

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING – MARCH 1, 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, Daniel Rist, Thomas Peake, Brad Riley and Koni Denham. Councilors James Kwiecinski and David Meunier were absent.

**Pledge of Allegiance.**

**Approval of Minutes:** On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Derby it was unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the Feb. 15, 2023 regular meeting and executive session.

**Public Speak Time Summary:**

- ***Elizabeth Applequist, President of the Emily Williston Library Bd. of Directors:*** She announced that the name of the Emily Williston Memorial Library & Museum is being changed to the **EASTHAMPTON PUBLIC LIBRARY**. She said the new name better aligns with the city and the library's commitment to the community. She said it would increase recognition and reduce confusion with the Williston Northampton School. There will be a re-branding and marketing campaign, including a new logo and updated website.

- ***Chuck McCullagh, Ashley Circle:*** He is working with the library on its financial analysis. He said the \$510,000 supplemental appropriation (under new business) is a good first step but there are still challenges to face.

- ***Joan Kurtz, President of the Friends of the Easthampton Dog Park:*** She spoke about how Nonotuck Park is the "logical choice" for a dog park. She said it would be on an underutilized area in the park and users of the park would increase park revenue. The location is also not close to a residential area. She asked for the council's support of this location.

***Also speaking in favor of locating a dog park in Nonotuck Park were:***

- Melissa Incampo, Marie Fournier-Page, J. McCarthy, Holly Allen, Ann Chase, Lynn Troy and Sandy Kurtz.

***Katya Schapiro, Director of the Emily Williston Library:*** She spoke of the overwhelming show of support that the library has received in the last couple of weeks – the support is greatly appreciated.

***Jennifer Ritz Sullivan, of Goshen:*** She spoke in support of the resolution (under new business) to create a COVID-19 Memorial Day. She volunteers with the non-profit group Marked By Covid, which has been lobbying the state and Congress to approve a National COVID-19 Memorial Day.

***Samantha Pliska*** - She spoke in opposition to the locating of a dog park in Nonotuck Park. She is an employee of the Parks & Recreation Dept. She noted the park is closed half of the year and in the summer it is very busy with youth camp, pavilion rentals and sports. She suggested looking at other sites that are available.

***Shelby Lee*** – She spoke in favor of the library and also noted that Nonotuck Park is a sensitive wetland area and so would not be the best location for a dog park.

***Lauren Steis*** – She spoke in favor of both the library and a dog park.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Peake it was unanimously voted to open the public hearings.

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

1. **Supplemental Appropriation – Water Meters:** Second reading by Councilor Rist to appropriate \$60,000.00 for the purchase of water meters. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Denham it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** to appropriate the sum of \$60,000.00 from Enterprise Retained Earnings to FY '23 Water Meters (#060.4510.5537.2023). The Water Division replaces approximately 250 water meters annually. Cost per meter varies based on size and type. A standard residential size meter with integrated radio reading capability if approximately \$250.00.

2. **Supplemental Appropriation – Union Street Sewer Repair:** Second reading by Councilor Rist to appropriate \$78,068.34 for an emergency sewer line replacement on Union Street. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee. An old sewer line had been found underneath the “Hurry & Scurry” building on Union Street, which was slated for demolition. Using available department funds, the sewer line was dug up and relocated into the adjacent alleyway so the demolition could proceed.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Peake it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** to appropriate the sum of \$78,068.34 from Enterprise Retained Earnings to FY '23 Union Street Sewer Repair (#060.4411.5813.2023) to cover the cost of an emergency sewer line replacement and relocation between Payson Avenue and Union Street.

3. **Supplemental Appropriation – Two Ford F350 Trucks:** Second reading by Councilor Rist to appropriate \$120,000.00 for the purchase of two Ford F350 trucks for the Highway Division. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee. These trucks will replace 1994 and 2007 trucks. They are medium duty with snow plows. At this time, they do not exist in electric models.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Denham it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** to appropriate the sum of \$120,000.00 from Capital Stabilization to FY '23 Ford F350 Trucks (#001.4210.5807.2023) to fund replacement of two trucks in the Highway Division that are over 15 years old.

4. **Supplemental Appropriation – Road Salt FY '22 Old Bill:** Second reading by Councilor Rist to appropriate \$4,701.68 to pay an FY '22 old bill for road salt. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee. DPW Superintendent Greg Nuttelman said the invoice had been received late and that Easthampton was not the only municipality which had been affected by this late billing.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Peake it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** to appropriate the sum of \$4,701.68 from Free Cash to FY '22 Snow & Ice – Salt (#001.4230.5544.2022) to pay an outstanding invoice from Morton Salt that was not sent prior to the fiscal year 2022 closing.

5. **Supplemental Appropriation – Street Sweepings Disposal:** Second reading by Councilor Rist to appropriate \$65,000 for disposal of a backlog of street sweepings. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee. The street sweepings need to be tested (they can contain asphalt, chemicals, etc.) and then removed to an approved location. They have been piling up since before COVID, Mr. Nuttelman said. Councilor Zaret asked whether the sand could be re-used; he was told it cannot be re-used.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** to appropriate the sum of \$65,000.00 from Free Cash to FY '23 Highway Prof. Services (#001.4210.5841.2023) for disposal of a backlog of street sweepings that have been stockpiled at the Highway Department.

6. **Supplemental Appropriation – Emerald Place Slope Stabilization Grant Match:** Second reading by Councilor Rist to appropriate \$22,500 to provide grant funding for the Emerald Place slope stabilization project. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee. Mr. Nuttelman said the sidewalk along Emerald Place is falling towards the pond. This funding would provide grant match funding of 20% for the planning stage of the project. The next step is to work towards the action grant. Mr. Nuttelman confirmed that this work is part of the ongoing New City improvements.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** to appropriate the sum of \$22,500.00 from Enterprise Retained Earnings to Emerald Place Resiliency (#026.4410.4975.6185.2023) to provide grant match funding for the MVP Emerald Place Slope Stabilization project.

7. **Supplemental Appropriation – Gas & Diesel Fuel:** Second reading by Councilor Rist to appropriate \$100,000 for the purchase of gas and diesel fuel. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee. This account covers all city vehicles and some heating oil. It is hoped this will be sufficient to finish out FY '23.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Derby it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** to appropriate the sum of \$100,000.00 from Free Cash to DPW Fuel Account (#001.4100.5481) to provide funding to overcome volatility in gas and diesel fuel pricing for FY 2023.

8. **Supplemental Appropriation – Full-time Custodian for COA & City Hall:** Second reading by Councilor Rist to appropriate \$25,000 to hire a full-time building custodian for the council on Aging and City Hall. Recommended 3 to 0 by the Finance Committee. This position would be full-time and benefitted and would provide coverage to the municipal building and the Council on Aging.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Zaret it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** to appropriate the sum of \$25,000.00 from Free Cash to Building Operations – Full Time (#001.1920.5112) to provide funding to hire a full time building custodian for the Council on Aging and City Hall.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Derby it was unanimously voted to close the public hearings.

**Communications from elected officials, boards and committees:** Councilor Zaret publically thanked our public safety employees who were front line personnel during the COVID 19 pandemic. Even felt it was important to “pause to recognize” their contributions. He also thanked outgoing Health Director Bri Dupras for her service to the city.

Councilor Denham announced an upcoming talk on “Slavery and Emancipation in the CT River Valley” coming up on March 27<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m. at the municipal building.

**Mayor Communications:** None.

**Correspondence, Announcements & President/Vice-President Communications:** None.

**Reports of Standing Committees:**

**FINANCE:** Councilor Rist reported the Finance Committee will meet next on March 8th at 5:15 p.m. They will discuss the remaining DPW requests as well as the Old Town Hall and Library appropriations under New Business.

**PUBLIC SAFETY:** Councilor Zaret reported last night’s Public Safety Committee had been cancelled due to the inclement weather. He hopes to reschedule sometime this month. The next regular meeting is April 4<sup>th</sup>. The Fire Department is scheduled to give their quarterly report at that meeting.

**APPOINTMENTS:** Councilor Riley said the Appointment Committee had met prior to tonight’s meeting to consider two Mayoral appointments. One appointee – Robert Ferris – had attended the meeting. The committee members felt he was well qualified and voted 2 to 0 to recommend his confirmation.

On motion made by Councilor Riley and seconded by Councilor Denham it was unanimously voted to confirm the following Mayoral appointment:

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Board/Committee</u></b>	<b><u>Term Expires</u></b>
Robert Ferris	Zoning Board of Appeals (Assoc.)	Dec. 31, 2025

Councilor Riley said he had been unable to speak to Nancy DiRocco, but there were no objections to her confirmation as a member of the Commission on Disability; she too was recommended 2 to 0 for appointment.

On motion made by Councilor Riley and seconded by Councilor Rist it was unanimously voted to confirm the following Mayoral appointment:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Board/Committee</u>	<u>Term Expires</u>
Nancy DiRocco	Commission on Disability	Dec. 31, 2024

**ORDINANCE:** Councilor Derby reported the Ordinance Committee had met on Feb. 21<sup>st</sup> to go over the Pay Plan amendments which are set for public hearings on March 15<sup>th</sup>. The next meeting will be on March 7<sup>th</sup>. They will discuss updated language for the new Sec. 6-23 (Safe & Fair Access to legally protected reproductive and gender affirming health care services).

**PROPERTY:** No report.

**RULES & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS:** Councilor Rist said last week’s Rules Committee had been cancelled; they will be meeting on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and again on March 9<sup>th</sup>.

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Derby it was unanimously voted to continue by 30 days the proposal to make Easthampton a Xerxes Society Bee City.

**New Business:**

1. **Resolution in support of establishing a COVID 19 Victims & Survivors Memorial Day:**  
Councilor Zaret presented a resolution which would indicate the council’s support of both state and federal efforts to establish a COVID-19 Victims and Survivors Memorial Day to be observed on the first Monday in March.

President Gomez polled councilors to see if there were any objections to voting on this resolution tonight. There were no objections.

Councilor Zaret read the proposed resolution. On motion made by Councilor Zaret and seconded by Councilor Rist, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** to approve the “COVID-19 Victims and Survivors Memorial Day Resolution”, as follows:

**“COVID-19 Victims and Survivors Memorial Day Resolution**

Sponsor: Owen Zaret, Councilor at-large

WHEREAS, the first Monday in March is an appropriate day to be designated as COVID-19 Victims and Survivors Memorial Day; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is an illness caused by a virus that can transmit from person to person and has spread across the world, creating a global pandemic and having catastrophic effects on human life, our community, and our economy; and

WHEREAS, in March 2020, communities in every State and US territories began to experience increased loss of life and families lost parents, siblings, children, friends, neighbors from the virus; and

WHEREAS, Public health guidance and policies targeted at prevention, such as social distancing, wearing masks in public, and staying home help mitigate the spread of COVID-19, prevented illness, and lessened the burden on individuals and society; and

WHEREAS, local, State, Tribal, and Federal Government entities, and public servants took swift action to protect the health of the general public and provided critical support to businesses, communities, and the people of the United States including US territories in need; and

WHEREAS, in response to rapid spread of COVID-19 its disruptions, essential workers stepped up to provide critical services to help protect our communities and save lives, sacrificing their own health and safety; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on low-income communities and communities of color, rural and tribal communities, people with disabilities, people with weakened immune systems, unhoused individuals, and those living in congregate settings such as long-term care facilities and prisons—exacerbating systemic inequities and social determinants of health; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the Native American community, with Native Americans losing over 6 years life expectancy, and has caused the incalculable loss of elders who carried with them the communities’ cultures, languages, traditions; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 has harmed the health and wellbeing of Veterans, especially those struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, because of the increased social isolation and disrupted access to mental health services; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 has harmed the health and wellbeing of children by delaying access to care and health services, disrupting schooling, undermining their sense of safety and security, increasing stress on caregivers, and by tragically robbing millions of children of a parent or caregiver; and

WHEREAS the symptoms and severity of COVID-19 can vary dramatically by individual and the long-term health implications for survivors are largely unknown, as many survivors suffer with post-acute sequelae SARS-CoV2 following infection (PASC); and

WHEREAS, more than 6.85 million people worldwide and 1.12 million in the United States including US territories have lost their lives due to COVID-19, and, in Massachusetts alone, more than 23 thousand lives have been lost to this deadly virus; and

WHEREAS, each life lost to COVID-19 mattered and leaves a hole in the hearts of loved ones, family members, and surrounding community; and,

WHEREAS, Massachusetts HD.3821 seeks to establish a statewide COVID-19 Remembrance Day on the first Monday in March; and,

WHEREAS, Similar efforts are underway on the federal level to create a national COVID-19 day of remembrance.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that on this 1<sup>st</sup> day of March, 2023 the City Council of Easthampton, Massachusetts recognizes the first Monday of each March as “COVID-19 Memorial Day”, in remembrance of those Marked By COVID, those who have lost their lives, and in honor of those who continue to suffer from the impacts of this virus,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that City Council urge our community to continue taking preventative measures as appropriate, to protect vulnerable members of the community and to mitigate spread of this virus, in tribute to essential workers and those who rose in service to protect the public.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be sent to State Representative Dan Carey, State Senator John Velis, Congressman Rich Neal, and State Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey.”

2. **Administrative Code #23-01 (reducing membership on the CRC from 11 to 7 members)**: On motion made by Councilor Derby and seconded by Councilor Rist it was unanimously voted to refer this Administrative Code request to the Rules & Govt. Relations Committee.
  
3. **Intra-departmental Transfer and Supplemental Appropriation**: First reading by Councilor Rist on the following two financial requests:
  - a. \$1,250,000.00 intradepartmental transfer for Phase II of the Old Town Hall project (construction of an ADA entrance and elevator)
  - b. \$510,000.00 supplemental appropriation from Cannabis Stabilization to the Emily Williston Memorial Library

On motion made by Councilor Rist and seconded by Councilor Riley it was unanimously voted to refer both requests to the Finance Committee and to schedule public hearings for the March 15th council meeting.

At this time, Councilor Rist made the following public statement:

“It has been my very great pleasure to serve the City of Easthampton and Precinct 5 as a city councilor for 27 years. I joined public service to give back to the village that helped me raise 5 beautiful children and now continues to provide for my grandchildren as well. I am proud to say that I feel in some small way I have made a difference. However, I have reached the inevitable decision that I must retire from this esteemed body and announce today that I will not be seeking re-election this fall and Dec 31st, 2023, will mark my last day in office.

When I was sworn in for my current term, I knew then it would be my last, but I was eager to fulfill certain legislative goals. I can safely say those goals I had are on their way. Two of which, the realization of affordable housing for our vacant schools and The CPA funding of the restoration of our Old Town Hall Second floor performing arts facility are so very important to me that my retirement from the council will not end my involvement for them.

The changes that Easthampton has seen over my years on the council are significant especially in the quality of life for our residents. I am proud of my work as CPA chair where we have funded numerous projects, not the least of which is our rail trail, the boardwalk, open space protection, new ball fields for Nonotuck Park, renovation of the pool soon to be started and accessible trails on Mt Tom just to name a few. Easthampton is now considered a “destination” city where many choose to visit and would want to live here.

I will try to be an active member of other boards and committees when and if my experience can help build an even better future for this City I call home.”

On motion made by Councilor Zaret and seconded by Councilor Peake it was unanimously voted that this meeting **ADJOURN. TIME: 7:30 p.m.**

Respectfully Submitted,



Barbara L. LaBombard, Clerk to the City Council