

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – FEBRUARY 2, 2022
Meeting held remotely due to COVID 19 Pandemic Restrictions
6:00 p.m.

Members Present: President Homar Gomez, Vice-President Salem Derby, Daniel Rist, Owen Zaret, Lindsey Rothschild, Thomas Peake, Brad Riley, Koni Denham and James Kwiecinski.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes: On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Derby it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to approve the minutes of the January 19, 2022 meeting. Councilor Kwiecinski abstained as he was absent on January 19th.

Public Speak Time Summary: None

Communications: Councilor Zaret spoke of the following:

- The importance of Black History Month (February)
- Thank you to River Valley Co-op for this month's "change for change" benefiting City Space
- A traffic light petition for the Main St./South St. intersection is available for signing on-line.
- He thanked the DPW for their work clearing the streets during recent storms.
- Regarding the LED street lights he advised residents to reach out to the DPW.

Mayor Communications: Mayor LaChapelle was not in attendance

Correspondence, Announcements & President/Vice-President Communications: Update from the "Say Something Youth Initiative program" at Easthampton High School by Amy Cronin DiCaprio/Safe Passage & Sindy Mojica/Diversity and Inclusion Liaison, EHS. They are recruiting both youth and adult stakeholders for a spring advisory group. The group meets monthly; there is a \$100 stipend for student members. The group seeks to shift culture in support of healthy relationships.

President Gomez announced that the EHS "We the People Team" had - for the 5th year in a row - been named state champs!

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

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

1. **Amend City Ordinances – Chapter 2, Sec. 2-8 (Holidays):** Councilor Zaret said the Ordinance Committee had voted 3 to 0 to support both an ordinance amendment and a resolution adding Juneteenth Independence Day as a city holiday. During the discussion, some “housekeeping” was also recommended (removing the ½ day before Thanksgiving, which had been added in error).

On motion made by Councilor Zaret and seconded by Councilor Derby it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to amend the City Ordinances, Chapter 2, Sec. 2-8 (Holidays) by adding “Juneteenth Independence Day (June 19) and deleting the “half day before Thanksgiving””. The revised ordinance now reads as follows:

“Section 2-8 (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), Juneteenth Independence Day (June 19), Independence Day, Labor Day (First Monday in September), Indigenous Peoples Day (Second Monday in October, per March 3, 2021 City Council Resolution), Veterans Day (November 11), Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve (Half Day), Christmas Day. The renaming of “Columbus Day” to Indigenous Peoples Day shall in no way impair or otherwise change any obligation, contractual or otherwise of the City in which the term Columbus Day is currently used.”

On motion made by Councilor Zaret seconded by Councilor Derby it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to approve the “Resolution of the City Council of Easthampton to recognize Juneteenth as a city holiday” which was read by Councilor Zaret, as follows:

“Resolution of the City Council of Easthampton to recognize Juneteenth as a city holiday

WHEREAS, Juneteenth celebrates the end of slavery in the United States, and is also known as the emancipation Day, Juneteenth Independence Day, and Black Independence Day; and,

WHEREAS, President Abraham Lincoln decreed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. The proclamation declared “that all persons held as slaves” “are, and henceforward shall be free; and

WHEREAS, news of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation was withheld in parts of the United States for two and one half years, and this freedom was not made known to many enslaved African Americans.

WHEREAS, because freedom from slavery in the United States came to enslaved black people in different parts of the United States at different times, emancipation celebrations are often called by different names and take place on different dates. Juneteenth recognizes that on June 19, 1865, the last enslaved people in Galveston, Texas were informed that slavery had been abolished

WHEREAS, organizations across the world in a number of countries also recognize June 19 as the end of slavery and to celebrate the culture and achievements of African Americans globally; and,

WHEREAS, racial injustice and violence toward African-American citizens have resulted in national protests, demonstrations, and a unification of voices crying for a need for judicial racial reform; and,

WHEREAS, in July of 2020, Juneteenth was officially recognized as a holiday in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and in June of 2021 Juneteenth was officially recognized as a federal holiday; now,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the City Council of Easthampton, Massachusetts, on this 2nd day of February, 2022 that Juneteenth is hereby officially recognized as a holiday in the city of Easthampton; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the day shall be spent in recognition of the social and cultural significance of the abolition of slavery in the United States, and punctuated by the gravity of historical and ongoing racial injustice in our country.”

2. **Amend City Ordinances – Traffic Rules & Orders – Restrict parking on Wemelco Way:**

Councilor Zaret said a request had been brought forward by a business owner to restrict parking on the southerly side of Wemelco Way. This street dead-end is located off of Main Street and dead ends at the Manhan Rail Trail. Councilor Zaret said the street is in a current state of disrepair and is difficult for vehicles to access, including public safety vehicles. Councilor Derby commented that the dormant property at the end of the street is being repurposed and there is a “real need for the street to be accessible”. A tractor trailer had also been parking on the southerly side of the street and it made access difficult for both commercial and emergency vehicles. President Gomez said there were safety concerns and employee access to consider. The Public Safety had voted 3 to 0 to recommend the change at the end of 2021.

On motion made by Councilor Zaret and seconded by Councilor Derby it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to amend the city ordinances, Appendix A (Traffic Rules & Orders), Section 1-24 (Parking prohibited on certain streets at all times) by adding the following:

- ***Wemelco Way - southerly side, entire distance***

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

Reports of Standing Committees:

PROPERTY: Councilor Kwiecinski reported the Property Committee had met on Feb. 1st to discuss a Memorandum of Agreement which would allow MassDevelopment to give its expertise towards repurposing of the three elementary schools. The buildings will be vacant at the end of the current school year and in anticipation of putting the three schools on the market there is much work to be done (confirming boundaries, finding deeds, coordinating appraisals, etc.) The Property Committee voted 3 to 0 to endorse the request.

City Planner Jeff Bagg said the vote would authorize the Mayor to execute the Memorandum of Agreement with MassDevelopment. The city had applied for a grant for this pre-sale work, but hadn’t been successful. MassDevelopment, however, wants to assist, he said. Payback would come from the net proceeds of the property sales. The Request for Proposals (RFP) will need City Council approval; Mr. Bagg estimated bringing them to the council in April or May. It is hoped

the RFP's could be released to the public before the schools are vacant in the spring. The goal is to have the schools vacant for as short a period as possible.

Memorandum of Agreement – MassDevelopment – School Re-Use: On motion made by Councilor Kwiecinski and seconded by Councilor Peake it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to authorize the Mayor to execute the Memorandum of Agreement with MassDevelopment to assist the Municipality in documenting existing conditions, including property surveys for the three school parcels and the public infrastructure/utilities in the adjacent areas, and supporting the town in establishing property values through appraisals for the disposition process to promote job creation and economic development (the "Project") within the Municipality at 4 Park Street (Pepin School), 9 School Street (Center School), and 7 Chapel Street (Maple School).

FINANCE: Councilor Rist said the Finance Committee will meet next on February 10th.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to schedule a public hearing for the Feb. 16th meeting on the request to amend the city ordinances, Chapter 7, Sec. 7-15 (Clerk to the City Council salary).

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Peake it was unanimously voted (by roll call) that the Finance Committee agenda item on the pay plan grade study for council appointees be expanded to include a study of the pay plan Exhibit B which deals with the scale for each pay step per each grade.

PUBLIC SAFETY: Councilor Zaret said the Public Safety Committee will meet next on Feb. 3rd at 6 p.m.

APPOINTMENTS: Councilor Rothschild said the Appointments Committee had met to discuss three Mayoral appointments. All three were approved 3 to 0.

On motion made by Councilor Rothschild and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to confirm the following Mayoral appointments:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Board/Committee</u>	<u>Term Expires</u>
Zacaree Banas	Affordable & Fair Housing Partnership	Dec. 31, 2022
Molly Goodwin	Commission on Disability	Dec. 31, 2022
Stanley Diamond	Commission on Disability	Dec. 31, 2022

Councilor Rothschild said there are many open vacancies on boards and committees. She urged councilors to share and post notices about these vacancies. She said there has been discussion about having a table at the Farmer's Market for in-person outreach about committee participation.

The Appointments Committee will meet next on Feb. 9th at 4 p.m.

ORDINANCE: Councilor Derby reported the Ordinance Committee had met on Jan. 27th. They will meet next as follows:

- Feb. 17th at 6 p.m. to discuss the Ordinance Review Committee’s report
- March 3rd at 6 p.m. to discuss the Vacant Storefronts Ordinance proposal
- March 8th at 6 p.m. – continued public hearing with the Planning Board (40R amendment)

RULES & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS: No report.

Ad Hoc Committees:

Senior Tax Work-Off Committee: Councilor Kwiecinski said he anticipated a presentation to the council in March.

New Business:

- a. On motion made by Councilor Derby and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to add an “ongoing review of public safety departments” to the Public Safety Committee’s agenda.
- b. On motion made by Councilor Derby and seconded by Councilor Peake it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer two new Mayoral appointments to the Appointments Committee.
- c. Second reading by Councilor Rist on the following interdepartmental transfer and supplemental appropriation requests:
 - Interdepartmental Transfer:**
 - \$2,000.00 to supplement the City Council legal ad budget for FY ’22
 - Supplemental Appropriations:**
 - \$20,000.00 to supplement the Legal Services budget due to Union St. legal expenses
 - \$32,254.21 to supplement the FY ’22 IT budget
 - \$325,200.00 to supplement the FY ’22 Fire Department budget

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Kwiecinski it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer all four requests to the Finance Committee and to schedule public hearings for the February 16th council meeting.

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

TIME: 6:54 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Barbara L. LaBombard, Clerk to the City Council