



City of Fitchburg Massachusetts 01420

CITY COUNCIL

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**Ward 1 – Amy L. Green
Ward 2 – Paul R. Beauchemin
Ward 3 – Joel R. Kaddy
Ward 4 – Michael P. Kushmerek
Ward 5 – Marisa R. Fleming
Ward 6 – Elizabeth R. Walsh**

Finance Committee

A meeting of the Finance Committee was called to order by Chairman DiNatale on Thursday, March 15, 2018 at 6:06 p.m. in the Room G02 Ellis White Lecture Hall, Hammond Hall, Fitchburg State University, 160 Pearl Street, Fitchburg, MA.

Committee Members present: Councilors Paul Beauchemin, Marcus DiNatale, Michael Kushmerek, Elizabeth Walsh, and Anthony Zarrella.

Other Councilors present: Councilor David Clark.

Others present: City Auditor Calvin Brooks, Police Chief Ernest Martineau, Community Development Director Thomas Skwierawski, Housing Director Elizabeth Murphy, Assistant School Superintendent Robert Jokela, Director of Public Health Stephen Curry, Recreation Director Nathan LaRose, from Our Father's House Kevin MacLean, from NuVue Communities Mark Dohan, and from MOC Leona Shaw.

043-18 **ORDER:** that the City of Fitchburg hereby approves the expenditure of funds from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security grant in the approximate amount of \$55,000.00 (FIFTY-FIVE THOUSAND AND 00/100 DOLLARS) for the purpose of said grant, which is to support the Domestic Violence Advocate position within the Police Department.

Discussion: Chief Ernest Martineau explained that the city has been using this grant for the past five years. The current request is the first year of another three years and the process of getting the grant has been extremely competitive. Fitchburg is one of the few communities in Worcester County to employ a full time domestic violence advocate, a person who reviews the domestic violence reports received by the police department and reaches out to the victims to help walk them through the system. This person also follows up with past victims to offer continued support. The program has been successful.

Councilors pointed out there is a similar program at Fitchburg State University, and the chief indicated that the police department advocate has been reaching out to the student body offering services. When asked if domestic violence complaints are up or down, the chief said that the level has stayed about the same. When asked if victims are more willing to testify, the chief replied in the affirmative, because the victims are given support and offered more services. The benefits of having the advocate continue well after arrest and trial.

Action: Be adopted (5-0)

COMMUNICATION: from the Mayor concerning the Community Development Block Grant Program Year 44 application and a recommended funding of \$940,918.00.

Discussion: Chairman DiNatale explained the process for reviewing the Year 44 funding. The committee will take up each section, ask questions, discuss, and then vote on each.

Public Facilities and Improvements - \$137,000 – Councilors asked why the Streetscape Improvements were focused on North of Main rather than, for example, the Cleghorn neighborhood. Thomas Skwierawski and Elizabeth Murphy responded that there have been no specific projects identified in the Cleghorn neighborhood. The funds requested are to leverage more funds. The location of the work was chosen to meet an identified need for better access to the Upper Common. Councilors questioned the Goodrich Playground project, because there was a perceived need for a basketball court. Nathan LaRose stated that the tennis courts being removed have become mostly rubble and are not salvageable. The desire is to install a grass field for flag football and other games.

Action: Be adopted (5-0)

Public Services - \$132,000 – Councilor Beauchemin moved to cut the allocation to Our Father's House by \$14,000. There was no second, so the motion failed.

Our Father's House - Councilor Beauchemin expressed a concern about offering a program that brings in people from other communities who need services. Some people want to stay on the streets. Kevin MacLean of Our Father's House thanked Councilor Beauchemin for assisting in the annual census of the homeless. The funding in this request is for continuing street outreach and not for providing shelter. Chief Martineau stated that the Police Department works closely with the outreach effort and it has helped reduce the homeless numbers. He would like to continue those efforts. When asked about the portion of the request offering first and last month's rent, Mr. McLean stated that to qualify for the money, a person has to be willing to accept what Our Father's House is offering and work long term to participate in the program. Councilors expressed the view that the problem of homelessness requires constant work and referral and that a successful program should be rewarded.

United Neighbors of Fitchburg / MOC – Councilors expressed a concern that this program was facing a cut. Chairman DiNatale explained that program funds from prior years, around \$30,000, will be reprogrammed to Year 44 so that the program can continue as before. Councilors were concerned about cuts to programs helping the poor, but part of the reason is the steady reduction by HUD in Block Grant funding. Leona Shaw of MOC said it is a challenge to work with this allocation, but that the organization will continue to work hard to offer programs.

Spartacus – Councilors spoke of the financial hardship that continues for many families in Fitchburg. Credit should go to the people who do the hard work to support these programs. There is no disagreement that there are needs, significant challenges, and limited funding.
Action: Be adopted (4-1, Beauchemin in opposition)

Economic Development - \$108,250 – According to Thomas Skwierawski, the funding for the Small Business Assistance Program is for future applications. It is a way Community Development can encourage new investment from desirable businesses.
Action: Be adopted (5-0)

Rehabilitation and Preservation - \$120,000 – Health Director Stephen Curry said that one position in the Health Department will be shifted from Block Grant funded to the tax levy. Councilors were pleased to be moving away from grant funded salaried positions.
Action: Be adopted (5-0)

Demolition - \$264,668 – No discussion
Action: Be adopted (5-0)

Planning and Administration - \$179,000 – Elizabeth Murphy stated that this amount is similar to last year. When asked about a possible reduction in this item, she said that cuts would affect the reimbursement to the city for fringe benefits, which would cause an increase in the city budget.
Action: Be adopted (5-0)

Councilors thanked Fitchburg State University for providing a meeting space.

The meeting adjourned at 7:01 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Calvin D. Brooks, Clerk