



City of Fitchburg Massachusetts 01420

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Ward 6 – Elizabeth R. Walsh

Finance Committee

A meeting of the Finance Committee was called to order by Chairman DiNatale on Thursday, March 27, 2018 at 6:02 PM in the Memorial Middle School Library, 615 Rollstone Street, Fitchburg, MA.

Committee Members present: Councilors Paul Beauchemin, Marcus DiNatale, Michael Kushmerek, Elizabeth Walsh, and Anthony Zarrella.

Other Councilors present: Councilors David Clark, E. Thomas Donnelly, Marisa Fleming, Joel Kaddy, and Samantha Squailia.

Others present: Mayor Stephen DiNatale, City Auditor Calvin Brooks, Housing Director Elizabeth Murphy, Recreation Director Nathan LaRose, Chief of Staff A. J. Tourigny, Wastewater Deputy Commissioner Jeff Murawski, Water Deputy Commissioner John Deline, Human Resources Director Susan Davis, Public Works Commissioner Lenny Laakso, and members of Local 39.

058-18 ORDER: that the City of Fitchburg hereby approves the expenditure of funds from the Stanton Foundation grant in the approximate amount of \$201,015.00 (TWO HUNDRED ONE THOUSAND, FIFTEEN AND 00/100 DOLLARS) for the purpose of said grant, which is to construct a Municipal Dog Park at Coolidge Park.

059-18 ORDER: that the City of Fitchburg hereby approves the expenditure of funds from the Friends of Fitchburg Dogs gift in the approximate amount of \$22,335.00 (TWENTY-TWO THOUSAND, THREE HUNDRED THIRTY-FIVE AND 00/100 DOLLARS) for the purpose of said gift, which is to construct a Municipal Dog Park at Coolidge Park.

Discussion: Recreation Director Nathan LaRose spoke on both Order 058-18 and Order 059-18 and reminded the committee that City Council last year approved a grant for the design of a dog park at Coolidge Park. He is now requesting acceptance of a grant and a gift to actually

build the dog park, which will be located in the old swimming hole. The Stanton Foundation will also assist with setting up the park and help with establishing rules for use.

Councilors expressed concern about costs of maintenance and liability. Mr. LaRose stated that rules will be posted so that responsible dog owners will pick up after their dogs and the Friends of Fitchburg Dogs will clean up the excess. The city will continue to do the non-dog maintenance of the park. Liability risk will be similar to other parks. The goal is to provide a place for responsible dog owners to go; the city is already trying to enforce the No Dogs rule in city parks.

Action: Be adopted (5-0)

054-18 ORDER: that there be and hereby is appropriated the sum of TWENTY-TWO THOUSAND, THREE HUNDRED THIRTY-ONE AND 00/100 DOLLARS (\$22,331.00) same to be charged against AVAILABLE FUNDS and credited to LAW OTHER EXPENSES, DAMAGES TO PERSONS AND PROPERTY for the purpose of paying the deductible incurred in connection to the fire damage to the Crocker Field Concession Stand.

Discussion: Chief of Staff A. J. Tourigny, speaking on behalf of School Superintendent Andre Ravenelle and City Solicitor Vincent Pusateri, announced that sufficient funds had been raised to cover the deductible and that the mayor was asking leave to withdraw the order.

Action: Grant mayor leave to withdraw (5-0)

055-18 ORDER: that there be and hereby is appropriated the sum of ONE HUNDRED THIRTY THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED EIGHTY-THREE DOLLARS (\$130,283), same to be charged against AVAILABLE FUNDS and credited to accounts as follows:

FIRE – Personal Services	\$ 520
DPW – Highway General Personal Services	\$81,391
DPW – Snow & Ice Personal Services	\$15,015
DPW – Cemetery Personal Services	\$18,422
DPW – Parks Personal Services	\$14,935

056-18 ORDER: that there be and hereby is transferred from within the following Personal Services Accounts the sum of EIGHTY-ONE THOUSAND THREE HUNDRED NINETY-FOUR DOLLARS (\$81,394), same to be credited to the respective Fiscal Year 2018 Personal Services Accounts:

Water Enterprise Fund	\$64,488
Wastewater Enterprise Fund	\$16,906

Discussion: Human Resources Director Susan Davis and Public Works Commissioner Lenny Laakso spoke on Order 055-18 and Order 056-18 and requested the committee approve the funding of a new contract with Local 39. Ms. Davis stated that there had been a comprehensive reworking of the contract in an effort to attract and keep good employees by offering better wages and more growth opportunities. Drug testing rules had been changed, new employees are not eligible for longevity, training costs must be reimbursed if an employee leaves within two years of training, and city vehicles will now be tracked using GPS.

Mr. Laakso stated that the negotiating sessions had been cordial and productive. He has had a serious problem attracting and retaining employees because wage rates were not

competitive with other communities and fields. Several employees had left or had declined job offers because of the wage scale, which was 15% to 40% lower than neighboring towns. The wage matrix was revamped with two lower steps eliminated, new top step, and a General Foreman position created. The use of GPS tracking of city vehicles will help to better manage the fleet.

Councilors noted that the additional cost of the contract over three years would be about \$560,000. However, the Public Works staff makes everyone look good, because they do the work on potholes, trees, catch basin cleaning, and the like. Councilors applauded a contract that benefits the city as well as the members.

Action: Be adopted (5-0)

057-18 ORDER: that there be and hereby is transferred from within the sum of THIRTY THOUSAND AND 00/100 DOLLARS (\$30,000.00) same to be transferred from YEAR 41 HOMEOWNER REHABILITATION PROGRAM to YEAR 43 DOWN PAYMENT ASSISTANCE PILOT PROGRAM.

Discussion: Housing Director Elizabeth Murphy explained that this request is to transfer funds from an existing account from two years ago to a pilot program designed to assist about six new homeowners. While the department does have a Buy It / Fix It program (buy and rehab), this one is to assist with the purchase of a home that does not need work and to encourage buyers to buy in Fitchburg.

Councilors asked how the program would work. Ms. Murphy stated that applicants would be offered a down payment match and assistance with closing costs, up to a maximum of \$5,000. The property would have to meet certain basic standards and the buyer would have to be financially sound and able to make a partial down payment. The program is for first time homebuyers, defined as not having owned a home in the past three years. Payments from the program could be combined with other programs. Buyers would have to come with a fixed rate mortgage in place.

Councilors asked if there would be a lien and were told that there would be for the first five years on a declining amount. They were pleased that the program is a pilot and that the city has a chance to test to see if it works.

Action: Be adopted (4-1, Beauchemin in opposition)

The meeting adjourned at 6:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Calvin D. Brooks, Clerk