

# DENNIS BIDWELL

## CITY COUNCIL ★ WARD 2

www.dennisbidwellcitycouncil.com

December 1, 2016



**To neighbors and friends, Ward 2 and elsewhere,**

As we all try to process the meaning and consequences of the recent national election, I take some comfort in the fact that surveys show that local government is one of the few institutions that tends to enjoy the trust and support of voters. Though like others I expect to be even more engaged than ever in national issues, I don't intend to be diverted from the important work to be done right here in Northampton. I encourage all of you to find ways to become involved in the good work underway locally, as you also tackle our pressing national issues.

***Please read on about these topics:***

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As always, I look forward to hearing from you with your suggestions, concerns and feedback.

Sincerely,

Dennis Bidwell

### **Safe and Accepting Communities/Welcoming Refugees to Northampton**

I am pleased that at the November 17 City Council meeting, the Council unanimously passed on first reading a [Resolution](#) "declaring Northampton's commitment to being a safe and accepting community." Thank you to Councilors Klein, Carney, Sciarra and LaBarge for sponsoring this resolution, which will come to the Council for a second reading at our Dec. 1 meeting.

Also, as many of you know, because many of you have stepped forward to become involved, planning is well underway for Northampton's acceptance of 51 refugees in the months ahead. Catholic Charities of Springfield is taking the lead in this effort. More information [here](#).

These are among the ways that we, as a City, can demonstrate leadership and express our welcoming and inclusive values, in stark contrast to the apparent direction of national policy.

**LED Streetlights**

With thanks to Council President Bill Dwight for his input to this statement, this is my response to the many of you who have contacted me about the installation of new LED streetlights.

The City of Northampton is now about half way through the process of changing out our streetlights from our old high-pressure sodium (HPS) and mercury vapor (MV) lamps to light emitting diodes (LEDs). There have been concerns expressed about this transition and some outright objections that deserve a response. Also, now that people are able to compare the new lights with the old, I am hearing considerable praise for the improved lighting quality and reduced glare.

The City's Energy and Sustainability Officer, Chris Mason, has prepared a [Frequently Asked Questions](#), which you might find helpful in addressing your own understanding about the process, the technology and the upsides to the conversion.

The public discussion and planning for this change-over has been comprehensive, public and occurred over the course of almost four years. This was not an impulsive or reactionary decision rendered behind closed doors. Knowledgeable citizens, engineers, lighting consultants and other professionals have made significant contributions to the design and implementation of this important upgrade.

Which isn't to say that all such experts are in agreement. Such is rarely the case.

**After extensive input, hearings, submission of expert analysis, submission of petitions, ongoing comments at City Council public comment session, meetings with the Mayor, discussions at the Energy and Sustainability Commission, letters to the editor and op ed pieces, and delays to reconsider, it came time for the Mayor to make a decision based on all available information and input. That's his job. To further delay the decision would have had significant financial consequences for the City.**

I don't pretend to have available to me all of the information and analysis available to the Mayor, so I'm not in position to say that I would have made another decision. (In any event, the Council's job was to appropriate the funds, not to make final technical implementation decisions.)

**I therefore support the decision by the Mayor to proceed with the modified plan for LED streetlight installation.**

Worth noting: These new systems are adaptable to specific situations such as wireless dimming controls and can be further enhanced as the technology evolves and becomes affordable.

**The City is working on developing means by which citizens may request modifications to specific lights adjacent to their homes. I will share that policy and procedure with you when it is completed.**

As Bill Dwight notes, given the recent election, the prospects for future support for proactive energy reduction programs will be dim (no pun intended). I believe our commitment to reducing our share of the contribution to adverse climate change, light pollution and financial costs is made more urgent by the recent events. We are dedicated to a greener Northampton and improving our standing as the first Energy Star rated city in the U.S. The conversion to municipal LEDs is part of that important goal.

## **Annual Toy Exchange**

The 6th annual Holiday Toy Exchange will be held on **December 9 and 10, 2016** at Smith Vocational High School. **Toy donations will be collected Friday from 5 pm to 8 pm, and Saturday morning from 8am to 9am.** The exchange will be available to the public free of charge at 10am Saturday, December 10th. The Toy Exchange promotes the gift of giving, and has become an important source of holiday gifts for our

residents. Donated items must be clean, in working order and complete (no missing pieces). Need an idea of what to donate? Musical instruments; dolls; sports equipment & bicycles; books, games & puzzles; model kits & building toys; arts/craft kits & learning toys; cars & trucks; outdoor toys; stuffed animals; electronic toys; video games & DVDs; baby & preschool toys. The Toy Exchange is coordinated by the Northampton Department of Public Works and the Reuse Committee and is co-sponsored by the Northampton Public Schools/CFCE via grants from the MA Department of Early Education.

## **Exciting Pleasant St. Developments**

The construction activity you've seen along Pleasant Street, at the site of the former Northampton Lodging near the bike path, is HAP Housing's 72-unit Live 155 affordable housing project. Breaking ground at some point in the future, at the site of Northampton Lumber, will be Valley CDC's 55-unit Lumberyard project. Together these two developments will add 104 units of affordable housing to our community, and almost 9000 square feet of new commercial space. These developments are perfectly in line with the Sustainable Northampton vision for our community: increased residential density downtown, and additions to our stock of affordable housing. In addition, these developments will add significantly to the emerging "new" Pleasant Street corridor.

This corridor received a huge boost this week with the announcement of a \$2.5 million MassWorks grant from the State. When combined with nearly \$1 million of local CPA funds and CDBG dollars, this makes possible the relocation of an 1846 brick storm-sewer, which is necessary before the Lumberyard Project can proceed. The grant will also help transform lower Pleasant Street into a more inviting gateway to the City, with improved sidewalks, bike lanes, street trees, benches, curb extensions and other streetscape improvements.

All of this, of course, comes on the heels of completion of the City's newest roundabout at the Pleasant-Conz St. intersection.

## **Constituent Issues**

Some of you may know that about five weeks ago I took a bad fall on stairs in our home. I'm recovering well, and expect to join my fellow cyclists on the roads by spring. In the meantime, I've fallen behind on my responses to various inquiries and requests from constituents. Please bear with me as I catch up in the weeks ahead.

## **Welcoming Jim Nash to the City Council**

We once again have a full complement of City Councilors. Jim Nash, newly elected Councilor for Ward 3, has joined the Council. Not only has he joined, he's hit the ground running. Welcome Jim!

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