

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING – MARCH 16, 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 and James Kwiecinski. Koni Denham arrived during the third public hearing.

**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 March 2, 2022 meeting.

**Public Speak Time Summary:**

- ***Joan Kurtz, 359 Main Street*** – She is the president of the Easthampton Dog Park group and asked the councilors for their support of the creation of a dog park in the city. She said there are currently 80 families and businesses on their email list (including one city councilor).
- ***Maureen Pasquale, 51 Florence Road*** – She also spoke in support of a dog park. She said the group is looking for suitable land for the park.
- ***Jackie Brousseau-Pereira, 39 Garfield Avenue*** - She spoke in support of the Debt-Free Future Act Resolution. She said she has many stories of students and their financial situations.

**Communications:**

- ***Joe McCoy, Chair of the Elementary School Re-use Committee*** was in attendance to give councilors an update on the work of the committee, as the time nears when the three elementary schools will become vacant. He said the committee will soon give a report to the council. They have been doing groundwork ahead of the council’s actions which will determine the future use of the buildings.

City Planner Jeff Bagg said a Request for Proposals (RFP) is being prepared with assistance from consultants and will be given to the School Committee in April. The RFP and committee report should come to the council in May or June, he said. Affordable housing is a primary goal, with other high priorities being community benefits such as public parking, maintaining the gym at Pepin School and including a playground or park.

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

<b>PUBLIC HEARINGS – STARTING AT 6:15 p.m.</b>
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1. **Interdepartmental Transfer – PEG Access Account:** Second reading by Councilor Rist on the request to transfer funds to the PEG Access Account for cable related purposes. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Kwiecinski it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to transfer the sum of \$53,117.85 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.

2. **Supplemental Appropriation – OPEB Benefits/Actuarial Study – FY '22:** Second reading by Councilor Rist on the request to appropriate funds from Free Cash to cover a shortfall in the Actuarial Study Account. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Kwiecinski it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to appropriate the sum of \$6,900.00 from Free Cash to Actuarial Study Account (#001.1520.5739) to cover unanticipated expenses in FY 2022 budgeting for valuation of city OPEB benefits.

3. **Supplemental Appropriation – Property Liability FY '22 Shortfall:** Second reading by Councilor Rist on the request to appropriate funds from Free Cash to cover a shortfall in the FY '22 Property Liability budget. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to appropriate the sum of \$20,464.00 from Free Cash to the following:

School Liability Account (#001.9450.5600):	\$ 8,390.00
City Liability Account (#001.9540.5742):	\$12,074.00

to cover unanticipated expenses in FY 2022 budgeting for property liability.

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

**Mayor Communications:** Mayor LaChapelle was not in attendance at the meeting.

**Correspondence, Announcements & President/Vice-President Communications:**

Councilor Zaret spoke about the following:

- The upcoming Riverside Industries Auction – both on-line and in-person (April 8<sup>th</sup>).
- Pascommuck Conservation Trust's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. They are looking for officers.
- Ongoing prayers for the people of Ukraine.

Councilor Rothschild reminded councilors there would be a board/committee table at the Farmer's Market on March 27<sup>th</sup> (last market before the outdoor market begins in May).

Discussion was held at this time on upcoming council meetings and whether it was time to move back to in-person meetings. All councilors voiced support of going back to council chambers. President Gomez said Easthampton Media and IT Director Karin Camihort had been working on the technical aspects of a hybrid meeting. Councilor Peake suggested a "trial meeting" be held

before an actual meeting. President Gomez said this has already been done. Councilor Peake also commented that anyone should feel free to wear masks (even though they are not required). Councilor Kwiecinski thanked him for that comment. President Gomez suggested April 1<sup>st</sup> for the City Council in person, following with other city committees in May. No formal vote was taken, but it was agreed the council would meet in person at 50 Payson Avenue on April 6<sup>th</sup>.

**FY '23 City Council budget:** President Gomez asked for a vote to be taken tonight on the proposed FY '23 City Council budget. He proposed that \$900.00 be added in FY '23 for councilor training. There has never been funding for training and he thought \$900.00 would be a good place to start.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to approve a 3% increase in the budget from FY '22, adding \$900 for councilor training and approving a bottom line figure of \$44,010.63.

### **Reports of Standing Committees:**

**FINANCE:** Councilor Rist said the Finance Committee will meet next on March 23<sup>rd</sup> at 5 p.m.

**Retirement COLA Base Increase:** Councilor Rist reported the Contributory Retirement Board has requested that the council approve an increase in the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) base by \$2,000 to \$16,000.00. According to the board's request, the current COLA base is \$14,000.00 which means that the retiree's COLA is calculated on the first \$14,000 for a maximum COLA benefit of \$425.00. The council approved the increase to \$14,000 in 2015. Councilor Rist said the retirement system is in good shape financially – it is 74.9% funded and should be fully funded by 2035.

Retirement Director Kymme Wood said the COLA base increase would increase the \$425.00 maximum benefit to \$480.00. It will not affect the FY '23 budget and will have a low impact on the FY '24 budget, she said.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Kwiecinski it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to approve the acceptance of the amended section 103(j) of chapter 32 pertaining to an increase in the maximum base amount on which the cost-of-living adjustment is calculated increasing this amount by \$2,000.00 to \$16,000.00 as voted on by the Easthampton Contributory Retirement Board.

**PUBLIC SAFETY:** Councilor Zaret said the Public Safety Committee has not met since the last council meeting. They will meet next on March 24<sup>th</sup> and then again on April 5<sup>th</sup>.

**APPOINTMENTS:** Councilor Rothschild said the Appointments Committee had met on March 9<sup>th</sup> to review the pending appointments.

All appointments were approved 3 to 0 by the Appointments Committee.

On motion made by Councilor Rothschild and seconded by Councilor Rist it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) to approve the following City Council re-appointments:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Term Expires</b>
Barbara LaBombard	City Clerk	March 31, 2025
Mary Ann Giza	Asst. City Clerk	March 31, 2025

On motion made by Councilor Rothschild and seconded by Councilor Rist it was **VOTED** (by roll call) to confirm the following Mayoral appointments (Councilor Zaret abstained from voting on this motion):

<b>Name</b>	<b>Board/Committee</b>	<b>Term Expiration</b>
Kiam Jamrog-McQuaid	Affordable & Fair Housing Partnership	Dec. 31, 2023
Kate Banigan-White	Affordable & Fair Housing Partnership	Dec. 31, 2023
Marla Solomon	Community Relations Committee	Dec. 31, 2022
Ruth Jennison	Housing Authority	Dec. 31, 2022
Mary Church	Housing Authority	Dec. 31, 2026
James Ramsey	Parks & Recreation Commission	Dec. 31, 2023
James Hickson	Veterans Council	Dec. 31, 2023

The Appointments Committee will meet next on March 23rd at 4 p.m.

**ORDINANCE:** Councilor Derby said the Ordinance Committee had met with the EDIC to discuss the vacant storefront ordinance.

They had also met with the Planning Board to continue the public hearing on the housing zoning overlay – that public hearing was continued to March 29<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m.

The Ordinance Committee will meet next on March 22<sup>nd</sup> to discuss the Mayor’s proposal to add the position of Executive Assistant to the Mayor to the Pay Plan.

**PROPERTY:**

No report

**RULES & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS:**

No report.

**Ad Hoc Committees:**

**Senior Tax Work-Off Committee:** Councilor Kwiecinski said the Sr. Tax Work-Off Committee will meet next on March 21<sup>st</sup>.

**New Business:**

- a. On motion made by Councilor Derby and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer two Mayoral appointments to the Appointments Committee.
- b. **Debt-Free Future Resolution:** Councilor Rist asked for council action on this resolution tonight as it relates to pending legislative action. The resolution was co-sponsored by Councilors Rist and Denham.

Councilor Denham presented the resolution, which is in support of an Act currently before the Joint Committee on Higher Education in Boston. It would expand access to affordable higher education and give opportunity to students who might otherwise face insurmountable financial obstacles. The Debt Free Future Act (H.1339/S.829) provides free public education to all residents in Massachusetts. Additionally, it provides grants to eligible students for cost of living expenses, including food, housing and books. Councilor Denham said that 41% of Easthampton youth are considered economically disadvantaged.

Councilors voiced support of this resolution and Act. It is currently in committee, Councilor Denham said.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** (by roll call) that the City council approve a resolution supporting H.1339/S.829, “An Act to Guarantee Debt-Free Public Higher Education” as follows:

**“WHEREAS:** it has come to the attention of the City Council that the Joint Committee on Higher Education is considering H.1339/S.829, [An Act to Guarantee Debt-Free Public Higher Education](#); and

**WHEREAS,** while the federal government has the authority to cancel all outstanding debts, state legislatures have the ability to prevent future debts; and

**WHEREAS:** since FY01, per-student spending on public higher education has been [cut by](#) 32% and state scholarship spending has also been [cut by](#) 32%, increasing the burden on students and their families who now pay more than 50% of total public college revenue across the Commonwealth’s community colleges, state universities, and UMass campuses; and

**WHEREAS,** student debt in Massachusetts is disproportionately a public college problem as public college students graduate with almost equivalent dollars of student debt as private college graduates and more public college students graduate with debt in MA than private college students; and

**WHEREAS,** in Massachusetts in 2017, the average Cost of Attendance at public colleges accounts for an average of only 21% of white household income, but accounts for 38% of Black household income and 43% of Latinx household income; and

**WHEREAS:** women hold nearly two-thirds of the country’s student loan debt, which totals \$1.7 trillion dollars, and women are often forced to pay back their student loans at a slower rate than men due to the gender pay gap, which can result in women paying more than men overall for their right to learn; and

**WHEREAS**, that the City Council go on record in enthusiastic support of H.1339/S.829, An Act to Guarantee Debt-Free Public Higher Education, and in urging the Joint Committee on Higher Education to advance the bill as quickly as possible; The Act is a systemic solution to the related crises of college unaffordability and student loan debt which will guarantee tuition-and- fees free public college and award additional cost-of-living grant money to low-income families to eliminate the need to borrow for housing, transportation, child care, etc;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:** that the Easthampton City Council offers its support for H.1339/S.829 An Act to Guarantee Debt-Free Public Higher Education and that we continue to elevate the voices of students and families living with the burden of student debt.”

- c. On motion made by Councilor Derby and seconded by Councilor Rist it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer the following resolution to the Rules & Govt. Relations Committee:
- Gender Neutral Designation Resolution
- d. First readings by Councilor Rist on the following interdepartmental transfer and supplemental appropriation requests:
- \$3,000 for computer, radio & battery recycling
  - \$39,354 for pedestrian safety improvements on Holyoke St.
  - \$10,000 for funding of the EV Charging stations & Valley Bike Share program
  - \$25,000 for consulting services for NPDES Permit Compliance
  - \$32,500 for structural evaluation - WWTP Headworks Bldg. & storage compliance
  - \$58,000 for repairs/upgrades at the Lovefield St. Waste Water Pumping Station
  - \$108,000 for a replacement dump truck – Highway Division
  - \$120,000 for pump inspection/repair at Hendrick St. Water Treatment Facility
  - \$150,000 to fund an addition to the Sewer Division garage
  - \$137,500 from CPA funds for land acquisition at 17 Ward Ave. – rail trail connection to Park St.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer these requests to the *Finance Committee* and to schedule public hearings for the April 6th council meeting.

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

**TIME: 7:34 p.m.**

Respectfully Submitted,



Barbara L. LaBombard, Clerk to the City Council