1. **Roll Call.**

2. **Pledge of Allegiance.**

3. **Approval of Minutes:** Meeting of February 17, 2021

4. **Public Speak Time.**

5. **Public Hearing (starting at 6:15 p.m):**
   
   Resolution to change the holiday’s name “Columbus Day” and replace it with “Indigenous People’s Day”

6. **Communications from elected officials, boards and committees:**
   
   a. Senior Tax Work-off Presentation
   
   b. Telecommunications Advisory Committee Final Report

7. **Correspondence, Announcements & President/Vice-President Communications:**
   
   a. City Auditor Selection Ad-Hoc Committee

8. **Mayor Communications:**
9. **Reports of Standing Committees** (Date referred to sub-committee & 90-day action deadline):

   a. **Finance:**
      - Review of monthly fiscal reports from the City Auditor (8-5-20)

   b. **Public Safety:**

   c. **Appointment:**
      - Mayoral appointments (2) (2-17-21) (5-18-21)
      - Discussion on amending Council Rule 11H – appointment process (12-16-20) (3-16-21)

   d. **Ordinance:**
      * Remove Columbus Day and replace with Indigenous People’s Day (10-14-20) (4-12-21)
      * Zoning ordinance amendment proposals:
         - Solar installation requirement on certain new construction (10-14-20) (4-12-21)
         - Request for consideration of zoning amendment re: cannabis delivery (1-6-21) (4-6-21)
         - Allow multifamily with affordable units by Plan Approval (2-17-2021) (5-18-21)
         - Replace Sec. 8.5 to allow ADA’s w/bldg. permit or Special Permit (2-17-21) (5-18-21)

   e. **Property:**
      - Request to authorize Mayor to execute revised agreements – 1 Ferry St. (2-17-21) (5-18-21)

   f. **Rules & Govt. Relations:**
      - Resolution proposal for a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program (3-18-20) (4-12-21)
      - Request for easthamptonma.gov emails for city committee chairs (7-15-20) (4-11-21)
      - Add Council Rule requiring Anti-Bias Training (10-14-20) (4-12-21)
      - Request for amendment to City Council Rule 5C (1-6-21) (4-6-21)
      - Remote participation adoption proposal (2-17-21) (5-18-21)

   g. **Ad Hoc Committees regarding:**
      - Ranked Choice Voting (established 2/5/2020; expires 2/5/2022)
      - Senior Tax Work-Off (established 6/17/2020)
      - Ordinance Review (established 12/16/2020)

10. **Old Business/Pending:**
11. **New Business:**
   a. **Supplemental Appropriations:**
      - $61,450 from Cannabis Stabilization for Fire Department EMS expenses
      - $15,000 from CPA Funds for Archival Records Project (2nd half of Phase 2)
   b. Amend city ordinances – Chpt. 2 (holidays) per Indigenous People’s Day resolution
CITY COUNCIL MEETING – FEBRUARY 17, 2021
Meeting held remotely due to COVID 19 Pandemic Restrictions
6:00 p.m.

Members Present: President Margaret Conniff, Vice-President Daniel Rist, Homar Gomez, Owen Zaret, Erica Flood, Lindsey Rothschild, Thomas Peake, Salem Derby and James Kwiecinski (arrived after start of meeting).

Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes: On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Gomez it was voted (by roll call) to approve the minutes of the February 3, 2021 meeting. Councilor Derby abstained as he was absent on Feb. 3rd and Councilor Kwiecinski was not present for this vote.

Public Speak Time: None.

Communications:
• Angelique Baker, chair of the Commission on Disability was present to speak about her committee. She said they would like to collaborate with others and are hoping to have guest speakers attend their meetings. They are also continuing to work on a survey. She suggested that adding closed captioning to the meetings would be helpful. Councilor Derby provided a “work-around” but it was suggested she reach out to Easthampton Media about this.

Councilor Kwiecinski arrived at the meeting.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Gomez it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to open the public hearings.

PUBLIC HEARINGS – STARTING AT 6:15 p.m.

1. Pole Location – Main Street near South Street: Councilor Zaret said the Property Committee had met on Feb. 5th to discuss the pole location; the Eversource representative was present at the meeting. This pole would be located between two existing poles and is being added to provide electrical service for a new “recloser”. Eversource representative Joe McCarthy was present. He said the recloser is a large piece of equipment and can’t share a pole; it has to be by itself on a pole. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Property Committee.

On motion made by Councilor Zaret and seconded by Councilor Rist it was UNANIMOUSLY VOTED (by roll call) to approve the installation of one jointly owned mid-span pole along Main Street, beginning approximately 183’ northeasterly of the intersection with South Street to provide electrical service to a new recloser.
2. **Supplemental Appropriation – Library Appropriation:** Second reading by President Conniff on the request to appropriate funds for the Emily Williston Memorial Library. This is an additional appropriation for the library. Mayor LaChapelle said she hopes another $15,000.00 could be appropriated after the budget meetings have concluded. Recommended 2 to 0 by the Finance Committee.

Samuel Williston of 41 Loudville Road spoke in support of the appropriation.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Kwiecinski it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to appropriate the sum of $10,000.00 from the Cannabis Stabilization Fund #087 to the Library #001.6100.5805.2021 for resources and funding for the Emily Williston Memorial Library.

3. **Interdepartmental Transfer – PEG Access Account:** This transfer would move money for public access television to Easthampton Media. The action is needed due to a new law which requires the funding from the cable company to first come to the city and then be transferred to the public access station. It is expected this type of transfer will happen at least twice a year, President Conniff said. The city receives about $50,000 per quarter from Charter/Spectrum. Councilor Flood noted this money can only be used for this purpose.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Kwiecinski it was **VOTED** (by roll call), with Councilor Flood abstaining, to transfer the sum of $132,000.00 from the PEG Access Account (#027.1210.4399.2833) to the PEG Access Account (027.1210.5400.2833) to give approval to spend from the PEG Access Receipts Reserved Account for cable related purposes consistent with the franchise agreement.

4. **Housing Production Plan:** The Planning Board was also in attendance for this public hearing; they called their meeting to order. Councilor Zaret said the Property Committee had met with City Planner Jeff Bagg and Janna Tetreault, chair of the Affordable & Fair Housing Partnership, about the 2020-2025 Housing Production Plan. Councilor Zaret said the plan identifies housing priorities and there are some actions which are “low hanging fruit” in terms of implementing changes. Two of these are being brought forward tonight by Councilor Peake as proposed zoning amendments. It was stated that a “yes” vote tonight is also a pledge to bring forward legislation; but also in a prudent, steady pace, not with a “flood of legislation”.

Mr. Bagg said the report outlines a “data driven set of strategies” and he said there is “no silver bullet to make it happen”. There are a series of steps needed and this plan looks forward. This plan, plus others (such as the Open Space Plan) will all be woven together for an updated Master Plan. Once the Housing Production Plan has been approved locally, it will be sent to the state for review and approval.
At this time, a presentation was made by Judi Barrett from the consulting team which completed the plan.

Ms. Tetreault also spoke. She said the plan:
- Shows Easthampton cares about affordable housing;
- Makes the city eligible for other grants; and
- Gives purpose, focus and a list of activities to the Affordable & Fair Housing Partnership.

Tom Brown, Chair of the EDIC, said the lack of affordable housing can affect economics. This plan gives the city “tools in the toolbox”. He said the EDIC strongly supports the plan.

Councilor Peake said he was frustrated that the last Housing Production Plan (7 years ago) had similar goals and yet the council “didn’t do anything”. He made a challenge that this not be repeated.

There was discussion about setting up an ad hoc committee, but others felt the Ordinance Committee could be tasked with working on priorities in the plan. Mayor LaChapelle suggested that if an ad hoc committee was appointed, the members could work with the EDIC and Affordable & Fair Housing Partnership. Councilor Zaret was concerned about adding another ad hoc committee.

Mr. Brown spoke of an “overhaul” of the entire zoning document. Ms. Barrett said she thought there were a lot of administrative items that could be removed from the zoning ordinance; doing that would help clean it up and make it more streamlined and easier to understand.

Members of the public speaking about the plan included: Jo Landers, Randall Austin, Kae Collins, Sara Amorosa, Louise Jacob, Carl Woodruff and Jackie Brousseau-Pereira.

On motion made by Councilor Zaret and seconded by Councilor Kwiecinski it was UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call to adopt the 2020-2025 Easthampton Housing Production Plan and allow the Mayor to send the plan to the Department of Housing and Community Development for approval.

Following the City Council’s vote, the Planning Board also unanimously voted (by roll call) to adopt and approve the 2020-2025 Housing Production Plan.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to close the public hearings.

Five minute recess.
Communications, continued:

- The council was in receipt of a request from the City Planner asking for the Mayor to be authorized to execute a revised Agreement and Perpetual Grant of Easements associated with the redevelopment of One Ferry Street. In his memo to the council, City Planner Jeff Bagg said the nature and extent of the easements have changed since the initial authorization approved in November of 2019. On motion made by Councillor Zaret and seconded by Councillor Kwiecinski it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer the easement revision request to the Property Committee.

- Councillor Gomez spoke about the upcoming virtual Community Listening Services programming. The sessions will be held on Feb. 18th and 24th. Topics are to be safety and policing in Easthampton.

- President Conniff said State Representative Dan Carey has reached out asking that the council re-affirm its September 16, 2020 vote amending the Home Rule Charter. At the time, the various amendments were not in “special act” format. Since that time, the amendments have been put into that format. To move forward, the state needs the council to petition the legislature to enact the amendments as special legislation.

On motion made by Councillor Peake and seconded by Councillor Gomez it was VOTED (by roll call with Councillor Flood abstaining) to petition the General Court to enact special legislation amending the city’s Home Rule Charter, as recommended by a vote of the City Council on September 16, 2020, and that the petition be forwarded to State Representative Daniel Carey for filing on behalf of the City of Easthampton.

Mayor Communications: Mayor LaChapelle spoke about the following:

- The Community Listening Sessions coming up on Feb 18th and 24th.
- Reminder about the city funded rental assistance program
- COVID 19 vaccine update.

Reports of Standing Committees:

APPOINTMENTS: On motion made by Councillor Rothschild and seconded by Councillor Rist it was unanimously voted to refer two Mayoral appointments to the Appointments Committee. The committee will meet next on Feb. 25th at 3:30 p.m.

Councillor Rothschild reported the Principal Assessor Appointment Ad Hoc Committee had completed its interview of the three Principal Assessor candidates and had unanimously voted to recommend the appointment of Randall A. Austin. Mr. Austin has worked as an assessor in West Springfield, Dalton, Montgomery and most recently, Lenox. The committee felt his experience in dealing with difficult interactions with residents and city officials was important. Councillor Rothschild also said he has experience with public presentations and enjoys sharing information with different stakeholders.
Mr. Austin was in attendance at the meeting and spoke about why he was interested in the position.

On motion made by Councilor Rothschild and seconded by Councilor Kwiecinski it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to appoint Randall A. Austin as Principal Assessor with a term to expire on February 17, 2024.

**FINANCE:** Councilor Rist said there was no report. There will be no regular Finance Committee meeting on Feb. 24th. Councilor Rist left the meeting at this time.

**PUBLIC SAFETY:** No report.

**ORDINANCE:** Councilor Derby said the Ordinance Committee had met on Feb. 10th to discuss changing Columbus Day to Indigenous People’s Day. A public hearing has been set on this subject for March 3rd.

Councilor Derby said the Ordinance Committee had met jointly with the Planning Board on Feb. 16th to discuss the proposed solar ordinance on certain new buildings. That joint public hearing has been continued to April 13th.

The Ordinance Committee will meet next on Feb. 23rd to discuss cannabis delivery.

On motion made by Councilor Derby and seconded by Councilor Flood it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer two proposed zoning amendments to the Ordinance Committee:

- Allow multifamily with affordable units by Plan Approval
- Replace Sec. 8.5 to allow ADA’s with a Building Permit or by Special Permit

**PROPERTY:** No report. No next meeting date set at this time.

**RULES:** Councilor Peake said the Rules Committee had met last week. He said discussion on the amendment to Council Rule 5C had been productive, but they are not ready to bring it forward.

He said they had also discussed a proposed charter amendment regarding the Mayor’s salary. He said there were concerns about introducing new special legislation while the other Home Rule amendments are pending. It was decided to dismiss the proposal without prejudice and to take it up again after the current charter special legislation has been acted upon. Councilor Kwiecinski, who had proposed the amendment, asked if there was a time frame to bring it back? Councilor Peake suggested they could hopefully take it up again before the end of the current term of office.

On motion made by Councilor Peake and seconded by Councilor Gomez, it was unanimously voted to dismiss without prejudice the proposal to amend the Home Rule Charter, Article 3-1 (c)
Compensation (re: Mayor’s annual salary).

On motion made by Councilor Peake and seconded by Councilor Kwiecinski it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer to the Rules Committee a request to consider adopting remote participation at meetings.

**Ad Hoc Committees:**

*Ranked Choice Voting:* On motion made by Councilor Peake and seconded by Councilor Gomez, it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to reaffirm the establishment of the Ranked Choice Voting Ad Hoc Committee until Feb 5, 2022.

*Principal Assessor Appointment:* On motion made by Councilor Rothschild and seconded by Councilor Kwiecinski it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to dissolve the Principal Assessor Appointment Ad Hoc Committee.

*Senior Tax Work-Off Committee:* Councilor Kwiecinski said this committee will meet next on Feb. 18th. They may be ready to bring forward their report at the March 3rd council meeting.

*Ordinance Review Committee:* Councilor Rothschild said the committee had reviewed Chapter 3 and 4 and had sent letters to department heads about reviewing chapters they are familiar with. They had planned to meet on Feb. 24th, but will be cancelling that meeting. President Conniff asked if the committee could report on the status of their work every couple of months.

**OLD BUSINESS:** None.

**NEW BUSINESS:** None (dealt with under committee reports).

On motion made by Councilor Kwiecinski and seconded by Councilor Gomez it was unanimously voted (by roll call) that this meeting **ADJOURN**.

**TIME:** 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Barbara L. LaBombard
Clerk to the City Council
RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY IN EASTHAMPTON

VOTED: THAT THE CITY ADOPT THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:

WHEREAS, Columbus Day has been celebrated unofficially since the early 18th century, and was officially made a federal holiday in 1937 to be celebrated on the second Monday of October, with M.G.L. Part I, Title I, chapter 4, section 7, clause 18 setting aside the second Monday of October as a Massachusetts state holiday, and M.G.L. Part I, Title II, chapter 6, section 12V providing that the Governor declare that day to be Columbus Day; and

WHEREAS, Columbus Day commemorates the landing of Christopher Columbus in the Americas specifically on the Caribbean islands of The Bahamas on October 12, 1492 and, later, on Hispaniola (present-day countries of the Dominican Republic and Haiti); and

WHEREAS, the first voyage of Columbus to the Americas initiated the transatlantic slave trade, journal entries from Columbus show his desire to enslave the Indigenous populations of the Caribbean, and he subsequently imprisoned and transported many hundreds of people to this end, including trafficking women and girls as young as 9; and

WHEREAS, Columbus’ second voyage of 1493 was one of conquest, wherein seventeen ships were led by him to the New World, and his governorship of the Caribbean instituted systematic policies of slavery and extermination of Indigenous populations, especially the Taino/Arawak people whose population was reduced from approximately 8 million to 100,000 during Columbus’ reign, being further reduced by the continuation of his policies until near-extinction in 1542; and

WHEREAS, the example of the Taino/Arawak people is merely indicative of the policies of Columbus and his men, and all told millions of Indigenous persons were exterminated in the Caribbean Basin alone; and

WHEREAS, though the introduction of European diseases may account for some of these deaths, starvation and overt extermination policies were mostly to blame, and thus these atrocities cannot be reasonably attributed to forces outside of the control of European colonialists; and

WHEREAS, the devastation of Indigenous populations would lead to the kidnapping, deaths, and enslavement of at least 10-12 million African people, and the profound effects of the transatlantic slave trade and African diaspora continue to be felt to the present day; and

WHEREAS, the cultures of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas are worthy of being promoted, their history is rich, diverse, and worthy of celebration, and the actions and policies of European colonizers of the Americas actively destroyed and suppressed parts of those cultures; and

WHEREAS, Indigenous Peoples of the lands that would later become known as the Americas have occupied these lands since time immemorial;
And WHEREAS, the City of Easthampton, Massachusetts (the “City”) has a history of opposing racism, this racism serving to perpetuate high rates of Indigenous poverty and leading to inequities in health, education, and housing; and

WHEREAS, the City wishes to honor our nation's Indigenous roots, history and contributions; and

WHEREAS, the District of Columbia, States of Alaska, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, Wisconsin, and localities including Somerville MA, Cambridge MA, Brookline MA, Marblehead MA, Northampton MA, Amherst MA, Portland ME, Los Angeles CA, San Francisco CA, Denver CO, Portland OR, Portland ME, Seattle WA, Columbus OH and many more have adopted Indigenous Peoples Day as a counter-celebration in lieu of Columbus Day, to promote Indigenous cultures and commemorate the history of Indigenous Peoples; and

WHEREAS, Indigenous Peoples Day was first proposed in Geneva in 1977 by a delegation of Native Nations to the United Nations-sponsored International Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in the Americas; and

WHEREAS, in 1990, representatives from 120 Indigenous nations at the First Continental Conference on 500 Years of Indian Resistance unanimously passed a resolution to transform Columbus Day into an occasion to strengthen the process of continental unity and struggle towards liberation, and thereby use the occasion to reveal a more accurate historical record.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE CITY COUNCIL VOTES AS FOLLOWS:

To establish that the second Monday of October henceforth be commemorated as Indigenous Peoples Day in Easthampton rather than Columbus Day, in recognition of the position of Indigenous Peoples as native to these lands, and the suffering they faced during and since the European conquest,

Be it further resolved that the people of Easthampton observe Indigenous Peoples Day by reflecting upon the dispossession of the homelands and villages of the Pocumtuck, Nipmuc, and other Indigenous people of this region who lived here for millennia prior to the arrival of European settlers, and upon the history of the other Indigenous Peoples who have lived in Easthampton, and to celebrate the survival of Indigenous Peoples against all odds, as well as to celebrate the thriving cultures and values that Indigenous Peoples have brought and continue to bring to our City and the wider community, and to reflect on the meanings, honor, and celebrate the names and language that are utilized for the places in our city and community.

Be it further resolved that Easthampton shall include Indigenous representation from the City inasmuch as possible and will also seek representation from Indigenous organizations in the area as well as other Easthampton community representation from segments of the community such as citizens, schools, non-profit organizations and businesses,
Be it further resolved Easthampton Public Schools will observe this day, with appropriate exercises and instruction in all schools around the time of Indigenous Peoples Day, to the end that the culture, history and diversity of Indigenous Peoples be celebrated and perpetuated,

Be it further resolved City of Council encourages businesses, organizations, and public institutions to recognize and observe Indigenous Peoples Day, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Clerk shall ensure that the Massachusett Tribe at Ponkapoag, Mashpee Wampanoag Indian Tribal Council, the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), the Nipmuc Nation Tribal Council (including the Hassanamisco and Natick), the Assonet Band of Wampanoags, the Chappaquiddick Wampanoags, the Chaubunagungamaug Nipmuc, the Pocasset Wampanoag, the Herring Pond Wampanoag, and the Seaconke Wampanoag, all of which include descendants of those people indigenous to Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Commission of Indian Affairs, North American Indian Center of Boston, IndigenousPeoplesDayMA.org, United American Indians of New England, Massachusetts Center for Native American Awareness, , as well as the Easthampton School Committee and The Daily Hampshire Gazette, The Springfield Republican, The Reminder, receive a suitably endorsed copy of this Resolution.

Or take any action relative thereto.

Resolved this 3rd day of March, 2021 in the City of Easthampton, Massachusetts

_________________________________________  ______________________________________  ______________________________________

_________________________________________  ______________________________________  ______________________________________

_________________________________________  ______________________________________  ______________________________________

_________________________________________  ______________________________________  ______________________________________

*Easthampton City Council*
February 25, 2021

Dear Councilors:

I am pleased to submit to you the committee's presentation of our review of Senior Tax Work-off Program in Massachusetts. The city council's Senior Tax Work-off Ad Hoc Committee has studied programs throughout the state and we recommend that the city council urge the mayor of Easthampton to move forward with a pilot program for three years beginning Fiscal Year 2022.

We have met with various city departments to determine interest and the response has been wholeheartedly positive.

This small step forward offers Easthampton the opportunity to join other municipalities across the state which have thriving programs to help seniors pay a portion of their property taxes in exchange for volunteering to serve the city of Easthampton.

We believe the program outlined in the presentation begins modestly and will allow the city to carefully evaluate as we move forward together.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call 413-575-6009.

James "JP" Kwiecinski, Chair
Senior Tax Work-off Ad Hoc Committee
MARCH 3, 2021
PRESENTATION TO CITY COUNCIL

SENIOR TAX WORK-OFF PROGRAM
### INTRODUCTION

### SENIOR TAX WORK-OFF COMMITTEE

- **JP Kwiecinski**  
  City Councilor
- **Peg Conniff**  
  City Councilor
- **Brendan Rogers**  
  Director, Council on Aging
- **Jennifer Gallant**  
  City Treasurer
- **Joseph Banas**  
  Resident and Board Member, COA
- **Jay Andrzejczyk**  
  Resident
- **Stan Diamond**  
  Resident
INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS SENIOR TAX WORK-OFF PROGRAM*?

▸ Helps seniors property owners (60+) age in place by reducing their property tax liability.

▸ Senior property owners may volunteer in exchange for a reduction of property taxes.

▸ Volunteers to augment city staff in a variety of duties.

▸ Individuals will be treated as employees of the city in terms of being CORI checked, must go thru interview process and possess employable skills related to the open positions.

*M.G.L. CH. 59 § 5K
WHY ESTABLISH A SENIOR TAX WORK-OFF PROGRAM?

In 2018, a study was done by the Council on Aging in coordination with the Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging, a research unit within the Gerontology Institute at UMASS Boston.

- The number one finding: **Economic Insecurity** is a concern for older Easthampton residents.
  - Median household income for Easthampton householders age 65 and older is lower than the statewide median, and nearly one-third of householders age 65 and older report household income under $25,000 annually.
  - Survey respondents expressed substantial concerns about affordability and cost of living. Many respondents reported special concern about escalating property taxes.
  - Financial strain may be substantial for segments of the Easthampton community: one out of five respondents to the community survey indicated that they lacked finances for one or more necessities over the previous 12 months.

- One of the recommendations of the study was to consider establishing a senior tax work-off program.
## STWO COMMITTEE RESEARCH

### SAMPLING OF OTHER MUNICIPALITIES & PRESENTATION TO CITY DEPARTMENT HEADS

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- Department Heads participated in a presentation on this program - October 29, 2020
  - Police Department
  - Fire Department
  - School
  - Auditor
  - DPW
  - Dispatch
  - Assessor
  - COA
  - Planning Department
  - Parks Department
  - Building Inspector

- Very positive feedback
- Some departments expressed immediate interest in participating
IDENTIFICATION OF VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

- Lower priority work that goes undone due to staff limitations (i.e., not enough help)
- Workload that increases seasonally
- Special projects
- Probably not high-skill work
EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

› Administrative Support (most common job)
  - Filing, copying, organizing, shredding, reception, answering phones, stuffing envelopes

› Senior Centers - Receptionists, drivers, food preparation/service, fitness monitors, plus admin

› Libraries - Home book delivery; organizing, sorting stacks (numerous towns)
EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTEER JOBS

- School Greeters, Library Assistants, Reading Tutors (Westfield School Department)
- Checking house numbers for visibility, painting fire hydrants (Wellesley F.D.)
- Animal Shelter Volunteer (Westfield)
- Electrical Engineer (Wellesley Municipal Light Plant)
- Golf Course Maintenance (Ludlow)
The Senior Tax Work-Off Committee Recommends:

- Senior Tax Work Off (STWO) **pilot program to run for 3 years** beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2024.

- Taxpayer/property owner must be **60 years of age** or older.

- Applicants must be **owner of and residing in or on the property** for which the tax credit is sought. The program/exemptions would be **assessed during a fiscal year** (i.e., July 1 - June 30).

- The amount of property tax reduction the taxpayer receives under this statute is **not considered income or wages for purposes of state income tax** withholding but taxpayer may have to declare the amount received from STWO program on Federal Income Tax forms.
**PILOT PROGRAM 2021/2024**

- **Maximum Exemption** = $1,500 (before taxes and social security) per property owner or 111 hours *(based on minimum wage as of 01/01/2021 of $13.50).* Proration of exemption based on hours worked will be allowed. (example: hours worked = 50 hours. Exemption = $675)

- **Income limitations** - *(same guidelines used by HUD and by the CPA when determining exemptions for seniors of lo-moderate income)*:
  - **Married Couples** - $61,760/annually
  - **Single** - $54,040/annually

- **Planned number of “pilot” participants** = up to 12

- **Financial impact to the city, each pilot fiscal year (if all 12 positions are filled)** = **$18,000 reduction in Tax Lien**. To close this gap in the tax lien, the average single family homeowner in Easthampton might see an additional $2.45 on their tax bills.
**TIMELINE**

- **October, 2020** - Presentation to Department Heads

- **January, 2021** - Presentation to the Mayor

- **March, 2021** - Recommendation to the Mayor from City Council and Approval from the Mayor to move forward with the program

- **March - May, 2021** - Develop Program Requirements, meet with department heads regarding possible open positions, job descriptions.

- **April - June, 2021** - Partner with Easthampton Media to develop PSA to be used to inform residents of the program

- **June, 2021** - STWO funding finalized as part of budget approval process
The City of Easthampton by vote of the City Council and approval of the Mayor on Month Day, 2021 has accepted the "Senior Tax Work-off Program" as outlined in Ch 127 s.59 of the Acts of 1999. Residents 60 years of age or older are eligible to work off up to $1,500 in property taxes a year at the prevailing state minimum wage rate (as of 2021, $13.50/hour) provided they meet certain guidelines.

**City of Easthampton Program Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2022**

- **Eligibility**
  - 60 years of age or older at the time of application
  - Resident of Easthampton
  - Owner of Record (at the time of application) or spouse of owner of record
  - Property for which the abatement is requested must be the primary residence
  - Possess employable skills
  - Property tax payments are current
  - Limited to one $1500 work-off per household
  - Willing to supply references
  - Agrees to CORI check

- **Hourly Rate** - not to exceed $13.50 per hour (2021) or $14.25 (2022) (or the current prevailing state minimum wage).
  - $13.50 per hour to be used to compute tax reduction, not to exceed $1,500 per fiscal year (approximately 111 total hours)

- **Volunteer Period**
  For the FY22 tax bill, seniors who are eligible under this program, may volunteer their time between September 20, 2021 and April 30, 2022 to receive the tax abatement. Senior volunteers may receive a prorated amount for their abatement should they work fewer than the necessary hours to receive the full abatement.

- **Income Limitations** - Total GROSS annual income (guidelines used by HUD and by the CPA when determining exemptions for seniors of low to moderate income)
  - Married couples $61,760.00
  - Single $54,040.00

- **Ownership**
  - Taxpayers must be the assessed owner of the property on which the tax to be abated is assessed, or have acquired ownership before the work is performed and the abatement is applied.

- **Other Limitations**
  - Taxpayer must be 60 years of age or older and reside at the location that the tax reduction will be applied.

**Accounting for Abatements**

Volunteers may work September 20, 2021 through April 30, 2022 for a FY22 tax bill deduction. Reductions must be applied to the actual tax bill for the fiscal year shown on the tax bill as an abatement or credit against the amount due. All reductions will be charged against the Assessor's overlay account.

**Treatment of Reduction**

The amount of the property tax reduction the taxpayer receives under this statute will be NET of Federal taxes. This is not considered income or wages for purposes of state income tax withholding, unemployment compensation or workmen's compensation. However, you may have to declare the amount ($1500.00) as an earning on your federal income tax for the year that you were credited the amount. **Applicant should consult a tax expert for understanding of any tax implications of this abatement.**

**Status of Volunteers**

Taxpayers performing services in return for property tax reductions are employees for purposes of municipal tort liability. Municipalities will therefore be liable for damages for injuries to third parties and for indemnification of the volunteers to the same extent as they are in the case of injuries caused by regular municipal employees.

**How to apply for a volunteer opportunity:**

1. Fill out both part 1 (Tax Work Off Application) and part 2 (Confidential Financial Data) forms and submit to:
   - Human Resources Department
   - City of Easthampton
   - 50 Payson Avenue
   - Easthampton, MA 01027

2. Application forms are available at the Human Resources Office, and the COA or by download from the City website www.easthamptonma.gov.

3. All applications received on or before August 6, 2021 will be reviewed for eligibility. Applications received after August 6, 2021 will be reviewed for eligibility dependent on remaining volunteer opportunities. Incomplete applications will not be considered and will be returned to applicant for completion.

4. Selection
   - The STWO Program will have up to 12 participants during the first year.
   - An applicant may not apply for the program in consecutive years, unless insufficient applications are received.
   - Placement in a particular job is determined by matching applicant skills with available qualifications for each job. An interview will be required by the department supervisor of the position for which they have been placed. No applicant is guaranteed a position.
   - Applicant will work on a mutually agreed upon schedule with their assigned department.
   - Applicant will be notified of acceptance by position supervisor or Council on Aging Director.

5. Applicant and/or supervisor(s) are required to keep a timesheet of all volunteer hours worked. Timesheets with accrued hours volunteered through April 30, 2022 should be signed by the Department head or supervisor and submitted to Human Resources no later than Thursday, May 6, 2022. Human Resources will forward information to the Assessors Office for the tax credit.
# APPLICATION PROCESS

## SAMPLE APPLICATION

### CITY OF EASTHAMPTON
Fiscal Year 2022 Senior Tax Work Off Program
APPLICATION (Part 1)

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**Date of application:**
If you are a previous program participant, what Department or location did you work in?

Please check all experience/skills, either through past jobs or other volunteer experiences that you have and are willing to apply to a City placement:

- Office work
- Computer skills
- Data Entry
- Customer service experience
- Phone answering
- File management
- Copying/collating
- Bookkeeping
- Yard work
- Light Maintenance
- Shelving books
- Other

Do you have any physical limitations that need to be considered in placing you in a volunteer position?

Please attach a copy of your most recent property tax bill with this application along with a description of your work history. Please read the following statement. If you agree, sign below and enter the date.

I understand that only the hours worked between September 20, 2021 and April 30, 2022 will be eligible for the FY22 tax abatement. I understand that I will receive up to $1500.00 to be applied against my City of Easthampton residential property tax. At a volunteer for the City of Easthampton, I agree to abide by all the City’s rules and regulations.

Signature: Date:

The City of Easthampton is an equal opportunity employer M/F/D/V and does not discriminate based on race, gender, national origin, age, disability, marital or veteran status, sexual orientation or any other legally protected status.

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### CITY OF EASTHAMPTON
Fiscal Year 2022 Senior Tax Work Off Program
CONFIDENTIAL FINANCIAL DATA SHEET (Part 2)

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**Date of application:**

**GROSS INCOME VERIFICATION (this information must be provided)**

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The information above is accurate to the best of my knowledge. I understand that I may be required to submit proof of income in the form of W-2’s, income tax forms, etc.

Signature: Date:
To be eligible for benefits under the Senior Tax Work-Off Program, and to receive a maximum $1500 tax credit per fiscal year, I recognize and understand the following:

1. The hourly rate for services shall be set to the state’s current minimum wage ($13.50 eff. 1/1/2021-12/31/2021 and $14.25 eff. 1/1/2022-12/31/2022). Any combination of hours volunteered beyond the $1500 tax work-off cap allotted under the program do not qualify me for an additional tax credit.

2. I must successfully complete a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check.

3. The income limitations shall be $54,040 for a single household and $61,760 for a couple. I must submit a copy of my latest income tax return and I may be required to produce additional evidence and/or documents showing that I meet the requisite criteria contained in my application.

4. My placement and work assignments in the Senior Tax Work-Off Program shall be determined by the Council on Aging Executive Director and/or the head of the department for which I am matched. Placement is determined by matching my skills with the available requests. There will be a probationary period during the first 10 hours of service.

5. The volunteer service hours will begin in September, 2021 and must be completed by April 30, 2022. Hours are not cumulative and cannot be saved or carried over to the next fiscal year program cycle. I understand that as a volunteer, I can deduct from my 2022 property tax bill the amount of the credit which will be reflected in a Certificate of Completion that I will receive in the mail in May, 2022.

6. By participating in the program, I have committed to complete a community service project within a prescribed timeframe. If I am unable to complete the assignment because of repeated absences, I understand that I may be removed from the active participation in the program. I further understand that all absences need to be reported to my position supervisor. Any absence over three days should also be reported to the Council on Aging Executive Director.

7. I understand that nothing contained in this application or in the granting of an interview is intended to create a contract between me and the City for either employment or the provision of any benefits; and further understand that if an employment relationship is subsequently established, I will have the right to terminate my employment at any time and the City will have a similar right.

Name: ____________________________
Placement: ________________________
Date: _____________________________
TIMELINE

PILOT – YEAR 1

- **July 1, 2021** - Program Launch
- **July 1 - 14, 2021** - Continued communication around the STWO (GTWO - Get the word out)
- **July 15, 2021** - Applications Available
- **August 1, 2021** - Applications returned and initial review begins
- **August 15 - September 6, 2021** - Application submission and review timeframe. A) Financial eligibility; B) Assess knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs)
- **September 7, 2021** - Final day to notify applicants of acceptance to various position openings
- **September 14, 2021** - HR provides onboarding training
- **September 21, 2021 - April 30, 2022** - Timeframe to fulfill hours for tax credits.
- **May 1, 2022 - June 30, 2022** - Assessors process tax credits for the July 1 tax bills.
QUESTIONS ????
Easthampton
Telecommunications
Advisory Committee

Final Report

Chair — Paul St. Pierre Jr. (EDIC)
Stan Diamond
Daniel Gilbert
Patricia Hawkins
Thomas Malsbury (BPW)
Jason Miranda
Kevin Mulligan
Thomas Peake (City Council)
Harry Schumann (Planning Board)

Contributing Members
Greg Howe
Raymah Hutchinson
Bill Lynch

February 19, 2021
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1. Executive Summary

Over the last two years, the Telecom Advisory Committee has dedicated its time and effort toward the study of broadband infrastructure technology, market conditions in and outside of Easthampton, and the actions that the City of Easthampton might take to ensure affordable and effective internet service is made available to Easthampton residents for years to come.

The Committee has found that the current broadband infrastructure within our city has struggled to meet the needs of many Easthampton residents. We have obtained market data and public feedback indicating a general dissatisfaction with current broadband services. The reality of the Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced how inadequate our infrastructure has become, as well as how quickly data usage can increase when new internet-dependent technologies and services enter our homes and businesses, changing our way of life.

There is a consensus within the Committee that the City of Easthampton should move toward establishing a public broadband utility, owned and operated by the City. The feedback our Committee has received indicates there is widespread public support for a municipal internet option and a desire among residents to see competition within the market. We believe that such an initiative will help drive economic growth and contribute toward greater equity within our community.

It is important to acknowledge that such a service is unlikely to meet the needs of every Easthampton household and will face considerable marketplace competition. Legacy “bundled” service offerings which combine cable television packages with internet and phone service are preferred options for many Easthampton subscribers, and a municipal internet utility is unlikely to compete in that space. However, the market has steadily shifted toward on-demand streaming services. As part of the survey we conducted, we found that 46% of respondents currently subscribe to internet only. As streaming services become more popular, and available on a wider variety of devices, the bandwidth demand of the average home continues to rise. Additional network strain from teleconferencing applications, remote learning, remote working, and online gaming as well as the steadily increasing number of “smart home” internet connected devices will only continue to adversely affect the quality and reliability of our internet service.

Enclosed in this report are several examples of nearby communities which have succeeded in developing municipal broadband services. The Committee was interested to see the unique ways these shared goals have been accomplished. Each of the service providers we spoke to and visited had their own story and methods of implementation which took advantage of their strengths and weaknesses to craft a system which worked for them. We have not found a one-size-fits-all solution, but we have confidence that a system built for Easthampton would have every opportunity to succeed.

As with any investment, there are risks. Any borrowed money must be repaid, whether or not the return on our investment materializes. Certain risks may be mitigated by working with private or public partners. In some of the communities we observed, initial costs and liability were minimized by building a network incrementally, allowing the footprint of service to grow organically as revenue is reinvested. The Committee estimates the total cost for city-wide fiber optic broadband infrastructure is likely to be around
$10 million dollars. A smaller pilot network capable of proving the model and returning revenue to the City is estimated to cost between $1 and $2 million dollars.

Whichever way Easthampton accomplishes a public broadband infrastructure project, we believe the benefits to our community would be enormous. Fiber-optic technology would be an attractive feature to businesses and families considering joining our community. The advantages of fiber would allow Easthampton to meet the increasing data needs of its residents and businesses for decades to come. A municipally owned utility would be accountable to and act in the interest of city residents as opposed to private shareholders. The City could also guarantee policies of net-neutrality and help subsidize the cost of service for low-income households, veterans, seniors and students.

It has been the pleasure of the Committee to compile this report. We hope that the work we have done will prove informative and helpful to the City as we work together to prepare our infrastructure for the future and guarantee that every Easthampton home and business has access to affordable, high-speed internet.
2. The History and Mission of the Committee

2.1 — Committee Formation and Scope

In May 2018, an ordinance was proposed and passed in the City Council establishing a committee with a mandate to “study any actions that the City of Easthampton might take to ensure the provision of affordable, high-quality internet access to Easthampton residents,” including the potential establishment of a municipal light plant in order to provide internet service directly to Easthampton residents. The Telecommunications Advisory Committee was formed in August of 2018 with a mission to gather relevant industry data, collect feedback from Easthampton residents, and report their findings back to the Mayor and City Council.

The Committee initially discussed their own experiences with broadband internet service and began to research various aspects of the telecommunications industry. The Committee received several presentations from local Municipal broadband service providers, as well as a private technology company, beginning in Fall of 2018 and continuing through 2019. The Committee first met with Whip City Fiber, a division of Westfield Gas & Electric. We then met with Greenfield Community Energy and Technology (GCET), another Municipal broadband provider operating in Greenfield. Committee members made on-site visits to Whip City Fiber as well as Holyoke Gas & Electric, to gather information on their respective organizations. A private technology firm with an interest in public/private partnerships, Matrix Design Group, met with the Committee during the summer of 2019 to describe their expertise and available services. Finally, FiberSonic, a division of the South Hadley Electric Light Department, met with the Committee in late 2019 to talk about their own experiences building a Municipal broadband network and what services they could offer Easthampton in a potential partnership.

2.2 — Public Survey Process and Results

The Committee decided in February of 2019 to conduct a survey of Easthampton residents and businesses in order to learn more about local internet usage and needs, in addition to gauging public interest in potential Municipal broadband services. Committee member Jason Miranda was tasked with creating the survey and exploring various means of data collection. The survey questions and format were finalized in April of 2019 after thorough deliberation and approval by the Committee. The survey was available online and links were advertised on the City of Easthampton Municipal website as well as the Telecom Advisory Committee’s Facebook page. The survey was heavily promoted on social media, flyers were placed in popular city locations, and news was spread by word of mouth. The survey went live in May of 2019 and results were gathered for six weeks, collecting over 600 responses.

2.3 — Municipal Light Plant Proposal and Vote

A resolution was proposed to the City Council in February 2019 to form a Municipal Light Plant (MLP) for the purpose of exploring municipal broadband service and other potential MLP initiatives going forward in Easthampton. The proposal was approved by the Ordinance Committee of the City Council, followed by the full City
Council shortly thereafter. The resolution was put before city residents on the November 2019 Municipal Ballot and passed with 81% voter support.

2.4 — Public Meeting
Presentation and Feedback

In the interest of public discourse and to receive additional feedback ahead of the impending Municipal ballot vote, the Committee scheduled a Public Meeting on September 11, 2019 and publicized the event to city residents. The Committee took their research and the information gathered from their meetings with local Municipal broadband providers, as well as the results from the public survey, and created a presentation including a PowerPoint slide show.

The meeting was attended by approximately 25 city residents and other interested parties including several City Councilors. Committee Chair Paul St. Pierre made opening remarks and presented an overview of the research conducted by the Committee to that point, followed by Councilor Tom Peake who discussed the survey results in depth. The Committee then listened to observations and collected feedback from participants during the public speak portion of the meeting with the goal of incorporating that data into this report.
3. Background Information

The following information is intended to provide context for the Committee’s recommendations regarding the future of municipal broadband in Easthampton. This section includes short descriptions of relevant telecommunications technologies, steps the City would need to take before a public infrastructure could be built, and an overview of certain legal and physical infrastructures already in place.

3.1 — Broadband Technologies

A variety of technologies are currently employed in the provision of broadband internet access to the community. Short descriptions of each technology and its current use within the city are presented below. These are considered “last mile” or “network edge” infrastructures, meaning they are used to establish the final connection between an internet service provider and their end user, and not as the backbone of a larger network.

3.1.1 — Coaxial Cable

Cable internet access utilizes the cable television infrastructure, in which coaxial cable is strung along telephone poles and/or installed underground. This cable directly connects subscribers to their local service provider’s internet hub. This technology works by moving electrical signals over copper wire, requiring a constant electrical current which can degrade quickly and is susceptible to electromagnetic interference.

Before a location can receive cable internet service, the building must be connected directly to the coaxial cable network, and the user must have a cable modem which can be rented from the service provider or purchased outright by the subscriber. Subscribers pay a monthly fee for the service and usage is typically unmetered, meaning the monthly cost will not change depending on the amount of data being transferred. The typical subscription cost in Easthampton is roughly $70 per month and is reduced when internet access is bundled alongside additional television or telephone services.

3.1.2 — Telephone Lines (DSL)

Similar to how cable internet utilizes the cable television infrastructure, DSL (“digital subscriber line”) service utilizes the existing telephone wire infrastructure to provide “last mile” internet access. This infrastructure is owned and operated by telephone companies, which in Easthampton is currently Verizon Communications.

Being a more limited technology than cable, DSL speeds are considerably slower in comparison. The service can be slightly less expensive for subscribers, though it often must be bundled with residential telephone service. DSL technology provides maximum download speeds which range from 1 to 15 Mbps. The service is asymmetric, meaning the maximum upload speed is significantly less. Like cable, subscribers must have an on-site DSL modem. Bandwidth capacity is shared between neighborhoods, and usage is not metered.

3.1.3 — Fiber Optic Cable

Fiber optic cable is widely considered to be the most desirable and robust technology in broadband network infrastructures today. Instead of electricity, fiber optic cables use pulses of light to transmit information along thin strands of light-conducting material made from either plastic or glass. Because light travels at both higher speeds and higher frequencies than electricity, fiber optic cables transfer more data per second
at a higher bandwidth than copper. For example, a local area network using coaxial cables can carry 3,000 telephone calls at once, while a similar fiber optic system can carry over 31,000.

The “backbone” of our nationwide internet infrastructure was built using fiber optic cables. Fiber was chosen because it is the most reliable and efficient form of high-speed digital communication available; other forms of data transfer, such as copper or telephone signals, are converted to fiber optic along the way. Fiber cables are more durable and suffer less signal loss than coaxial cables, and they are not susceptible to electromagnetic interference. A fiber optic cable traveling 100 meters in length will lose 3% of its signal, while a copper cable will lose 94% of its signal over the same distance. Because the electrical current traveling on coaxial cables must be processed and repeated frequently, “latency” is introduced with each step. Certain technologies being developed in manufacturing, health care, remote imaging, and other specialty industries require a fiber optic connection with minimal latency in order to function.

Verizon has provided residential fiber networking services (branded as “Fios”) in limited high-revenue markets over the past decade. Other companies such as Google have also competed in this space. However, neither Verizon nor any other company is currently offering fiber-based residential services in Easthampton.

In places where it has been built, fiber internet often provides individual customers with 1 Gbps (1000 Mbps) symmetrical connections with very low latency. This represents a speed increase of 1-3 orders of magnitude compared with existing offerings. Pricing appears to range between $60 and $100 per month and is typically unmetered. Initial service hookups to run the fiber optic cable between a building and the nearest utility pole will cost between $400 and $1,000, depending on the distance and terrain. Many service providers subsidize this installation cost and build it into the monthly charge of internet service, while others have required new customers to pay these costs in advance. Requiring advanced payment for installation is likely to dissuade many potential subscribers from switching to a new service.

3.1.4 — Wireless Networking (Wi-Fi)

Wi-Fi is a short-range wireless networking technology which is often used within homes and businesses to expand their local connectivity options. However, it is not suited for the provision of widespread internet access across a neighborhood or community. Wi-Fi is most often used to share a single wired internet connection between multiple computers or other wireless-connecting devices within a fixed location, such as a house, apartment, office or cafe. This is accomplished using a Wi-Fi router.

Efforts have been made in some communities to provide public municipal Wi-Fi access over more widespread areas, however the results have been largely unsuccessful. Wi-Fi does not travel well through certain materials, meaning that walls, buildings, and even the weather can interfere with its reliability. While it is possible to successfully offer public Wi-Fi in certain locations, such as a park or a boardwalk, it is not an option for city-wide infrastructure in Easthampton.

Although it cannot be used exclusively, there is a precedent for using Wi-Fi technology in the deployment of a municipal broadband network. The City of Greenfield has demonstrated the successful use of encrypted Wi-Fi in making the final connection between a utility pole and a service point. This eliminates the cost of running a cable to a residence or business and allows for faster network expansion. However, this does involve some additional equipment and the cost savings must be counterbalanced against the increased
complexity, customer support, and maintenance requirements. Additionally, there may be security implications from using this technology, should the encryption be broken.

Wi-Fi has gone through several generations of technology over the years (a, b, g, n, ac, ax) and these standards typically operate in the 2.4 and 5 GHz frequency bands. Speed is often in the 50-1000 Mbps range (depending heavily on the generation of equipment in use) but these speeds are rarely the limiting factor in achieved internet speed because the upstream internet connection to the home (cable, DSL, etc.) is typically much slower.

3.1.5 — Cellular Data (4G & 5G)

Cellular data describes a wireless internet connection operating via cellular telephone infrastructure. There have been numerous generations of this technology, often marketed with names like 3G, 4G, and 5G. Standards built on top of these technologies include SMS, GSM, CDMA, EDGE, HSPA, WiMAX, and LTE. The current technology in widespread use is 4G LTE, and coverage within Easthampton is broad. Three carriers operate 4G LTE network infrastructure within the United States: AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile. These carriers either own or lease space and equipment on cellular towers to provide service, and the speed and reliability of service degrades as distance to the nearest tower increases. The speed and latency of this service is somewhat comparable to coaxial cable, although reliability can vary highly with network load, weather, and physical location.

Other brands (besides those listed above) such as Boost, Credo, Cricket, Net10, Straight Talk, SafeLink, Ting, Tracfone, Spectrum and Virgin, are marketing firms which simply resell network access provided by one or more of the three primary operators. These are referred to as MVNOs (mobile virtual network operators) and do not invest in or provide any physical network infrastructure.

Unlike residential cable internet, cellular data is often metered, which means that it is billed based on the amount of data being transferred within a given month. Customers who use relatively small amounts of data can end up paying as little as $20-30 each month for a relatively high-speed connection. Unlimited data plans are also available and range from $60-90 or more per month. Data services are typically bundled with telephone service, although “hotspot” plans for data only also exist.

3.2 — Infrastructure Preparation

3.2.1 — Utility Poles (Ownership & Contracts)

The utility poles (aka telephone poles) within Easthampton are not owned by the City, although many are located on City-owned property. The vast majority of poles are owned by either Ever-source or Verizon, and these poles are governed by contracts made between the City and their respective corporate owners. There is a separate contract for each individual utility pole.

One of the main phases of infrastructure rollout for municipal fiber would be the physical installation of fiber optic cable on these utility poles. Because the City does not own these poles, leases would have to be paid to occupy space on them.

3.2.2 — Pole Survey Process

Before moving forward on the installation of fiber optic cable, the condition of each utility pole must be established. A Pole Survey would need to be taken to document the location, height,
capacity, owner and condition of each pole. This is typically done by a private contractor, however it may also be achieved through a volunteer-led crowdsourced effort.

Completing a Pole Survey provides necessary information for buildout to be properly estimated. Poles in need of replacement will add to the cost of make-ready work needed. The suitability of poles is likely to vary by neighborhood. A Pole Survey may also be helpful for identifying opportunities for preventative maintenance and as a general source of information for future City projects.

It is also possible for an initial Pole Survey to be done by volunteers. This would help us form a preliminary estimate of costs. However, it may be difficult to ensure the accuracy of data collected in this way, and potential partners may want to conduct the survey themselves or seek a third-party effort.

3.2.3 — Make-Ready Work

Make-ready work includes anything which must happen before installing new cables on utility poles. This includes extending poles which lack capacity, replacing those in poor condition, moving existing wires to create more space and performing any additional necessary repairs. Hanging cables require at least one foot of clearance above and below each other, and crews would have to make accommodations in those locations where clearance does not exist. This constitutes a major element of the total cost of deploying a fiber network.

Because many poles are owned by private utilities, make-ready work requires extensive coordination between contractors and private entities. Private utility owners may require the make-ready work be completed by their own employees and contractors. This can be an expensive and time-consuming process.

3.3 — Existing Fiber Infrastructure

Several fiber optic networks currently exist within Easthampton today. Crown Castle, a large communications infrastructure company, owns a stretch of fiber optic cable running along Route 10 (Northampton Street). Easthampton municipal buildings and public schools are also connected through a fiber network which ties to a fiber access node located at City Hall. Charter may also use fiber through their internal network prior to conversion to the coaxial cables it uses to connect with subscribers.

3.4 — Current Contract with Charter

The City of Easthampton currently has a contract (titled “Cable Television License Renewal Agreement”) in effect with Charter Communications. This contract allows Charter to provide and operate a “Cable Television System” within the city. In addition to cable television service, Charter uses this system to provide internet access to subscribers.

The current contract began on June 25, 2015 and lasts for ten years. It was signed by Mayor Karen Cadieux and will remain in effect until June 25, 2025. The contract is non-exclusive, which means the City can enter substantially equivalent contracts with any other entity. The contract is roughly 45 pages long and covers liability, the rights of both parties, payment terms, and notification requirements. It also makes references to many applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

Despite containing numerous details pertaining to the specifics of cable television service, the contract makes no explicit mention of cable internet service. However, Charter’s responsibilities under the contract appear to apply to any
services provided by them, including internet access. These responsibilities include service quality and outages, customer service and support, physical installation and maintenance, and billing and other financial obligations.

Notable internet-related topics that are not addressed in the contract include:

- Network neutrality considerations, including service prioritization
- Minimum internet service upload/download speeds or tiers
- Geographical availability of internet access within the city
- Liability regarding internet interruptions or outages
- Collection or storage of internet activity or metadata
- Deep packet inspection and/or third-party content injection
- Pricing and discounts related specifically to internet access
- Equipment (user-facing or infrastructure) related to internet service

The following sections are highlighted due to their relevance to the topic:

- **Section 8.8** requires that Charter relocate (either temporarily or permanently) any part of the “Cable System” infrastructure at their expense for any good reason provided by the City. Good reasons explicitly include the construction of signal lines or any public improvement or structure.

- **Section 8.17** gives the City the right to use any Charter-owned utility poles or underground conduit for governmental communications purposes, space permitting. However, this provision explicitly excludes commercial telecommunications services.

- **Section 10.1** requires that Charter pays the City $0.50 per subscriber, per year, as a franchise fee. The use of this revenue by the City is not constrained.

- **Section 12.2** requires that Charter provide the City with maps and/or electronic geographic (GIS) data detailing their cable system infrastructure within 45 days of receiving such a request.

- **Section 13.4** requires that Charter pay the City a total of $250,000 to be used only for PEG (Public, Educational, and Government) access purposes. In addition, Charter must also pay a yearly amount equal to 3.5-4.5% (the exact percentage depends on the year) of their gross annual revenue, which the City must also use exclusively for PEG purposes. Charter can recover these expenses via itemized subscriber fees.

- **Section 13.9** requires Charter to build and maintain a fiber optic network connecting the Eastworks Building, 50 Payson Ave, White Brook Middle School, Easthampton High School, and the Southampton Town Hall in order to facilitate PEG access purposes. The City was required to contribute $8,000 toward this construction, however it remains unclear who retains ownership of this fiber optic infrastructure.
3.5 — Municipal Light Plant

In November of 2019, the City of Easthampton overwhelmingly voted to approve the possible establishment of a Municipal Light Plant, a form of public-owned utility company which can provide residential services such as electricity, natural gas, or broadband internet. This vote allows for the creation of an MLP by the City but does not automatically create one. Prior to this general election vote, the Easthampton City Council voted unanimously to the idea of forming an MLP during two consecutive years, another legislative requirement.

There are currently 41 Municipal Light Plants servicing 50 communities within Massachusetts. MLPs are usually operated by a City board or committee, to which members are either elected or appointed. If Easthampton is to pursue a municipal broadband service, the creation of a new MLP and/or the formation of a partnership with an existing nearby MLP would be required.
4. Market Landscape and Competition

4.1 — Current Service Providers

4.1.1 — Charter/Spectrum Cable

In Easthampton, the vast majority of internet access is delivered by Charter. Under the brand name Spectrum, Charter offers both residential and business broadband using existing infrastructure within Easthampton. Spectrum’s broadband infrastructure is a mix of coaxial cable and limited fiber optic cable. Charter owns and operates the physical infrastructure and is the sole provider of cable internet in the city. They offer stand-alone service, as well as broadband service bundled with other services including cable television, home phone (VoIP), and mobile phone service. According to our survey, 91% of respondents used Charter and roughly half of them purchased bundle packages.

While cable internet is theoretically capable of download speeds of up to 1 Gbps, service within Easthampton typically falls within the 50-150 Mbps range. Cable internet is asymmetric, meaning the maximum upload and download speeds are not the same. Bandwidth along a network is typically shared within a neighborhood, and network performance may decrease during periods of heavy use. Insufficient bandwidth may result in slow connection speeds or intermittent signal loss. Many respondents to our survey indicated they experience these types of issues on a regular basis.

In Easthampton, Charter offers standalone broadband service with a free internet modem for $49.99/month* for 12 months which increases to $74.99/month afterward. They offer additional higher speed service plans in certain areas. Internet speeds are advertised as 100+ Mbps, but actual speeds may vary. Charter does not cap data usage, however this may change as capped data business models become increasingly prevalent.

Spectrum Residential service does not advertise an upload speed for any of their packages. Upload speed tests conducted by the Committee averaged roughly 20 Mbps, although certain locations only averaged 5 Mbps. Download speed tests averaged 65 Mbps.

Additional services and support options are available for Spectrum Business subscribers. For example, static IP address are available for $14.99/month, with additional IP addresses sold in packs of 5, 13, and 29 addresses. As with their residential plans, Spectrum Business plans do not guarantee service speeds and actual network performance may vary.

4.1.2 — Verizon DSL

Verizon DSL is also available for homes and businesses. They advertise download speeds ranging from 0.5–15 Mbps. Like dial-up internet, Verizon DSL uses telephone lines to transmit data. Verizon also operates a higher speed fiber service called Fios in certain areas. However, Verizon currently has no plans to bring Fios to Easthampton or the surrounding area.

4.1.3 — Cellular Data

Cellular data plans are another way many people access the internet. In addition to cell phones, mobile “hot spot” devices can connect laptops or other devices to the cellular network. In our survey, 10 respondents labeled cellular data as their primary source of internet access. However,
most consumers consider cellular data to be a supplemental purchase. Unlimited or high-cap mobile data plans are expensive and fill a niche market.

Unlike home internet, the cellular data market is fiercely competitive. Providers such as AT&T and Verizon have invested in the newest technologies (such as 5G internet) to improve their services and attract subscribers. While mobile networks have improved with each generation, they are still more costly and less reliable than wired home internet. Mobile networks may struggle with data intensive uses such as video conferencing, remote work, or online gaming.

Cellular data is an important source of internet access but does not traditionally compete with home broadband service providers. Some cellular data providers have begun to offer residential (non-mobile) data plans designed to compete directly against DSL. These plans are unmetered and priced competitively, however they are subject to certain usage restrictions and their availability remains limited at this time.

4.2 — Future Competitive Factors

4.2.1 — Anticipated Rate Drops

When new competition (such as a municipal broadband utility) enters the marketplace, incumbent providers have at times responded by lowering base rates or offering additional discount packages in efforts to retain customers. Successful municipal utilities often emphasize an improved quality of service and hometown control to gain market share instead of competing purely on price. In our survey, 70% of respondents listed price and reliability among their top three priorities.

4.2.2 — New Technologies

It is possible that a new technology could enter the market at some point in the future which would render current technologies obsolete. Several companies (including Google, SpaceX, Amazon and Facebook) have invested in high-speed wireless internet services using balloons, drones and satellites. While these efforts have largely been focused on bringing internet connectivity to unserved and underserved parts of the world, there is nothing to prevent such technologies from competing directly with current internet service providers.
5. Field Visits and Presentations

The Committee reached out to local broadband service providers and arranged meetings with them as part of their data gathering effort. Whip City Fiber, a division of Westfield Gas and Electric, was the first to present in October 2018. Greenfield Community Energy & Technology (GCET), the broadband access venture formed by Greenfield, met with us in March 2019. The Committee visited with Holyoke Gas & Electric, the MLP for Holyoke, in late March 2019. Matrix Design Group, a private company, met with us in June 2019. FiberSonic, a division of South Hadley Electric Light Department (SHELD), met with us in December 2019. Each presentation and/or visit will be discussed in following sections.

5.1 — Whip City Fiber / Westfield Gas & Electric

On October 1, 2018, John Leary, Manager of Whip City, and Rich Carnall, Senior IT Fiber Architect, made a presentation to the Telecom Advisory Committee at our monthly meeting, also attended by Mayor LaChapelle. They discussed their experiences with the fiber optic startup and rollout in Westfield. Whip City began offering broadband service in 2017 on a small scale, building a network through small individual neighborhoods called “fiberhoods.” Prior to network construction, the MLP gauged public interest with a survey to estimate demand in each neighborhood. According to Whip City Fiber, subscriber counts in areas showing both low and high estimated demand were consistent with their projections, proving the accuracy of the survey. They found that community members were advocating the service to neighbors in efforts to build excitement and increase localized demand. Some network expansion was funded using revenue from these initial fiberhood installations.

Whip City Fiber had several advantages being a division of Westfield Gas & Electric (WG+E). Much of the infrastructure, such as buildings and poles, were already in place. Having a previously established public utility allowed Westfield to invest in a Fiber network with minimal risk. They located their central communications hub at the WG+E plant in North Westfield and extended the network from there. They had a trained staff of utility pole workers and established relationships with suppliers of bulk cable reels and related equipment. Westfield was able to fund their initial fiberhood pilot program using revenue earned from their pre-existing utility services. The success of the project allowed WG+E to bond for the installation costs needed to expand into remaining neighborhoods.

The Committee visited the Whip City offices on November 15, 2018 and had a short discussion with Mr. Leary and Mr. Carnall before touring their facility. They demonstrated the streaming TV hardware and discussed several aspects of operational costs and customer relationships. WG+E promotes streaming television packages in addition to high-speed internet and conducts regularly scheduled workshops for members of the public interested in learning more about their services. Whip City Fiber offers 1 Gbps connection speeds to residential subscribers at $69.95/month and business subscribers starting at $84.95/month, as well as phone service for an additional $12.95/month.

The Committee viewed the on-hand cable inventory and various other hardware used within fiber optic networks. Leary and Carnall took the time to explain how the servers, switches, and the main trunk line work together as the Committee toured the central communications hub. WG+E expressed interest in working with Easthampton should the City decide to pursue a public
broadband utility. They stated that they were willing to offer “turnkey” services with full network management and support as well as “a la carte” services allowing Easthampton to manage particular aspects in-house. Generally speaking, the Committee was impressed with the professionalism and expertise of WG+E and consider them to be a strong asset to their community.

5.2 — Greenfield Community Energy & Technology

John Lunt, the General Manager for Greenfield Community Energy & Technology (GCET), met with the Committee on April 1, 2019 to discuss his experience working with the municipal broadband provider in Greenfield. Like Easthampton, Greenfield did not have a pre-existing Municipal Light Plant (MLP) and went through the process of creating one in order to establish a public broadband utility. In 2016, GCET bonded for $5 million to cover their startup costs and initial buildout and was funded in part by a Community Development Block Grant administered by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and the City of Greenfield. Their network presently covers over 80% of all Greenfield households. According to GCET, subscribers are saving nearly $1 million combined each year compared to their previous costs, and the municipality itself saves an additional $30,000 each year in internet expenses as well.

GCET diverges from traditional broadband providers by using a Fiber-To-Pole, Wireless-To-Home connection model. In this type of network, fiber cables connect each telephone pole while wireless transponders on the poles connect to signal receivers placed at the home. This technology allowed Greenfield to bypass the costly and time consuming work of making direct home connections and expanded their network rapidly over low population density areas. This wireless technology uses an encrypted form of Wi-Fi which does not support full gigabit internet speeds at this time. Equipment upgrades and transponder/receiver replacements will require further investment down the road.

The Committee visited GCET in April of 2019 and met again with John Lunt and network architect Greg Howe. We were given a tour of the streaming TV offices and studio while learning more about their business model. Greg then gave us a tour of the servers, switches and communications lines housed in a downstairs bunker and talked about the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing wireless technology for the final hookup.

GCET offers tiered basic internet service plans, priced at $44.90, $55.90, and $76.90. Each tier offers a different internet speed, topping out at 150 Mbps. This is 15% of the 1 Gbps speed offered by Whip City Fiber at a similar price point. GCET has also introduced tiered streaming TV and Internet bundles with an assortment of pricing options, internet speeds, and add-on channels. Phone service is available for an additional $12.95 a month. GCET has also partnered with Greenfield Public Schools to offer free and heavily discounted service to students from low-income families and is working toward expanding discounted service programs for seniors, people with disabilities, veterans and other low-income residents.

Revenue from the sale of service has been reinvested in GCET to aid the ongoing buildout. GCET operates with a staff of fewer than 10 people and handles all billing, technical support, network maintenance and expansion in-house. An initial bond was taken out by the City to fund the startup, and Mr. Lunt said that the business is on pace to become permanently self-sustaining in fiscal 2021.
GCET expressed interest in helping Easthampton with any potential broadband venture and indicated flexibility regarding the services they could offer. The Committee appreciated the creativity of the GCET operation and feels the people of Greenfield are well served by their local telecom utility.

5.3 — Holyoke Gas & Electric

The Committee visited the Holyoke Gas & Electric (HG+E) offices on March 28, 2019, meeting with Jim Crowley, General Manager, Tim Haas, Senior Engineer, and Steve Bouvier, Telecom Account Executive, who discussed their business operations and history. Like Westfield, Holyoke had an existing MLP which allowed them to expand broadband services with minimal risk. HG+E currently offers fiber optic internet service for businesses through an extension of their municipal fiber network built in 1998. Residential services are not currently available, however HG+E is evaluating a broader build-out to begin offering those services as well.

HG+E has been expanding their network backbone slowly and expressed great interest in partnering with Easthampton to help with any future broadband venture. They would not be able to offer Westfield’s turnkey solution, but they are well positioned to provide backbone services and infrastructure expertise.

5.4 — Matrix Design Group

The Committee met with Chris Lynch, a representative of Matrix Design Group (MDG), on June 3, 2019. MDG is based in Hanover, NJ and has been in business for over 20 years as a full service telecommunications design firm. At the time, they had 10 current municipal fiber installations operating in New England with an additional 5 installations scheduled. Matrix has historically provided services to colleges, cooperatives, and small municipalities seeking a broadband infrastructure where no prior broadband service was available.

MDG presented the Committee with a general proposal to form a partnership and provide Matrix with an exclusive lease on fiber broadband service within the city. In return, Matrix would cover all startup and installation costs and handle network maintenance, customer service, and any other responsibilities related to operating a broadband utility. Under this proposal, the City would pay for any make-ready work needed to prepare the telephone poles for network installation, at a roughly estimated cost of $1-1.5 million. The City would have the option to purchase the network outright after 3 years of operation. The cost for the City to purchase the network would be reduced each year until 20 years have passed, at which point the cost would be only $10.

Proposed pricing for subscribers under this model were higher than anticipated at $95/month, but this was a flexible number. Matrix typically services areas with much lower population densities than Easthampton and have little existing market competition. Matrix is also willing to offer “a la carte” services, including a pole survey, to help Easthampton determine actual startup costs.

5.5 — FiberSonic / South Hadley Electric Light Division

The Committee met with Sean Fitzgerald, the General Manager for FiberSonic in South Hadley, on Dec 10, 2019. FiberSonic is a joint venture between South Hadley Electric Light Division (SHELD) and Holyoke Gas & Electric. Mr. Fitzgerald was accompanied by Tim Haas from Holyoke G&E, and Lee Masters, Head of SHELD’s IT Department.
Fitzgerald and Masters discussed the formation and history of SHELD and their experience offering municipal broadband services. Tim Haas spoke in detail regarding the backbone network architecture which supports SHELD and expressed that Easthampton would be an ideal partner geographically in the expansion of their network. HG+E and SHELD advocate a “ring network” architecture to provide robust redundancy. The representatives pitched the Committee on a potential network running along Route 141 from Holyoke through downtown Easthampton, proceeding along the Route 10 corridor to Northampton, and crossing the Connecticut River into South Hadley before returning to Holyoke, creating a “ring” of service. Should any cabling along the ring be severed, data would “bounce” back and travel to a different access point along the ring, resulting in very little interruption of service or loss of data.

Like Westfield, SHELD has offered to provide Easthampton with turnkey services including full network management and support, as well as “a la carte” services as needed. Fitzgerald and Masters noted the geographic and population similarities between South Hadley and Easthampton and believe working together would be mutually beneficial. SHELD followed a similar business model to Westfield, dividing the city into fiberhoods and allowing residents to express interest within their fiberhood on the MLP website. SHELD offers 1 Gbps internet speed for residential customers at $74.95/month, with a $5 discount for enrolling in automatic payments. South Hadley bonded for the initial network buildout costs and is reinvesting any revenue earned in further network expansion. SHELD was able to wire 2,000 out of 8,000 potential customers in less than one year and expects it will take 4 years to reach every South Hadley home.

5.6 — Statistics on Peer MLPS

The table below consolidates data from several cities and towns in Massachusetts that have constructed their own municipal broadband networks and which are reasonably comparable to Easthampton in terms of population and density.
6. Business and Operation Models

Should the City decide to develop a municipal broadband system, decisions will have to be made about the structure of the system and the role a municipal light plant would play in the process. While many communities choose to develop, own, and operate their own broadband networks, other communities have opted to engage outside partners in managing some aspects of the system. The remainder of this section will explore some of the operational models which the Committee examined during our study period.

6.1 — Network Fully Owned and Operated by the City

Many of the larger communities in Western Massachusetts which have municipal broadband networks own and operate those networks themselves. These include broadband networks housed within existing municipal light plants in Westfield, South Hadley, and Holyoke. In these cases, the MLPs have been able to leverage their preexisting infrastructure, capital assets, and skilled labor necessary to operate an electric utility in order to more easily enter into the broadband sector. Not every community with a fully owned and operated broadband network had an existing MLP. The City of Greenfield established an MLP for the primary purpose of supplying broadband to the community. Even in cases where a broadband network was operated by a previously established MLP, certain business processes such as customer support and billing may still be outsourced to third parties.

With a fully owned and operated municipal broadband network, all operational decisions and responsibilities are centralized within the City. Such a network would require the City to employ skilled personnel to ensure the network is maintained and able to serve the needs of the community while remaining fiscally sustainable. If this can be done successfully, running a broadband network “in-house” would ensure that critical decisions being made by the MLP would provide the maximum benefit to Easthampton residents and that revenue generated by the MLP would remain local. That said, recruiting and retaining a skilled municipal workforce is a known challenge across the Commonwealth, and many communities have chosen to outsource some parts of their operations to other entities.

6.2 — Partnership with Other MLPs

Communities may partner with an existing MLP to manage the implementation and/or operation of their broadband networks. This arrangement can be appealing to communities because it allows their network to be operated by an established entity which has already demonstrated some level of success while avoiding the challenges of building a new operation from scratch. This model is particularly common in small communities where fully operating a network may not be feasible. For example, Whip City Fiber currently supplies broadband to customers in Alford, New Ashford, New Salem, Otis, Plainfield, and Rowe in addition to Westfield. While Holyoke Gas & Electric does not currently provide broadband to residential customers in Holyoke, they have helped implement broadband networks in both South Hadley and Leverett.

In this model the community still owns the network infrastructure but pays another MLP to operate the broadband network. Depending on the agreement, services which an outside MLP provides can include initial planning and project management, network installation and maintenance, as well as customer support, billing, and
marketing. This can be convenient for the communities outsourcing these services and can help the MLPs stretch their fixed costs over a wider customer base. In order to be successful, a community must ensure that they retain enough revenue to service debts, build reserves, and save for future infrastructure upgrades. They also must ensure that whatever MLPs they partner with have a business plan and operational structure which will be successful in their community. All of the incumbent MLPs which the Committee spoke to expressed interest in exploring the possibility of a partnership with Easthampton.

6.3 — Public-Private Partnership

Some communities may choose to partner with a private sector entity rather than another MLP. Similar to an MLP partnership, the exact structure of a public-private partnership could take many forms. One potential private partner, the Matrix Design Group, approached the Committee in 2019 and briefed the Committee on services they have provided to other municipalities. Under their business proposal, the private entity would provide an up-front investment to build a fiber network and operate it for a profit, while the City would be given the option to buy the network in the future, with the cost falling with each subsequent year of operation.

Another form of public private partnership could involve the City owning a broadband network and allowing one or more private entities to provide internet service over that network. While the Committee did not find any communities locally who have implemented a system like that, communities in other parts of the country have set up systems like this, including a well-publicized example in Westminster, Maryland. A public-private partnership of this sort has many of the same appeals as a partnership with another MLP, with the potential benefit of having a wider spectrum of options available for consumers. However, without local examples, the Committee has been unable to study this option as thoroughly as the others.
7. Rollout Strategies

As a major infrastructure project, a municipal fiber internet network would not materialize overnight. Many important steps would need to be completed before any homes could be hooked up to the network, and even after those steps are completed there may be some time between when the first house is connected and when the service is available citywide. In this section we will lay out our understanding of what a rollout might look like based on our conversations with other communities.

7.1 — Business Plan and Bonding

Few cities would have the cash on hand to perform this sort of project without borrowing money, and Easthampton is no exception. Easthampton will likely need to bond for such a project, a step which will hopefully be helped by the City’s currently strong bond rating and the relatively high density of homes in the community when compared to other cities (allowing us access to more potential customers per mile of fiber).

Bonding for a project of this magnitude will require the creation of a pro-forma business plan for the municipal utility. While this report may help inform some aspects of a successful business plan, funds will likely need to be appropriated to hire experts who can incorporate up-to-date knowledge of requisite labor, technology, and material costs to help the City solidify an operational model.

While the formation of this plan will certainly cost money, the City may be able to realize some savings by leveraging the experiences of surrounding communities. Business plans often involve costly surveys which are used to evaluate consumer interest and estimate potential take rates. Easthampton may choose to bypass this step by evaluating the experiences of communities like South Hadley and Westfield which have similar demographic and socioeconomic profiles to Easthampton and have recently rolled out their own networks.

7.2 — Construction of Basic Infrastructure

While what exactly is needed may vary based on the technology and potential partners, some amount will need to be spent on the infrastructure required to bring fiber into Easthampton and provision it to homes and businesses. This would involve either securing rights to existing fiber running through Easthampton or laying new fiber into Easthampton from multiple locations, so that a disruptive event like a downed tree would not shut down internet citywide. It would also involve the construction or repurposing of a “hub” or a structure that would hold the hardware required to deliver fiber to households. This step, along with the business plan listed above, must be complete before the fiber network is able to begin generating revenue. Depending on the nature of any partnership which might be formed with another community, part of setting up this infrastructure may include hiring personnel for key positions necessary to connect homes and businesses to the service.

7.3 — Fiberhoods

While it may be possible to bond for—and build—an entire fiber network at once, many communities (including each of the Western Massachusetts MLPs we spoke to) have instead opted to roll out their fiber networks in an incremental fashion,
limiting the amount of debt they needed to take on at any one time. This has often been accomplished by breaking the city into multiple small districts known as fiberhoods.

Once fiberhoods have been designated, decisions about where to lay fiber and begin providing connections to the network can be made based on factors including density, proximity to existing infrastructure, and interest from the fiberhood community. In Westfield, the MLP created a website for residents to express interest and request a fiber hookup and prioritized building the network in those fiberhoods where the most interest has been expressed. In Greenfield, the MLP prioritized building to the more densely populated center of the city. At the time of our meeting with them, Greenfield had not yet begun rolling fiber out to less densely populated areas where the per-unit cost of connection is higher due to the greater distance between homes.

One of the advantages of rolling out a fiber network gradually is that it limits the amount that the City must borrow at any one time. It also means that the City can realize some operating revenue before the whole network is built out. Neighborhoods with particularly high take rates enable the MLP to pay the bonds associated with their build out faster.

7.4 — Ongoing Management & Operations

Once a fiber network has been built, some aspects of it are likely to stay functional for many years. At the time of this report, fiber initially placed in the 1980s remain operational and it is unclear what the true “life span” of fiber is, barring something like a downed tree damaging the cable. Because repairs to the system will be necessary from time to time, some of the fiber network’s revenues must be held in reserve to quickly respond to these incidents when they occur. The cost of any personnel hired by the City to maintain the network will need to be considered as part of the business plan. In the case that the City enters into an agreement with another MLP or service provider, it is likely that the partner will be entitled to a certain percentage of each internet bill in exchange for their services.
8. Sources of Funding

There are several methods the City could use to obtain funding for the purpose of establishing a public broadband utility. Funding sources for an initial buildout could include revenue drawn from a property tax increase, free cash on-hand, through a public-private partnership, or through bonding. Settling on a financial business model will allow the City to forecast and budget its network build activities, which will provide critical information necessary to evaluate the true viability of the project.

Once a broadband network is established, the municipality may draw further recurring revenue from ratepayers who register for the service. Subscription models traditionally achieve enhanced profitability when bundling together services such as Voice-Over-IP (VOIP) and business-level support. As noted in the previous section, cities may also be divided into sections or fiberhoods with networks built out over time, spreading the financial costs over several years and reducing the need for borrowed capital as revenue is earned.

8.1 — Revenue Generation

Like any public utility, a municipal broadband network would be expected to draw an income sufficient for meeting the payment obligations stemming from the initial buildout, and to cover continued operational expenses, maintenance, and the improvements to the network. Revenue in excess of these operational costs may be used to fund additional infrastructure, growing the footprint organically as profit is reinvested. The scale and pace of growth may be adjusted according to market conditions and achieved subscription rates. Revenue would also be used to pay for salaries, equipment purchases, and professional fees to service partners. Money could also be used to sponsor events, advertise municipal broadband services, and help fund public entities such as Easthampton Media.

8.2 — Bonding

There are two types of bonds we have seen used to fund Municipal Broadband infrastructures. General Obligation (GO) bonds are sometimes used; this type of financing is common in areas with very low-population densities and is often combined with State and Federal aid. Easthampton does not currently qualify for this type of aid as it is intended for rural areas which may not currently have access to broadband. State and Federal grants may be available in the future as eligibility requirements change and program funding increases.

We have seen cities similar to Easthampton which have used revenue bonds to fund municipal broadband projects. Revenue bonds are loans repaid with money generated when an infrastructure project is complete. For example, a city might use revenue bond to build a bridge and re-pay that bond by charging a toll when the bridge is used. Typical revenue bonds are 30-year loans with no penalty for early repayment. It is important to note that although revenue bonds are intended to be repaid with revenue earned, the City would still be responsible for the terms of the loan should the project fail. As they are not guaranteed by a property tax increase or debt override, revenue bonds may have a slightly higher interest payment than general obligation bonds. However, interest rates for each type of bonding will depend on the credit rating of the City at the time of application and may fluctuate over time.
8.3 — Citywide Tax Increase

The Committee has seen some municipalities implement property tax increases as a method of funding municipal broadband infrastructure. This seems to be a rare occurrence and requires the approval of a plurality of residents on a municipal ballot vote. Similar to G.O. bonds, municipalities pursuing wide tax increases tend to be those with low population densities and little or no alternative broadband offerings.

In 2018, Charlemont, MA rejected an offer of service from Comcast and instead supported a property tax increase to build a municipal broadband network. Charlemont partnered with Westfield Gas & Electric to design and construct the network. The municipal tax increase will be tied to the revenue earned from subscribers; if enough households adopt the service, the tax increase would vanish.

While this method creates extra steps and requires a ballot vote in favor of raising property taxes, the communities pursuing this type of funding have been largely successful. It is possible Easthampton would be successful pursuing this model as well. However, the Committee feels that the lack of similar communities using this type of funding makes it difficult for us to recommend, as more common funding models have been consistently successful.

8.4 — Residential Betterment Districts

Using “Residential Betterment Districts” could be a method to fund a municipal broadband network in only specific fiberhoods which agree locally to support a tax increase. In this model, the City would be divided into districts and residents within those districts could vote to increase their property taxes to pay for a fiber broadband installation. This funding mechanism is typically used for water and sewer projects but may be used for municipal fiber as well.

Under the Residential Betterment model, property owners will receive cost estimates based on the terrain of their district, and participation within each district may be optional under certain plans. Once construction is complete, the total end cost is divided among the participating properties. The amount borrowed is repaid over time at a low municipal bond rate. There is no financial risk to the municipal government under this model because property owners themselves guarantee the repayment.

Residential Betterments Districts as a funding method could bring inequities to our community, with differing costs for residents depending on their location and the participation of their neighbors. Residents in lower-density areas would see increased costs, and low-income neighborhoods may be less likely to support this type of program.

8.5 — Need for Pro Forma Business Plan

It is not possible to forecast a budget for network build activities before the City has created a pro-forma business plan. This will require a market study and full pole survey to establish and communicate the conditions on the ground. This information will allow us to have more detailed conversations with potential partners and will help inform the discussion as we move toward settling on the business model which makes the most sense for our community. Once this information is available, we will have a better picture of the true viability of such an investment.
9. Additional Service Offerings

Many telecom operators, both public and private, offer internet service packaged together with telephone and/or television subscriptions. This section talks about what additional services may be offered by a municipal broadband utility.

9.1 — Television & Streaming Video

Some municipal broadband providers offer internet and streaming video combination packages. Providers such as Whip City Fiber allow customers to purchase streaming equipment at cost (Fire TV Sticks, Chromecast devices, etc.) and hold free training seminars to teach customers how to use them. Other providers, such as GCET, have negotiated streaming rights with various TV stations and offer an assortment of bundles at costs which are far less than typical Cable subscriptions, but have fewer total channels. Other add-ons, such as HBO or Cinemax, may be included at an additional cost.

Many customers already have streaming video subscriptions through services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hulu, and YouTube TV. These services only require an internet connection to use.

9.2 — Telephone & VoIP

The great majority of municipal broadband service providers offer telephone service for an additional fee, with the service being handled over the fiber optic cable as opposed to a traditional telephone wire (VoIP). Fiber optic technology provides a substantial improvement to VoIP quality when compared to cable alternatives, which can suffer from distortion and lag.

9.3 — Residential Versus Business Customers

Business customers are typically billed a higher rate for service than residential customers and may have additional network requirements. Business internet connections typically have a static IP and guaranteed service and uptimes.

9.4 — Low-Income Subsidized Rates

It is possible for a municipal broadband service provider to offer subsidized rates to low-income or otherwise disadvantaged residents. For example, the City of Greenfield is offering free internet service to the home of every child who qualifies for discounted or free lunch during the Covid-19 pandemic and will offer substantially discounted service to these households after that. Having a municipal broadband utility would allow the City to subsidize internet access for less fortunate people and ensure equal internet access for all Easthampton residents.
10. Easthampton User Profiles

In the summer of 2019, the Telecommunications Advisory Committee conducted an online survey of Easthampton residents and businesses. The survey asked questions regarding general broadband and internet usage, types of devices, users per household, current internet provider, level of interest in municipal broadband service, priorities for that service, and respondents overall experience and satisfaction with their internet service provider.

10.1 — Demographics

According to the most recent American Community Survey (2014–2018) Easthampton has an estimated population of 16,023 residents. The median age for an Easthampton resident is 45, with 11.2 percent of the population under the age of 18 and 19.2 percent of the population over the age of 65. The median income for an Easthampton household is $63,507, with 9.6 percent of the city’s population living below the poverty line.

Easthampton contains an estimated 7,292 households, 3,997 of which are estimated to be families. An estimated 1,477 families contain children, and the average family size in Easthampton is 2.82 people. Easthampton’s households are split between single family and multi-family buildings, with 57 percent of households being located in single-unit structures, and 43 percent being located in multi-unit structures.

In this section we present a selection of the most representative figures from the survey data we collected. The complete survey data set and all visualizations of the data can be viewed at <<URL to anonymized data>>.

10.1.1 — Survey Respondents

This chart breaks down the respondents. At the time the Committee reported this data at the end of the summer 2019, a total of 618 residents and business owners had responded to the survey. The majority of respondents (72%) were homeowners, followed by renters. While the survey was written with specific questions for both residents and businesses, we did not receive a large number of responses from businesses. A separate survey targeted specifically at businesses and business owners would yield useful data when considering how to structure and market a municipal broadband offering to Easthampton businesses.
10.1.2 — Total Number of Internet Connected Devices in Household

This chart shows that the number of internet-connected devices is growing in each household. Many households not only have a growing number of shared devices connected to the home's broadband connection, but members of households often have a growing number of personal devices that connect to the internet through the home's shared broadband connection. As the number of devices accessing the internet within the home and neighborhood grows, it creates more demand for the finite bandwidth available.

10.2 — Internet Usage

The survey contained numerous questions about internet usage and habits of Easthampton residents. Current provider, level of satisfaction, bundled services, types of activities, interest in municipal internet service, and priorities for using that service.

10.2.1 — Current Internet Provider

91% of Easthampton residents use Charter/Spectrum as their primary residential internet service provider, followed by 4% who use Verizon DSL.
10.2.2 — Current Satisfaction With Internet Service/Quality

The average of 614 survey responses to their current level of satisfaction yielded 2.94 on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest satisfaction). The comments provided to the Committee reveal polarized feelings about Easthampton's current broadband service. Most respondents indicated uneven levels of service throughout the year, with evidence of seasonal, weather, and neighborhood/geographic variables impacting service dependability. The feedback received by the Committee indicates that many residents hold strong negative feelings regarding the limited choices currently available to them.

10.2.3 — Bundled Services

Charter/Spectrum currently offers bundled options which 54% of our survey respondents were taking advantage of. Most of these bundled services allow residents to control costs, but it is important to note that these bundles increase in price regularly and include promotional discounts which eventually expire.

When the next two figures are considered, we can see how streaming and communication services (such as Zoom and Skype) have allowed more people to “cut the cord” every year. Charter's bundled services approach is likely to appear less attractive to customers as these services continue to improve.
10.2.4 — Cutting the Cord

While 46% of respondents have already “cut the cord,” 38% of respondents indicated they have considered doing so in the future. It appears from our data that price is a significant factor in making this determination, but availability of streaming services able to match cable television access to live events and sports may be an important consideration as well.

10.2.5 — Top Priorities

Survey respondents largely agree that they would like any new internet service offering to be priced competitively with their current service. Respondents also indicated reliability and speed to be their other top priorities.
10.2.6 — Considering Switching

73% of respondents indicated they would consider switching to a municipal broadband service. A significant number of respondents also indicated they would like to become early adopters of the service. Another 24% of respondents would also consider switching depending on the recommendations of others. The high percentage of respondents willing to consider switching to a municipal broadband service is another indication of low satisfaction among Easthampton residents with their current internet service.

10.3 — User Profiles Based on Survey Data

Based on feedback from survey respondents, the Committee was able to identify several general categories of typical Easthampton internet users:

10.3.1 — Remote Workers and Businesses

Remote workers are a growing part of our community. According to our survey, 58% of respondents used the internet to work from home. Remote workers, as well as business respondents, ranked reliability and speed as the two most important qualities of internet service.

Considering the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Committee believes that remote working, as well as remote learning, has increased in prevalence. Ensuring equitable internet access will help Easthampton grow as we continue to invest in these technologies.

Remote Workers and Businesses — Survey Respondent Quotes:

- “Since we both do remote work, we can only live where we can get high speed broadband. While Spectrum provides a decent service, it’s at a steep cost, and only going to go up. Internet access is becoming crucial in our society. Making it a publicly owned utility is common sense if we want an equitable community.”

- “I also use internet for my business, separately from my home. Reliability is of utmost importance. Also must be secure.”

- “At my current address, the Internet is better but still slow and frequently drops out, which is a major problem as I work from home.”

- “I think I am the only person in Easthampton that has not had any problems with Charter Internet. I worked out of my house for 15 years and never had a problem.”
10.3.2 — High-Capacity Home Users

The majority of survey respondents described themselves as homeowners or renters with multiple internet users in their household. 50% of all respondents reported using 6 or more devices within their homes that accessed the internet in some way. Many of these high-capacity home users rely on the internet for online gaming, streaming video and audio, holding remote meetings, and other uses requiring high bandwidth to function properly. Service interruptions during peak usage hours are often the result of low bandwidth availability.

High-Capacity Home Users — Survey Respondent Quotes:

- “Current service is costly and unreliable—streaming services are frequently interrupted because of low bandwidth, particularly at peak times. DSL was even worse.”
- “We need reliability. We both telecommute as well as take online classes and find service interruptions to be detrimental. Our entire home is connected to the internet and find that it goes down quite frequently throughout the day.”
- “Spectrum often has a slow down during peak hours which is frustrating.”

10.3.3 — Casual Home Users

Casual home users require dependable and affordable internet service. This type of user may depend on the internet for web browsing, email, social media, and video calls with family and friends. Although their bandwidth requirements are typically modest, these users may still experience service outages during peak usage hours.

The City of Greenfield offers reduced cost internet plans with lower advertised speeds in efforts to attract casual home users. However, other municipal ISPs have cautioned against this model, stating that multiple service tiers add overhead and unnecessary complexity to daily operations.

A municipal broadband utility may subsidize the cost of service for low-income residents and seniors, some of whom may fit within this group. This method would allow greater internet accessibility without reducing the quality of service for those who are unable to afford a higher priced tier.

It is important to note that the line between “high-capacity” and “casual” users is likely to blur significantly over time. Broadband access is being used widely by all residents within a home across a wide and growing spectrum of shared family and personal devices. As the “casual user” adopts more of these internet-dependent devices and services, their bandwidth usage will grow significantly.

At the time this report was written, Comcast had begun to roll-out a data quota for residential service. If this becomes a prevalent business change across residential service providers, commercial broadband will become more expensive for families and individuals as well as more difficult to estimate the month-to-month effect on family budgets. This will accelerate usage changes while also accelerating the ever-widening gap in broadband access and speed.
The Committee believes that the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed how critical fast, reliable broadband is to sustain and enrich student learning, business operation along with remote working and citizen engagement with municipal government.

Casual Home Users — Survey Respondent Quotes:

- “I’m disabled, on SSDI, and pay 86% of my income to rent. I cannot afford internet service. The social security COLA never keeps up with true cost of basic living expenses. There should be some sort of grant or subsidy to help low income people to access internet. It’s becoming as important as electricity. I’m talking about accessing websites that are necessary, like government agencies. They all expect people to have internet access AND a printer.”

- “I had Charter. I am elderly and disabled. I had to get rid of my internet because it reached $72. Per month. I had to choose between internet or car. I can’t believe how expensive Charter got for slow service. They claimed 100 Mbps but I never reached that high. I have now is a cellphone with 14 GB monthly for data. I can’t watch Netflix or other services my phone is too small and I don’t have the data anyway.”

- “We need a cheaper internet option or one that is universal across town and embedded into our taxes.”
11. Benefits

It is the belief of the Committee that better internet service for Easthampton’s residents is a benefit in and of itself. As residents’ personal and professional lives come to rely more and more on connectivity to the internet, improved connection quality will help households and businesses to access the services and amenities that they need. If the City can supply faster, more reliable internet to residents at a reasonable price, this is a positive thing. The results of the 2019 referendum on the establishment of a municipal light plant could be interpreted as a message that residents see this as something that they want.

Beyond the basic good of supplying the City with faster internet, a fiber-optic network could unlock certain economic development opportunities. Industries including software development, manufacturing, health care, and media have developed technologies which rely on fast and stable internet connections in order to function. Having such a connection available will likely make Easthampton a more attractive location for some of these businesses. It may become increasingly difficult for Easthampton to attract those businesses if fiber continues to be rolled out in nearby communities, but not here.

The potential economic benefits extend to the residential market as well. Even as the Committee was formed, more and more American workers were working remotely. That trend accelerated dramatically following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and while it is unclear at this time how that will affect the nature of work after the end of the pandemic many organizations have built technological and cultural structures to allow their employees to work from home and these structures may not be fully disassembled after. At a minimum, potential homebuyers or renters may look for properties where they can work from home when doing so is convenient. As with businesses, the presence of fast, reliable, and affordable internet will likely play a role in the decision-making process for many households.

One aspect of municipal internet which may be appealing to many subscribers is that it would afford subscribers a greater level of control over the policy choices made by their ISP. For example, one issue which has generated a great deal of interest has been that of net neutrality, the principle that an ISP should not treat different internet communications or uses differently. Many people who follow this matter believe that decisions made recently by the Federal Communications Commission have compromised this principle. A municipal internet utility would have the ability to choose how it handles these matters and could adhere to the principle of net neutrality even if private sector companies began to deviate from it. At the time that this Committee interviewed them, the MLPs which were asked all stated this to be their intention.

There may also be a value in shifting a substantial monthly expenditure for households in Easthampton from a national entity to a local one. While the first priority of an MLP must be to pay down its bonds and maintain reserves for necessary repairs and upgrades, a local municipal entity is more likely to have the best interest of the city and its residents in mind when it makes its business decisions.

Different implementation plans may have their own specific benefits. For example, a system owned and operated in whole by the City would allow for the greatest degree of local control and the greatest potential for job creation within the city. A system formed in partnership with another existing MLP would have the benefit of allowing residents to access the systems and
expertise which have already been developed by the MLP. A public-private partnership would allow the City to access private funds, allowing the city to develop a fiber network without taking on as much debt.
12. Risks

The greatest risk involved in creating a public internet utility is involved in the bonding. While the exact mechanics might vary, most municipalities which have built their own municipal fiber networks have taken on a substantial amount of debt to build these networks out with the understanding that the revenue from the network would pay for the bond. Any issue which could prevent the network from generating the revenue to pay down that bond would be problematic. Two examples of this could be if the interest in switching to the new municipal internet was significantly lower than expected, or if a new technology emerged which took with it a large share of the customer base. Once the bond payment is settled, the risk involved for the City falls substantially. If after that point a competing technology entered the market which negatively affected the MLP’s market share, the liability to the City would be diminished.

Beyond the risk involved with bonding, a fiber network would carry with it the usual risks associated with any major project in the City. The City will face the same costs and liabilities involved with bringing on additional employees or equipment. For the network to remain functional and competitive, systems will need to be put in place to ensure that the system receives timely maintenance and upgrades.

Just as with benefits, there are some risks unique to various methods of implementation. While encouraged by the success of neighboring communities in setting up their own fiber networks, there is no guarantee that Easthampton will achieve the same level of success. In many ways, this risk is exacerbated by the fact that Easthampton does not have an existing gas or electric utility whose resources could help develop a fiber network. Partnering with another MLP would help to mitigate those risks, but it could create issues down the line if the partner MLP were to experience issues unrelated to Easthampton. While partnering with a for-profit entity in a public-private partnership may avoid other risks related to financing and implementation, the network would be operated by a for-profit entity whose own goals and incentives may not align with those of subscribers in Easthampton.
13. Conclusion

13.1 — Conclusions

After reviewing and studying the information available to us, the Committee has reached the following conclusions:

- Our cable infrastructure is inadequate in meeting the current citywide internet needs and is unavailable or unaffordable for some city residents. These issues are likely to worsen as consumer demand for bandwidth and internet speed continue to rise.

- Based on the review of our current franchise agreement with Charter, as well as state and local law, there is no legal barrier which would preclude our municipality from establishing a public telecommunications utility.

- Preliminary review of our demographics, population density, and geographical location suggest that Easthampton is well positioned to implement such a public utility. Feedback from potential partners indicates that we are a desirable location for industry growth and expansion. The City can expect to receive multiple bids from qualified contractors should it pursue such an initiative.

- If so developed, a fiber-optic network would drastically improve the quality, speed and stability of internet connectivity available to residents and is likely to exceed our usage requirements for the next several decades.

- Local feedback has indicated to the Committee that there exists within Easthampton significant support for establishing a municipally owned internet utility.

- While several funding mechanisms are possible, the Committee has concluded that such a utility would be achievable without increasing property taxes. Revenue drawn from such a utility would be expected to cover the initial investment as well as the cost of ongoing network maintenance and expansion.

- While most of the city has access to cable internet, the lack of universally accessible and affordable broadband - as well as neighborhood variances in the quality and consistency of service - contributes toward inequity within our community.

- Surrounding communities compete to attract new businesses and residents. Those which have invested in telecommunications infrastructures will continue to outperform those which have not. Easthampton has an opportunity to increase economic growth and desirability by establishing a fiber-optic utility.

- While there are several options available to the City, the Committee feels that partnering with an existing local MLP would afford Easthampton several advantages including infrastructure expertise while allowing us to retain control of the utility.
13.2 — Recommendations & Next Steps

It is the recommendation of the Committee that the City consider taking the following actions:

- Establish a Municipal Light Plant and appoint an MLP board to continue evaluating and reporting their work to the public.

- Commission a detailed engineering and design study, including a full utility pole survey.

- Commission a business plan to implement a sustainable municipal fiber network.

- Research and pursue grant opportunities made available by private, State and Federal government entities which may be used in the establishment of public telecommunications utilities.
DATE: February 24, 2021

TO: City Council

FROM: Peg Conniff, City Council President

Today I will be requesting approval from the City Council to form an Auditor Candidate Selection Ad Hoc Committee.

The members of this committee will consist of the following:

City Council Appointments Committee:

• Lindsey Rothschild
• JP Kwiecinski
• Erica Flood

Additional members:

• Peg Conniff
• Greg Roland
Date: February 24, 2021

To: City Council

From: Mayor Nicole LaChapelle

RE: EFD Supplemental Appropriation

I am requesting $61,450.00 from the Cannabis Impact Fee Stabilization Fund to fund the requested line items based on the increased service demand for EMS, provide annual service and maintenance on EMS and fire equipment, and provide initial medical exams and personal protective equipment (PPE) for new personnel.
Supplemental Appropriation
FY 2021

Date: 02/18/21

Request is hereby made for approval of the following appropriation:

1. **Amount requested:** $61,450

(Auditor’s Approval)

2. **To be transferred from:** #087 Cannabis Stabilization

3. **To be transferred to:**
   - #001.2200.5181 Uniform Allowances- $3,750
   - #001.2200.5173 Fire Medical Expenses- $2,150
   - #001.2200.5314 Fire Education & Training- $2,100
   - #001.2200.5439 Fire Bldg & equip. R&M- $4,200
   - #001.2200.5595 Fire Equipment- $5,800
   - #001.2200.5483 Fire repairs to vehicles- $850
   - #001.2200.5597 SCBA maintenance/repair- $250
   - #001.2200.5191 Uniforms/equipment- $2,250
   - #001.2310.5130 ALS/EMS overtime- $3,000
   - #001.2310.5131 Amb. Callback overtime- $12,000
   - #001.2310.5319 Prof & Tech services- $5,000
   - #001.2310.5500 EMS Supplies- $9,500
   - #001.2310.5490 Maintenance agreements $10,600

4. The amount requested will be used for the following purpose: To fund the above requested line items based on the increased service demand for EMS, provide annual service and maintenance on EMS and fire equipment, and provide initial medical exams and personal protective equipment (PPE) for new personnel.

Nicole LaChapelle, Mayor

Department Head Signature
City Council Action

Date of City Council meeting March 3, 2021
Date referred to Subcommittee March 3, 2021
Public hearing date Date of Advertising:
Number present & voting Appropriation approved $
Appropriation Disapproved $


Mayoral Approval

Date of City Council approval 
Amount approved $ Department transferred to:

Pursuant to Section 3-7 of the Easthampton Home Rule Charter, I, Nicole LaChapelle, Mayor of the City of Easthampton, hereby approve the foregoing City Council action.

Nicole LaChapelle, Mayor Date of Approval
SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION REQUEST
Community Preservation Act (CPA)
FY 2021

Date: Wednesday, February 24, 2021

Request is hereby made for approval of the following appropriation:

1. Amount requested: $15,000.00

2. To be appropriated from: 024.0024.3242
   CPA Reserved for Historic Preservation $15,000.00

3. To be appropriated to: 024.2981.5400.2458
   City Archival Records Survey Phase 2 $15,000.00

4. The amounts requested will be used for the following purpose:
   To hire a contractor to implement recommendations based on the initial phase 1
   survey: inventory, index, and re-box archival items; separate out records that can be
   destroyed; and create a database of the archival records to be saved.

   Daniel D. Rist, CPA Committee Chair

   Jeffrey Bagg, City Planner
City Council Action

Date received by City Council: March 3, 2021

Date referred to Subcommittee: March 3, 2021

Public hearing date: ____________________ Advertisement date: ____________________

Number present & voting: ____________ Appropriation approved: $___________

_________________________ ____________________________
_________________________ ____________________________
_________________________ ____________________________

Date of City Council approval: __________________________

Amount approved: $______________________________

Department transferred to: ____________________________

Pursuant to Section 3-7 of the Easthampton Home Rule Charter, I, Nicole LaChapelle, Mayor of the City of Easthampton, hereby approve the foregoing City Council action.

_________________________________  ____________________________
Nicole LaChapelle, Mayor               Date of Approval
At the February 18, 2021 Community Preservation Act Committee meeting, the Committee voted to recommend the appropriation of funding for one projects as follows:

**Project name:** City Archival Records Project – Phase 2  
**Location:** Municipal Building (50 Payson Ave) and Old Town Hall (43 Main St)

By a vote of seven (7) in favor and none (0) against with two (2) members absent: to provide funding to hire a contractor for phase 2 of the City’s Archival Records Management Project as detailed and conditioned on the attached project funding agreement dated 2/18/2021.

**Applicant:** Barbara LaBombard, City Clerk  
**CPA funding amount:** $15,000 in total from the Reserved for Historic Preservation account

As of 12/31/2020 the CPA account balances were:

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<th>Account name</th>
<th>Account number</th>
<th>Current balance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reserved for Open Space</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserved for Historic Preservation</td>
<td>024.0024.3242</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reserved for Affordable Housing</td>
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<td>Undesignated Fund</td>
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<td>889,945.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reserve Fund</td>
<td>024.2999.5966</td>
<td>4,350.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total available**  
$1,104,382.05
Project Funding Agreement
Easthampton Community Preservation Act Committee

Project name: City Archival Records Project – Phase 2

Location: Municipal Building (50 Payson Ave) and Old Town Hall (43 Main St)

Scope: To hire a contractor to implement recommendations based on the initial phase 1 survey. Records management contractor will inventory, index, and re-box archival items; separate out records that can be destroyed; and create a database of the archival records to be saved.

Applicant name and address: Barbara LaBombard, City Clerk

Total CPA funds granted (this phase): $15,000
(from the Historic Preservation set-aside account)

Total project cost (this phase): $65,000
Total matching funds (this phase): $50,000
(from other City funds)

Conditions, stipulations, restrictions:

1. All of the work funded by this CPA grant must be completed no later than June 16, 2022, unless the Committee has granted an extension. Any and all funds not utilized by this date must be returned to the CPA and no further payments/reimbursements will be made. Requests to extend this date must be submitted in writing and show good cause; you may be required to appear before the Committee to present the request.

2. Periodic project updates to the Committee are required. The first project update is due December 16, 2021. Subsequent updates are due every 6 months from that date until completed.

3. A final written project report, with photo documentation as relevant, must be submitted within 30 days of the project’s completion.

4. Please credit CPA funding in any written materials about this project by stating "This project was made possible by Easthampton Community Preservation Act Funds."

5. No significant changes may be made to the scope of this project as stipulated in this document, unless otherwise authorized by the Committee and/or City Council and Mayor. CPA funds may only be used for items included in the attached project budget and/or within the project scope.

6. No payments will be made in advance or for costs covered by or charged to any other funding source. All requests for direct payment must include the original invoice; requests for reimbursement must include a copy of the original invoice and proof of payment.

7. The CPA committee respectfully recommends that city policies are implemented to ensure that future storage and access procedures prevent future storage disorganization.

Attachments:

1. Project narrative and budget, dated 2/4/2021

[Signatures]
Signature of Easthampton CPA Committee Chair

Signature of Applicant
Records Management Survey of the City’s Archival Records

Project Description & Goals: The current CPA request would pay for a portion of the cost to being Phase II of the city’s record’s management project. Phase I—a survey of the city’s archival records—was completed in November, 2020. Work is expected to begin in March of 2021 at 50 Payson Avenue using funding approved by the City Council on February 3, 2021. Work will be done by archival records staff from King Information Systems.

The CPA funding request of $15,000 would allow continuation of the project and focus primarily on the city’s oldest records, many of which are stored in the basement of the Old Town Hall. The project would involve going through all the items listed in the survey and sorting, re-boxing, separating for microfilming, destroying and indexing in a database. It’s important to note that especially at the old Town Hall, many of the city’s oldest records are deteriorating, moldy and stored in extremely sub-par conditions. The “vault” in the Town Hall basement contains large pipes, has windows and is damp and moldy smelling. This work would include moving the records from the vault to a space with somewhat better storage conditions. In addition, if plans for the Town Hall change in the future and the city records need to be removed, it will be much easier if this cleanup/sorting is done.

As a refresher – here is an outline of the full project:

**COMPLETED** Phase One would be to hire a professional records analyst to go to each building and department to survey and analyze the city’s archives. From the survey, the analyst would then formulate specific recommendations on how to better organize, preserve and maintain the records.

Phase Two begins the implementation of recommendations based on the initial assessment done by the record analyst. It involves a records supervisor and staff re-boxing records (as needed) and indexing the items that need to be retained. They will identify records that can be destroyed and assist with the process of obtaining permission for destruction. This phase also includes the indexing of the records in a database; creating an important tool to be used for accessing records for many reasons, including historical, personnel, retirement and public records requests.

Future phases of the project include the same work on records at the Public Safety Complex (approximately $20,000) and the Council on Aging (approximately $7,000). Beyond that are future plans for maps & plans to be included. Also, plans are to microfilm certain records which would both increase physical storage space and allow for computer accessibility.

In March of 2006, the CPA statute was amended to include “documents and artifacts” within the definition of historic resources. Since that time, many communities have used CPA funds for document preservation projects, including document conservation and storage projects and improvements to storage systems. This project meets those requirements and is not only worthwhile, but necessary to protecting our city’s records.

Timeline: The expected start of Phase II is March of 2021.

Budget: The CPA portion of the first part of Phase II is $15,000.00. The total cost to complete the Town Hall and 50 Payson Avenue is $65,000.00. That amount includes both labor and supplies. Funding for the balance of $50,000.00 was approved by the City Council on February 3, 2021.
Amend the city ordinances as follows

**ADD Chapter 2, Article I (In General), Section 2-8:**

1. Holidays: The city shall observe the following holidays for the purpose of building closures, enforcement, and personnel: New Year’s Eve (half day), New Year’s Day, Martin Luther King Day (Third Monday in January), Presidents Day (Third Monday in February), Patriots Day (Third Monday in April), Memorial Day (Last Monday in May), Independence Day, Labor Day (First Monday in September), Indigenous Peoples Day (Second Monday in October, see Resolution), Veterans Day (November 11), Christmas Eve (Half Day), Christmas Day