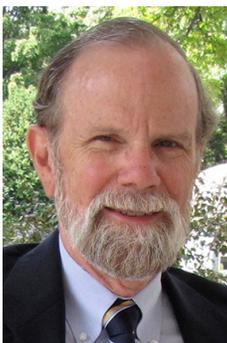


DENNIS BIDWELL

CITY COUNCIL ★ WARD 2

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March 14, 2017



To neighbors and friends, Ward 2 and elsewhere,

The municipal budget season is here, and I'm hoping that some of the tremendous energy around engagement in national issues will be applied to our City's budget process and decisions. Arguably the most significant thing the City Council does every year is bring the City's residents into the process of discussing the budget document submitted by the Mayor - a document that determines how we spend over \$100 million per year. Our annual budget is a statement of our priorities and values as a community, and I encourage as many of you as possible to plug in to the process.

Please read on about these topics:

[Background on the City's finances](#)

[Water and Sewer Rates for Fiscal Year 2018](#)

[Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2018-2022](#)

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Sincerely,

Dennis Bidwell

Background on the City's finances

At a joint meeting of the City Council and School Committee on January 31, Mayor Narkewicz, along with the City's Finance Director Susan Wright, presented an excellent overview of the City's finances, as background for the process leading to a budget for Fiscal Year 2018, beginning July 1, 2017. This [comprehensive presentation](#) covers, among other things, where the City stands in relation to surrounding communities regarding tax rate and average tax bill, new growth, unemployment rates, state of stabilization funds and other fund balances, sources of municipal revenue and revenue trends (including hotel and meal tax receipts), per pupil education spending, bond rating (which in Northampton in five years has moved from A+ to AA+ to AAA, the highest attainable), federal funds coming to the City (slightly over \$3 million), ***the impact of charter school funding on the City budget***, and municipal staffing levels over time.

This presentation is an excellent way to get a grounding in the City's finances. I highly recommend it to anyone wanting to get involved in the budget process.

For anyone wanting to get further into the weeds, the Scanlon & Associates audit of the

City's finances, for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2016, along with management letter and recommendations, can be found [here](#).

Water and Sewer Rates for Fiscal Year 2018

One of the building blocks for the municipal budget is the revenue projections for the City's four enterprise funds: Water, Sewer, Solid Waste and Storm Water. Over 80% of the indirect funds flowing to the City budget from the enterprise funds come from the Water and Sewer funds, so setting the fees for those services is an important matter.

At the March 16 meeting of the City Council the Mayor will present his proposal for water and sewer rates for FY2018. The Council will refer the matter to the Public Works and Utilities Committee, which will hold a **public hearing on the proposed fees Monday, March 27 at 4 pm in City Council Chambers.**

As background on the way that water and sewer fees were set this last year - a methodology which is unlikely to change in the Mayor's proposal - a great deal of information can be found [here](#).

Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2018-2022

On March 2 the Mayor presented to the City Council the proposed Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2018-2022. The plan was developed with input from the Capital Improvement Program Committee. The CIP is a five-year rolling plan that projects the next five years' worth of capital improvements, with cost estimates and financing methods, along with the estimated annual cost of financing, operations and maintenance for facilities and major equipment. This, too, is an important building block leading towards the FY2018 budget. **A public hearing on this Capital Improvement Program will be held by the Finance Committee at its meeting March 28 at 5 pm, in City Council Chambers.**

The proposed plan can be found [here](#).

Public hearings on the FY2018 Budget Submitted by the Mayor

The Mayor expects to submit his budget proposal for FY2018 to the City Council at its May 18 meeting. After that time public hearings will be held, though dates have not yet been determined. **I will include the dates of those hearings in a future newsletter.**

At one of its June meetings - probably June 15 - the City Council will vote on the proposed budget for the new fiscal year.

Applying for membership on City commissions, committees and boards

The City Council's City Services Committee, at its meeting April 10 at 4 pm (in City Council Chambers), will review the process by which participation in City commissions, committees and board is solicited and the process in the Mayor's office of reviewing applications and submitting appointments to the City Council. We expect the Mayor to join us for this discussion. I requested this item be placed on the committee agenda because of several complaints that it was hard to determine where vacancies exist, and that some applicants didn't heard back after submitting applications.

Because of a dramatic increase in the level of interest in local government, especially among younger residents, it's important that we seek improvements, where appropriate, in this appointments process.

Grass roots politics is alive and well in the Democratic Party/March 20 City Democratic Committee meeting

On February 15 the Northampton City Democratic Committee held a city-wide meeting and Ward caucuses. Attendance was huge. When we broke into meetings by Ward, approximately 40 Ward 2 residents joined the caucus. (In previous years, there were

sometimes only a handful of participants.) The primary purpose of the Ward caucuses was to elect delegates from each Ward to the June 3 State Democratic Convention. The main item for that Convention, in Lowell this year, will be to approve the platform for the state Democratic Party for the next four years.

At the Ward 2 caucus, led by Ward Chair Elliot Fratkin, it was really heartening to see eleven individuals from the Ward stand up to make speeches, asking to be voted to the four delegate slots available. (The Ward Chair is automatically a delegate.) Secret ballots determined who will be representing Ward 2 Democrats in Lowell on June 3.

Congratulations to Ward 2 delegates Joy Ohm, Laura Fallon, Rami Efal and Niko Guardia. And congratulations also to alternate delegates: Michael Hourihan, Brit Albritton, Marissa Elkins and Lindsay Peterson.

The next city-wide meeting of the Northampton City Democratic Committee will be held on March 20 at 7:00 pm at JFK Middle School. State Representative Peter Kocot will speak. At that meeting Ward caucuses will debate priority items to be included in the state Democratic Party platform.

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