

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – JANUARY 18, 2023
Meeting held in-person at 50 Payson Avenue and remotely by Google Meet
6:00 p.m.

Members Present: President Homar Gomez, Vice-President Salem Derby, Owen Zaret, Koni Denham, Daniel Rist, David Meunier, Thomas Peake and Brad Riley were present in person. Councilor James Kwiecinski was present remotely.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes: On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Denham it was voted* (by roll call) to approve the minutes of the Dec. 21, 2022 and Jan. 4, 2023 meetings. Councilor Meunier abstained from voting on this motion.

Public Speak Time Summary: A large number of people were in attendance to speak about funding of the library and a potential new building location:

- *Charles McCullough, Ashley Circle:* He said the library's budget is greatly impacted by the facility and the work it needs. It was recently announced that Easthampton Savings Bank has offered to donate the former Bank of America building at 52 Main Street to the library. However, renovating it to meet the library's needs would require financial collaboration between the library and the city, he said. The building would allow the library to grow, but it is also important to not erode the library's endowment with renovation costs.
- *Elizabeth Appelquist, President of the Library Board:* She read a letter from State Senator John Velis and State Representative Dan Carey in support of the library. The letter indicated they would continue working to pursue funding for the library. She said she has a deep sense of responsibility towards the library.
- *Katya Schapiro, Library Director:* She said while the library has needs, it also has so much to offer the community. She said she wants to do more.
- *Ted Perch, 8 Fairfield Ave.:* He has a background serving as library directors in Connecticut. He said the Main Street building is a "golden opportunity" and "we can't let it go". He urged working together on a solution to make it happen.

Numerous others spoke in support of the library. Several said the current library doesn't have enough space to offer programs and they urged the council to financially support a potential move to a new location. Speakers included:

- Shelby and Donovan Lee
- Nathan Markee, Holyoke St.
- Marvin Ward, Cottage St.
- Heather Beck, Chapman Ave.
- Jonathan Schmidt, East St.
- Raymah Hutchinson, Plain St.
- Gail Canon, Ashley Circle
- Carolyn Cushing, Main St. (remote participant)
- Nancy Stenberg, Maine Ave. (remote participant)

- Lonnie Chu, Lyman Ave. (remote participant)
- Sam Virzi (remote participant)
- Brianna B, Loudville Rd. (remote participant)
- Jean Libby, Oliver St. (remote participant)

Communications from elected officials, boards and committees:

Mayor Communications: None.

Correspondence, Announcements & President/Vice-President Communications:

Councilor Rist made the following statement regarding the upcoming budget season: “As we approach budget season, I wanted to briefly make the council aware of our responsibility to do our homework on ALL the areas of the budget. We will be approached by advocates for some departments, especially the school department and the library for instance. We will also hear from constituents that also advocate for those departments with passion. I encourage all of us to listen BUT to remember, that there are many departments in this government that don’t have that kind of public advocacy but are supported by the majority of citizens. Yes, they want the schools and the library funded, but they are very concerned about our roads, our sewer and water infrastructure, our public safety departments, our recreation department, and our senior enrichment center. So we MUST take the time to approach the mayor whose door is always open to our questions, to get the entire picture.

I ask ALL the departments to also be aware of the entire city’s needs. We may have extensive free cash this year, but we also have huge capital needs that are represented in the capital plan which will be available to view on our web site.

Free cash can only be a temporary fix to operational budget shortfalls. The bottom line is for the departments to communicate, to advocate yes but to realize that the mayor and the city council must balance all needs of the city. To prioritize one department over others only leads to acrimony and citizen despair.”

Councilor Zaret spoke about clean-up day on Saturday, April 29th, “No Mow May”, the “nip bottle” collection container and a pollinator habitat presentation coming up on April 12th.

Mayor LaChapelle swore in two new firefighters – Riley Sorenson and Mitchell Prest. After the swearing-in, she congratulated Chief Norris on achieving his PhD. She also said the two new firefighters were added “without financial detriment” due to grant funding. Councilor Derby welcomed the new members of the Fire Department.

Reports of Standing Committees:

FINANCE: Councilor Rist reported the Finance Committee will meet next on Jan. 25th at 5:15 p.m.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Peake it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to schedule a public hearing for the Feb. 1st meeting on the request to transfer \$3,000,000.00 from Free Cash to the General, Capital and Tax Rate Stabilization Funds.

Councilor Rist read the following report on Library Finances:

“City Council Finance Report on Library Finances
Dan Rist, Chair
Jan 19, 2023

The items I summarize in this report are based on the finance meeting of Jan 11 and available through the google meets video and the materials made available by President Gomez

Library Finance Report

The library reported the great news that Bank ESB is willing to donate the old Bank America Building as a new home for the library. This is a multimillion-dollar donation. The library however indicated that they would have difficulty accepting this donation if they don't have operational budget stability which would facilitate getting financing for the necessary renovation.

A power point demonstration and spread sheets looking at a five-year projection of their budget indicated a drawdown to their endowment each year with it being exhausted after 5 years.

They expressed concern that The City is one of the lowest contributors with public funds to the library among all cities and towns in the state. However, as was noted in the meeting, the private -public partnership which is the model of our library operation is not the same as the many libraries that are funded directly by their governments as actual departments of their community which of course would lead to higher public funding.

The mayor strongly supports the library but pointed out that political winds change and that any budgetary amount above the minimum that we could currently add to the budget could be withdrawn by a future mayor and/or council. A more secure funding model is necessary. To that end the library board is seeking a grants coordinator to seek the many grants available to libraries. The mayor and the council did provide a \$50,000 appropriation this year to the library this budget year.

In my personal opinion, which was NOT expressed at the meeting nor is it the opinion of the committee or any other councilor as I state it here first, the sale of the old library building should the library move to a new location, must preserve this historic architecture. It is this councilor's opinion that Williston should seriously consider purchasing the library at appraised value, preserving the legacy of Emily Williston and perhaps turning it into an archives center, a museum or a study hall. Those funds would greatly assist the library in renovating the new building.”

PUBLIC SAFETY: Councilor Zaret reported the Public Safety Committee had not met since the last council meeting. The February meeting has been changed from Feb. 21st to Feb. 28th.

APPOINTMENTS: Councilor Riley reported the Appointments Committee had met on January 12th to review three Mayoral appointments (two reappointments and one moving from an associate member to a full member).

Councilor Riley said he had been unable to contact the first appointee (Richard Ricci) so the Appointment Committee voted 3 to 0 to bring his appointment forward without a recommendation. Mayor LaChapelle said she had not spoken to him, but said his reappointment was ok with the committee (the Veterans Council).

On motion made by Councilor Riley and seconded by Councilor Rist it was voted (by roll call with Councilors Zaret and Denham abstaining) to confirm the following Mayoral re-appointment:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>BOARD/COMMITTEE</u>	<u>TERM EXPIRES</u>
Richard Ricci	Veterans Council	Dec. 31, 2025

Both of the following appointments were recommended 3 to 0 by the Appointment Committee. Lisa Jaffe is currently an Associate Member on the Zoning Board of Appeals; she would be moving up to a full member. Dan Buttrick is a current Conservation Commission member.

On motion made by Councilor Riley and seconded by Councilor Rist it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to confirm the following Mayoral appointments:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>BOARD/COMMITTEE</u>	<u>TERM EXPIRES</u>
Daniel Buttrick	Conservation Commission	Dec. 31, 2025
Lisa Jaffe	Zoning Board of Appeals (full member)	Dec. 31, 2025

ORDINANCE: Councilor Derby reported the Ordinance Committee had met on Jan. 5th and had discussed potential modifications to the proposed new Chapter 6-23. He also said they had gotten feedback from the City Solicitor on the Vacant Storefront Ordinance and so would be discussing that further. The next Ordinance Committee meeting will be on Jan. 24th at 6:30 p.m.

On motion made by Councilor Derby and seconded by Councilor Peake it was unanimously voted to extend the following two agenda items by 90 days:

- Vacant Storefront Ordinance
- Add Section 6-23 (Safe & Fair Access to Legally Protected Reproductive and Gender-affirming Health Care Services)

PROPERTY: No report.

RULES & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS: Councilor Rist reported the Rules Committee had met on Jan. 11th. The next meeting will be held on Jan. 26th at 5:30 p.m. They will discuss both agenda items, plus the charter amendment under New Business. He also said there is discussion about creating an ordinance with a new committee named the “Biodiversity Environment and Ecological Sustainability Committee” rather than an Ad-Hoc Committee as was proposed.

New Business:

- a. **FY '24 City Council Budget:** On motion made by Councilor Derby and seconded by Councilor Rist it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer the FY '24 City Council budget proposal to the Finance Committee.
- b. **City Ordinance Amendments – Chapter 7, Sec. 7-17:** On motion made by Councilor Derby and seconded by Councilor Peake it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer to the Ordinance Committee the following ordinance amendments to Chapter 7, Secs. 7-17 and 7-18, the Classification and Pay Plan, **Exhibit A and Exhibit B:**
 - Add the position of Veterans Agent at a Grade F.
 - Remove five positions from the Pay Plan that are redundant, obsolete or now unionized.
 - Change the pay grade of four positions from Grade F to Grade G

- Change and add positions within the Planning Department
- Amendments to the Classification and Pay Plan Scale (Exhibit B) effective July 1, 2023.

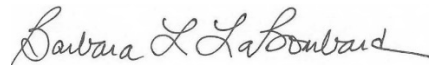
c. Charter amendment proposal: On motion made by Councilor Derby and seconded by Councilor Rist it was unanimously voted (by roll call) to refer to the Rules & Govt. Relations Committee the following:

- Charter amendment request – Sec. 2-10 – Council review of mayoral appointments.

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

TIME: 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Barbara L. LaBombard
Clerk to the City Council