.

She is telling him that someone made an argument of engineering judgment, but he has not read that argument, he clarified.

Director LaScaleia said the memo is on the project page of their website, and Councilor Stratton successfully located it.

Director LaScaleia explained the discrepancies in the sightlines by noting that they were measured at different times of year.

Councilor Stratton said he is not seeing the word judgment mentioned in the memo.

Councilor Loisel wondered if the judgment is implicit in the recommendation.

Yes, it can be implicit, Director LaScaleia confirmed. The ordinance has been drafted with her approval, so it is the DPW's engineering judgment, including that of their subcontracted engineer, that stop signs are warranted.

Councilor Stratton asked who the responsible engineer asserting engineering judgment is, and Director LaScaleia said it would be Fuss & O'Neill.

He asked the basis of the recommendation, and she said it is the report.

Procedurally, he is very troubled that he has a brand new memo to absorb that was not included in the order or submitted to council. This information is extremely contradictory of the information they were given before; it is drastically different.

He expressed his understanding that the calculation of the desired intersection sight distance is based on traffic speed. He asked what the applicable speed is at the intersection.

Fuss & O'Neill uses design speeds different from the actual posted speed limit. They use design speeds based on observed speeds, not what the speed limit says it is. They are using a 35 mph design speed, even though the posted speed drops to 20 mph.

In the safety study, it said they got the speed limit from a MassDOT viewer tool. He has that tool open, and it says the speed limit is 20 mph. A 20 mph speed limit sign is posted. The report is basing the calculated required sight distance on the regulatory speed but when he goes to that data base, he finds 20 mph.

They've also seen two sets of measurements that are drastically different, so he has little confidence in these numbers right now.

Councilor Loisel said she thinks he is getting into opinions and she'd like him to stick to questions.

At Councilor Perry's request, Councilor Stratton screen-shared the website he was referring to.

Councilor Maiore said she sees they might have different ideas about what their task is. She noted Councilor Stratton has an engineering background. When does that go into micro-managing? To her, it's less about what a number looks like in the report. The more helpful framing is what are the pros and cons of putting the stop sign in and what is the feedback and the concerns, not so much getting into the weeds with city staff.

She thinks they have much more compelling questions.

Councilor Perry said he believed the director said that the speed was based on observed speed. He made the observation that, looking at the report, Table 1 in Section 2.1.2. shows observed speed as 35 mph.

Councilor Stratton remonstrated that the argument they were given is based on a faulty report of the applicable speed limit.

Councilor Loisel said she didn't want him to say it is a faulty report. Director LaScaleia explained that by saying that sight distance was based on observed speed, she reminded.

Councilor Stratton highlighted the following sentence on pg. 4 as being technically inaccurate: "A posted speed limit of 35 MPH was listed for both roadways in the MassDOT Road Inventory Viewer."

Director LaScaleia said there isn't a discrepancy, the MassDOT viewer is correct. She expressed her perception that Councilor Stratton was trying to discredit the report because maybe he doesn't agree with the installation of the stop sign. The speed limit actually does drop a few blocks before that corner but cars continue through the corridor at that speed.

The way Fuss & O'Neill analyzes stopping distances is based on observed speeds.

Councilor Loisel expressed her understanding that the speed limit in the road leading up to the intersection is 35 mph.

Councilor Stratton said he's concerned about the factual accuracy of the report.

If there were an error, a procedural mistake, in the materials they were given, where in the process would that be uncovered? He asked. He would say it would be right here in this room.

Councilor Maiore said the report isn't bringing this ordinance forward, the director is. To her, it feels like he is hyper-focusing on a report when that is one tool. He brought it up, and the director has now explained.

She would like to get to the bigger question of the pros and cons and impact to the community.

Councilor Stratton reiterated that the process for approving stop signs is either satisfying a numeric warrant or making an engineering judgment.

He shared his finding from visiting the site that Warfield Place is a little over 114 feet from the intersection, the distance originally claimed to be the extent of sight distance. "They are saying that you can't even see to that, which you obviously can."

Regarding pedestrian safety, he asked if there have there been any pedestrian collisions at this intersection in the last 25 years.

Director LaScaleia said she doesn't know about the last 25 years but there haven't been any recently.

He asked Director LaScaleia if she had read the letter from retired city engineer David Veleta.

Yes, Director LaScaleia said.

He asked if she had any conclusions or response?

A lot of members of the public have comments about their projects, and he had comments about the proposed stop sign, she volunteered. Ultimately, they have to make decisions about the right way to move forward. Belaboring reports is not necessarily constructive. The bottom line is that it is their opinion than an all-way stop is warranted here.

Councilor Loisel asked that he stop sharing his screen, and Councilor Stratton appealed the chair's ruling.

He asked if David Veleta is just anybody. He is a registered professional civil engineer, he noted.

Councilor Loisel said she thinks he's just anybody. They are not in the business of going to find their own registered engineers.

Councilor Maiore clarified that the chair's request is not a ruling and so is not appealable.

After more general questions about the process for proposing stop signs and their purpose, Councilor Maiore refocused the discussion, noting she has heard concerns from residents about safety. There is some fear that traffic is going to back up.

Director LaScaleia said one of the reasons she went back to Fuss & O'Neill was to confirm there weren't going to be queuing problems. She wanted them to put in writing a queuing analysis.

They do not see queuing as a problem, she reported. She was specifically concerned with cars coming off King Street up Finn and proceeding up towards the YMCA. That is one thing they do not believe is going to be a factor. They shared their capacity analysis worksheets with them.

If they had infinite resources, she thinks this intersection is actually a good candidate for geometric reconfiguration. "But we don't have those infinite resources."

Councilor Loisel asked her to summarize the comments heard.

There were some folks who felt this would be a vehicular inconvenience and others who felt it was a dangerous area for pedestrians to cross.

Councilor Stratton moved to make an information request for documentation of the sight distances in the memo (looking up Prospect Street from the existing stop sign) or, alternately, a written argument of engineering judgment signed by a named responsible engineer.

There was no second.

He would assert that drivers can see to Perkins.

Going back to what he was saying about identifying the problem, he said he would like to discuss what it is. His view of the problem is that people perceive this as a dangerous intersection. State data goes back to 2000, and there have been no reported pedestrian crashes at this intersection. They can go all over the city and find intersections that have had pedestrian crashes. This intersection has never had one. It's perceived as dangerous, but there is no evidence that it is.

"Is the problem an actual danger or are we trying to solve a constituent concern?" he asked.

Councilor Perry noted that, if people perceive it as dangerous, they are less likely to use it. Some people might avoid it altogether.

Councilor Stratton said he used to live right there. He did have a scare there one day. Someone was coming west up Finn and were going straight into the sun and didn't see him. After that, he started crossing mid street so he could see cars in both directions. He questioned why the crosswalk is where it is. It is not actually a given that this is the best place to cross. It is the place currently established but not necessarily the best choice. "We don't want people's pedestrian mobility to be confined by fear."

Councilor Perry said he agrees this is a dangerous intersection in general. People sometimes just assume there is a stop sign there. They are really trying to solve that lack of clarity.

Councilor Maiore said the hesitation factor is a good point, since it itself could cause a collision if someone stops and the person behind them doesn't stop. She is hearing that the approach to making it safer is not ideal. She would always err on the side of safety and doesn't really want to wait for a pedestrian to be injured or killed. She wants to know what he sees as the cons of trying this out.

Councilor Loisel said she was persuaded by public comments, particularly the young man who said he feels unsafe. She also heard people say this isn't the best way to make people safer and that traffic calming is better. She knows putting up a stop sign is much easier and less expensive. It feels like it's sort of an imperfect fix to a complicated problem.

Councilor Stratton said one of the things important to remember is that stop signs are not traffic calming. The reason they don't want too many stop signs is that it is an unfortunate reality that, with too many, they lose their meaning. There is an engineering process; they don't just place stop signs politically. There are warrants.

He hears the desire to achieve traffic calming through the ready means of buying a stop sign. In terms of intersection data, 26 years is a very long sample size. It is perceptually considered dangerous but no one has gotten hit. He feels like they are in the momentum of doing what is seen as the right thing for the wrong reason.

"There's this nebulous argument being made of engineering judgment that doesn't have anyone's name on it," he asserted.

He has not seen this argument of engineering judgment named and signed. The argument that has been given to them is numerical, but he hasn't seen it substantiated. He's been out there and taken pictures and come to a different conclusion.

He understands the public is very passionate about this and wants to do something, but he questioned whether they have followed their process in terms of having either a numeric argument or the subjective argument of engineering judgment actually stated by an engineer.

Councilor Maiore said they ultimately have the judgment of the director, who has experience in the community. She said she thinks they just come to different conclusions. "I feel satisfied in her judgment call on this," she affirmed.

Councilor Loisel said she is not seeing this as a traffic calming measure, she is seeing it as a safety issue.

Director LaScaleia said they have a report from professional engineers who are recommending a stop sign.

Councilor Stratton said they have a report and a memo which give two different sets of numbers, neither of which are substantiated. And, the only judgment is a numerical argument.

He feels like the director has alleged an engineering argument which has not been stated anywhere. Councilor Loisel said it is evident in the recommendation

Councilor Perry moved a positive recommendation. Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion carried 3:1 by roll call vote with Councilor Stratton opposed.

Councilor Stratton requested that the report to the council be inclusive of the following:

- ❖ The original Fuss & O'Neill report
- ❖ Fuss & O'Neill memo
- ❖ David Veleta's memo

Set Meeting Schedule and Format for 2026 - 2027

Members agreed to continue meeting the second Monday of the month at 6 p.m.

8. New Business

None.

9. Adjourn

Councilor Maiore moved to adjourn. Councilor Stratton seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 6:08 p.m.

Prepared By:

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City Council Committee on Legislative Matters Meeting Schedule 2026-2027

All Meetings of Legislative Matters begin at 5:30 p.m. unless otherwise posted.

No January Meeting	January 11, 2027
February 9, 2026	February 8, 2027
March 9, 2026	March 8, 2027
April 13, 2026	April 12, 2027
May 11, 2026	May 10, 2027
June 8, 2026	June 14, 2027
July 13, 2026	July 12, 2027
August 10, 2026	August 9, 2027
September 14, 2026	September 13, 2027
October 12, 2026 (Columbus Day) - alternative date TBD	October 11, 2027 (Columbus Day) - alternative date TBD
November 9, 2026	November 8, 2027
December 14, 2026	December 13, 2027