

Scott D. Houseman-Chair
Julie R. Flowers
Matthew J. St. Hilaire

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FINANCE AND PROPERTY / CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

Monday, March 27, 2023 7:00PM

City Council Chambers, 3rd Floor, Beverly City Hall, 191 Cabot St.

Houseman called the meeting to order at 7:02pm.

Members present: Matthew St. Hilaire, Scott Houseman

Members absent: Julie Flowers

Other Councilors present: Hannah Bowen, Steven Crowley, Kathleen Feldman, Todd Rotondo, Brendan Sweeney, Estelle Rand

Also present: Mayor Michael Cahill, City Engineer Eric Barber, Commissioner of Public Services & Engineering Michael Collins, Finance Director Bryant Ayles

Order Number	Date to Committee	Description	Action Taken
#315	12/20/2022	Earmark from the Economic Development Legislation signed by Governor Baker \$200,000 for the installation of solar panels at Beverly High School	Held
#073	3/20/2023	Councilor Houseman-City Streets, National Grid Gas Installations, and Order 287	Held

Richard Donlon, 9 Oakmont Rd., stated the access roads in and out of the North Beverly Elementary School really needs work.

Houseman stated this was precipitated by the National Grid project. Houseman asked when National Grid pays the City instead of National Grid doing the repaving work if the money collected goes back into that specific street or if it will be deployed for a general use.

Cahill clarified that with the 115kv project, it's less about paving more cheaply and more about being able to pave the road in its entirety rather than just the section National Grid opened.

Collins stated the payments go to the general fund, but the net effect is they are available to us for that street. Barber spoke about the fund and how they changed the permitting process. Barber stated that to his knowledge, the streets the City took money for have been paved.

Collins stated the cost of paving is about triple what it was a few years ago. The need is massive; it's a problem facing every city and town right now.

St. Hilaire asked about big projects versus work on residential streets.

Cahill stated he could get that information. We have to invest in big projects or else they will never get done.

Collins stated that some of the big projects are absolutely a huge value for the City. We can get back tenfold what we invest. We can put two million dollars into a project and get 25 million in work done by the state.

Rotondo asked, philosophically speaking, why the City is not looking at smaller streets.

Collins stated many of these side streets fall under the category of not accepted streets, so state and federal money can't be spent on them.

Houseman asked for a list of those streets.

Collins stated that could be provided. It's probably 300 streets out of 650.

There was some discussion of the use of ARPA funds and free cash for roads and sidewalks.

There was discussion on the City's practice of fixing infrastructure underneath the road before paving. Collins stated that in the long haul it's more affordable to take the time to do it right even though it's a slower process. The roads we build will last longer and be more maintainable.

Rand asked at what point do we consider joining neighbors like Newburyport, Salem, Gloucester, and Waltham and bonding for paving.

Cahill stated it does come up from time to time. At its core, the idea of bonding here would lead to doing a chunk of work, but then the City would be constrained each year, so it's hard to say if the City would really be able to do more or less work over the term of the bond.

Ayles stated if you have two million a year to spend on roads, you can pave two million a year or use two million to pay debt and interest. By taking on debt, the City could be hamstringing what could be accomplished.

St. Hilaire stated the condition of the streets used to be a quality of life issue but now it is becoming a safety issue because of how bad they are getting.

Bowen asked if there was anything the Council could do to help the City's position with National Grid or to get certain messages out or have questions answered.

There was discussion on having National Grid do infrastructure work before paving and Councilors advocating for additional funding on the state or federal level.

Cahill suggested Councilors submit a set of streets that they really want to look at together for the front of the list.

Houseman asked, having embraced the idea of doing it first the right time, if there is a place in between, to be thorough on some but also hit a few other things quickly.

Barber and Collins stated it might be possible but would also need to be in line with the City's ADA compliance transition plan.

Bowen stated people are more amenable to seeing the changes if they have a list of what's coming.

Feldman agreed it's more about seeing the priorities in a list. One of the things that would be helpful in conveying information to constituents is if beyond the priority there was some type of notation about the grade, the utilities work, or the last time it was paved, so people could see when the infrastructure was upgraded and when it's closer to shovel-ready.

Barber stated the City is going to an asset management platform so that in the planning process there is one centralized place where this information is, then it will become a communication tool.

Rand stated she was moved by what was done with ClearGov and budget reporting. Rand suggested a level of transparency in what roads are being prioritized by posting something on the website. Priorities can change but even just to see the top of the list.

Collins stated the paving condition index was put on the website to give an idea of the scale of the problem.

There was a brief discussion on National Grid coming to the Council for new gas main installations and how that was not historically done but is required.

The motion to adjourn Committee of the Whole was made and seconded. A vote was taken, and the motion passed (8-0).

The motion to adjourn Committee on Finance and Property was made and seconded. A vote was taken, and the motion passed (2-0). The meeting adjourned at 8:33pm.