



Nathan <basicdignity123@gmail.com>

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## Concerns about the Conduct of the Ward 3 City Councilor Quaverly Rothenberg

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Nathan <basicdignity123@gmail.com>

Tue, Apr 22, 2025 at 7:15 AM

To: citycouncil@northamptonma.gov, lkrutzler@northamptonma.gov

Date: April 22, 2025

By: Nathan Chung, Northampton Resident

To the Northampton City Council and Staff,

This is Northampton resident Nathan Chung. I am writing to you about a series of conducts by Ward 3 City Councilor Quaverly Rothenberg, which I found to be concerning, including one instance of making racially and nationally insensitive statements. I have had negative experiences with Councilor Rothenberg in the past but decided to not raise concerns until now. With the incidents on 4/17/2025, I feel I have had enough and want to raise my concerns before further incidents.

### **4/17/2025 Using My Name Without My Consent**

During the 4/17/2025 Council discussion on the order Councilor Rothenberg proposed, Councilor Rothenberg used my name and suggestions without my consent. The order is listed on the agenda as "25.243 An Ordinance to Amend Chapter 350.4 Zoning Map to Rezone Parts of CB-Side to URC - 1st reading". I believe "Ordinance to Amend" is in error and should be "Order to Amend." The discussion starts at 1:39:45 (<https://youtu.be/Y0P8666S1wE?t=5985>).

Earlier during the same meeting, I made a general public comment at 1:15:04. At 1:16:07, I said, "So I think a sort of a new paradigm government officials and the general public might want to start thinking about is how can we control complexity and create a more connected community that makes sense for people without having to really struggle through all the complexity."

At 1:52:13, while discussing the order, Councilor Rothenberg said, "So this is a place where the neighborhood is already under a lot of strain and we should be thinking about how we can improve what's already there, not adding a lot of complexity to it to quote Nathan Chung." (<https://youtu.be/Y0P8666S1wE?t=6733>)

I understand that we have free speech rights, but that does not mean whatever we say is free from consequences that affect others. **I felt exploited and offended at Councilor Rothenberg using my name and my suggestion to bolster one's argument.** People might argue that the councilor was validating my ideas or was seeing common ground but my sense is that it is only possible when there is consent and a positive relationship. There is neither between the two of us.

### **2025-04-17 Violation of Rule 4.11 to Talk Over Others**

As a member of the general public in attendance, I could not utilize City Council Rule 4.11 to object to the use of my name during the 4/17/2025 meeting. Councilor Rothenberg has been misusing the rule to interrupt other councilors and speak more than once before others got to speak. From Rule 4.11 on Page 12 (Under Rules at <https://www.northamptonma.gov/2570/City-Council>):

4.11. ORDER AND MANNER OF SPEAKING. No City Councilor shall speak more than once on a question, to the prevention of any other who has not spoken, and is desirous of speaking. The

presiding officer may allow a brief immediate response to any statement posed directly to a particular City Councilor by a City Councilor.

The councilor would say "Direct response" to interject when one had already spoken once before others got to speak. I counted the councilor using the "Direct response" interjection at least six times on 4/17: 2:10:48, 2:17:35, 2:22:30, 2:31:46, 2:33:07, and 2:37:41. Notably, at around 2:33:13, the councilor raised one's hand toward Councilor Jarrett to stop him from speaking, which many would consider a rude gesture.



### **2024-11-18 and 12-19 Misstatements and Insults over the State's Free Cash Guidance**

During the November 18, 2024 City Council Finance Committee meeting, at 1:43:26, Councilor Rothenberg said, "Does the finance director know that the DOR does not say it is a best practice to set aside any percentage? There is no percentage they recommend as a best practice for free cash."

(<https://youtu.be/8UYtJf20BqY?list=PLvvoQNXtruYRuoR83D1xbQOtKcLx5yBX9&t=6206>)

This is a provably inaccurate claim as there is a guidance titled "Free Cash" with a percentage recommendation on the DLS "Best Practices in Financial Planning" web page at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/best-practices-in-financial-planning>. **At 1:45:22, I made a public comment and read from the 2016 DLS guidance, which is attached here.** I read, "Under sound financial policies, a community strives to generate free cash in an amount equal to three to five percent of its annual budget." It was updated in January 2025 with a higher percentage range of five to seven percent.

That evening on 11/18, Councilor Rothenberg found my personal email address, likely from a group email we were on before, and sent me an unsolicited email, exposing my personal email address to three other councilors and the finance director who were copied. There, the councilor made another disprovable claim: "The free cash sentence that you referenced is not a best practice; it's saying that all else being equal, 3-5% is a good starting point." As I said before, the document I read from is under a Best Practices page. **The email is attached here with our personal email addresses redacted for privacy.**

Under the City of Northampton's Facebook post on 12/19/2024 about free cash certification (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/12FQBinHm13/>), Councilor Rothenberg made a similar disprovable claim: "the DOR actually doesn't even recommend a percentage — cities could responsibly save anywhere from 0-15% depending on their circumstances." When I pointed out that the claim is not accurate, the councilor insulted me over Facebook, insinuating that I am writing out of pressure from my employer or local

group affiliations rather than out of my own agency. **Attached is the screenshot of the full exchange.**  
Here is a snippet:

Nathan Chung: I would ask you to not divert the topic. It's one thing to raise concern about the City's financial practices and advocate for solutions that might deviate from common practices. It's another thing to claim that such recommendations do not exist when they do, in documented form.

Quaverly Rothenberg: If I were changing topics, I'd ask why Nathan would want to take an "Empire did nothing wrong" approach to being in community.

Is it pressure from working at the Planning Department?

Is it concern, as a Strong Towns member, that if we get a new mayor, we'll stop prioritizing Picture Main Street?

If he is genuinely interested in the DOR situation, I'm quite sure there will be continued public meetings and debate on this topic — he should tune in.

What I won't do is pretend to teach someone on Facebook who doesn't actually want to learn. We all have better uses of our time.

### **2024-11-14 Talking down to Tibetans who Have a Mayoral Form of Government**

During the 11/14/2024 School Committee public comment period, Councilor Rothenberg made statements that I found to be nationally and racially condescending and discriminatory based on my East Asian background. At 1:19:13 (<https://youtu.be/Ltt7f-tlUDA?t=4753>), the councilor said,

It just so happened this week a bunch of Tibetan Monks were there making a mandala... we talked about this situation, you know, we talked about the way I presented it to them was we have seven Villages and I represent one of the villages. We have a queen and we give the queen our money. And we hope that she gives it back to us and right now we are suffering. Right now, we don't feel that we're getting it back but we get to choose our queen and I hope that we will choose a new queen in a year because I don't know this queen well enough to know or understand any way that I can help her help us stop suffering..."

Tibet has been under the rule of the Chinese government since the mid-1900s. Its cities have mayors. The Tibetan monks the councilor is referring to likely came from a monastery in the Indian city of Hunsur in the State of Karnataka, governed by an administrator. (<https://www.gyudmedschool.org/contact/>) The monks were politically savvy enough to form a monastery in India under the guidance of the Dalai Lama. I do not think that they need people talking down to them using a "queen and her villages" metaphor to understand Northampton politics. I myself am familiar with this type of talking down to people from Asian nations. When I was in my early teens, an American street vendor asked me, "Do you even have cars in your country?"

Many Asian nations had been under brutal monarchical rule for millennia. I found it to be a troubling autocratic statement when Councilor Rothenberg revealed that one views being a mayor in a democratic society as that of being a queen and expressed the desire to become the "new queen."

### **Suggestions Moving Forward**

I would ask Councilor Rothenberg to not use my name or tarnish my image to further one's political cause. Also, please study different nations, ethnic groups, and racial groups to adjust one's assumptions. It is up to the councilor to respond or not. If responding, I ask the councilor to only use one's official email address to communicate with me. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Nathan Chung  
Northampton Resident

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### 3 attachments

 **2024-11-18 Redacted QR unsolicited email after public meeting.pdf**  
147K

 **2024-12-19 QR Free Cash Comment on Facebook Full.pdf**  
418K

 **freecash 2016.pdf**  
74K

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Free cash is a revenue source that results from the calculation, as of July 1, of a community's remaining, unrestricted funds from its operations of the previous fiscal year based on the balance sheet as of June 30. It typically includes actual receipts in excess of revenue estimates and unspent amounts in departmental budget line items for the year just ending, plus unexpended free cash from the previous year. Free cash is offset by property tax receivables and certain deficits, and as a result, can be a negative number.

Cities and towns generally use free cash to support current-year operations or to provide a revenue source for the ensuing year's budget. However, free cash is not available for use until after the accountant, auditor, or comptroller submits a prior-year balance sheet to the Division of Local Services (DLS) and the Director of Accounts certifies the free cash. The DLS certification protects communities from relying on free cash that might not materialize due to inaccurate local estimates.

The Technical Assistance Bureau (TAB) recommends that communities understand the role free cash plays in sustaining a strong credit rating and encourages them to adopt policies on its use. Under sound financial policies, a community strives to generate free cash in an amount equal to three to five percent of its annual budget. This goal helps deter free cash from being depleted in any particular year, which enables the following year's calculation to begin with a positive balance. To do this, the community would orchestrate conservative revenue projections and departmental appropriations to produce excess income and departmental turn backs.

As a nonrecurring revenue source, free cash should be restricted to paying one-time expenditures, funding capital projects, or replenishing other reserves. When a community incorporates free cash into revenue source projections for next-year operational expenses, it is prudent to place a percentage restriction on the total free cash to be used.

Overall, TAB recommends that communities adopt a free cash policy that avoids supplementing current-year departmental operations. By eliminating the expectation of additional resources later in the fiscal year to backfill budgets, department heads will produce more accurate and realistic annual appropriation requests.

Any free cash use requires an appropriation approved by the city council on the mayor's recommendation or by town council or by town meeting but only after DLS has certified the free cash total. The same rules apply to DLS's certification of retained earnings, which is the enterprise fund equivalent of free cash.



Nathan Chung &lt;REDACTED\_PERSONAL\_EMAIL\_ADDR&gt;

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**Free cash**

1 message

**Quaverly** <REDACTED\_PERSONAL\_EMAIL\_ADDR>

Mon, Nov 18, 2024 at 8:11 PM

To: Quaverly Rothenberg &lt;qrothenberg@northamptonma.gov&gt;, Nathan Chung &lt;nchung@northamptonma.gov&gt;, Nathan Chung &lt;REDACTED\_PERSONAL\_EMAIL\_ADDR&gt;

Cc: Alex Jarrett &lt;ajarrett@northamptonma.gov&gt;, Charlene Nardi &lt;cnardi@northamptonma.gov&gt;, Rachel Maiore &lt;rmaiore@northamptonma.gov&gt;, Stan Moulton III &lt;smoulton@northamptonma.gov&gt;

Hi, Nathan -- I'm not sure if your comment tonight was professional or personal, so I'm using both of your addresses.

You raise an important point but one that should be clarified for you as well as for my colleagues, so thank you.

The free cash sentence that you referenced is not a best practice; it's saying that all else being equal, 3-5% is a good starting point. Please read all of the recommendations around free cash if you are interested in this topic.

I think it may be a good idea to have a special meeting on this, as well, so I am looping in our city council president and including Finance Director Nardi as well, as this comment is in reference to my dialogue with her tonight.

Thank you,  
Quaverly



**Marianne Milton**

3% of \$116.7 million (annual budget of 2024) is \$3.5 million. We should spend roughly \$8 million dollars on essential needs, in other words, and avoid preventable harm and injury that hoarding money will entail. That harm and injury will fall on our most vulnerable citizens, including our disabled children who need proper services and accommodations in our schools -- shameful!

4 mos Like Reply 7



**Marianne Milton**

Now that I'm reading more, I'm not sure my numbers are correct. Can anyone with more knowledge chime in on what we would have available to spend if we use the 3% (not 5%) end of the recommended range? Please and thank you: I want to understand!

4 mos Like Reply



**Quaverly H. Rothenberg**

**Marianne Milton** the DOR actually doesn't even recommend a percentage – cities could responsibly save anywhere from 0-15% depending on their circumstances.

What the DOR actually recommends as a best practice:

You should be setting that savings target anew each year, not following a template on autopilot.

But we absolutely have numbers nerds I can put you in touch with if you want to run some different models.

I expect the community is going to get to experiment with lots of different options and ideas at forums hosted by a serious new mayoral candidate very soon.

4 mos Like Reply 3



**Marianne Milton**

**Quaverly H. Rothenberg**, thank you for that clarification on the DOR. I'll follow the upcoming meetings and forums on these issues for more details when I have the bandwidth left over from fighting the district for what my 12th grader is entitled to. (F\*&#-ing system that handicaps every family with disabled youth.)

4 mos Like Reply 2



**Quaverly H. Rothenberg**

**Marianne Milton** we cannot turn this ship around soon enough. With all two seconds of your spare time each day, tell someone to vote in November 2025! We got this, Mama Bear.

4 mos Like Reply 1



**Marianne Milton**

**Quaverly H. Rothenberg**, I will!

4 mos Like Reply 2



**Nathan Chung**

**Marianne Milton Quaverly H. Rothenberg** The statement, "Marianne Milton the DOR actually doesn't even recommend a percentage – cities could responsibly save anywhere from 0-15% depending on their circumstances." Is not accurate. The Division of Local Services under the DOR recommends 3 to 5% in one of their documents. Direct link: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/the-importance-of-free-cash/download>

The document is also available through the Free Cash link in the page, "Best Practices in Financial Planning" at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/best-practices-in-financial-planning#>

The DLS and DOR seal are on the top right of the document.

I will quote the paragraph rather than just the sentence so you have the context. The percentage range is in the second sentence:

"The Technical Assistance Bureau (TAB) recommends that communities understand the role free cash plays in sustaining a strong credit rating and encourages them to adopt policies on its use. Under sound financial policies, a community strives to generate free cash in an amount equal to three to five percent of its annual budget. This goal helps deter free cash from being depleted in any particular year, which enables the following year's calculation to begin with a positive balance. To do this, the community would orchestrate conservative revenue projections and departmental appropriations to produce excess income and departmental turn backs."

4 mos Like Reply 2

calculation to begin with a positive balance. To do this, the community would orchestrate conservative revenue projections and departmental appropriations to produce excess income and departmental turn backs.”

4 mos Like Reply  2



**Quaverly H. Rothenberg**

“Under sound financial policies” means “all else being equal.”

Unfortunately we are not at all starting from a sound place; we have overfilled our piggy banks and underpaid our services.

You will need to read more than a paragraph of DOR guidance to understand that we are so far \*out\* of alignment with best practices that 3-5% is not an appropriate number for us at this juncture.

DOR guidelines exist specifically to avoid the kind of mismanagement we are seeing, not to prop it up.

In any case, **Tyler Barnett**, what percentage of free cash did we generate this year? Was it even \*more\* than 3-5%? \$11.6M is a pretty big number for a city of our small size.

Here it is:

Free Cash as a % of the Budget:

2025 – \$11.5M of \$131M – 9%

2024 – \$13M of \$113M – 11.5%

2023 – \$18.75M of \$113.5M – 16.5%

2022 – \$6.5M of \$104.75M – 6.15%

2021 – \$5.75M of \$104.5M – 5.50%

4 mos Like Reply  2



**Melissa Maciborski**

**Nathan Chung** We need an evidence based approach that takes into account our excessive savings, our large surplus, and the reality of what is happening in our city. Yes, 3-5% is the recommendation, but I would argue that guidelines do not occur in a vacuum. I believe the DOR agrees.

We have a very large surplus and critical needs. There is no reason we can't fund our essential services in Northampton. The city just chooses to spend money on other things. They make that choice at the expense of our community members.

4 mos Like Reply   3



**Nathan Chung**

**Quaverly H. Rothenberg** I would ask you to not divert the topic. It's one thing to raise concern about City's financial practices and advocate for solutions that might deviate from common practices. It's another thing to claim that such recommendations do not exist when they do in documented form. And if somebody in DOR said, "That makes no sense," it would be best if you actually provide supporting documentations. I understand that may have been in verbal exchange.

4 mos Like Reply



**Quaverly H. Rothenberg**

If I were changing topics, I'd ask why Nathan would want to take an “Empire did nothing wrong” approach to being in community.

Is it pressure from working at the planning department?

Is it concern as a Strong Towns member that if we get a new mayor we'll stop prioritizing Picture Main Street?

If he is genuinely interested in the DOR situation, I'm quite ... See more

4 mos Like Reply  2

The clipped-off part is in the next page.

This part  
was clipped  
off in the  
original  
attachemnt

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If he is genuinely interested in the DOR situation, I'm quite sure there will be continued public meetings and debate on this topic – he should tune in.

What I won't do is pretend to teach someone on Facebook who doesn't actually want to learn. We all have better uses of our time.



**Nathan Chung**

**Quaverly H. Rothenberg** You are assuming I am taking the "Empire did nothing wrong" approach. I am an individual before being a City government employee and being a resident of Northampton, both of which are composed of thousands of individuals with different viewpoints. What I am pointing out is specifically that, whether your criticisms and solutions are valid and effective or not, you are leaving out references to official documents and other relevant contexts. Your statement, "You will need to read more than a paragraph of DOR guidance to understand that we are so far \*out\* of alignment with best practices that 3-5% is not an appropriate number for us at this juncture." only came out after I pointed out official sources exist. Before that, you were telling people there were no official sources. It may be very much that the City government's fiscal policy has been too conservative and there are better solutions. It is fine to discuss these solutions. What is problematic is leaving out contexts and deliberately telling people incorrect information. Also, what is problematic is speculating on people's backgrounds and intents to deviate from the topic.

While I have constraints and biases as a City government employee, you also do as somebody who is running a political campaign based on various messages you have spoken in Facebook and at public comments at various meetings. This is your "I hope that we will choose a new queen" comment during 11/14 School Committee meeting - <https://youtu.be/Ltt7f-tIUDA?t=4785>. That means that people need to cross check [sorry, said "reference"] your claims as much as they need to do mine.

At this point, I will stop my online discussion with you. I have done my fair share of FB and email discussions and found them to be often counteractive because people can't talk to each other in real time and do not see each other fully as people. I regularly meet people for coffee and board games. At this point, maybe having an informal live community discussion around these topics would be good. I have done those in the past when I was living in Holyoke. I am going to think whether that makes sense or not.

4 mos Like Reply 2



**Nathan Chung**

**Melissa Maciborski** At this point, rather than putting energy and time into Facebook, which is an unstructured format not suitable for coming up with detailed solutions as a community, it might be good to start drafting some memos and proposals on potential solutions.

4 mos Like Reply 3



**Melissa Maciborski**

**Nathan Chung** We have and will continue to do so- big time. There is a tremendous amount of organizing going on. This is just the beginning. Join us if you like and learn more.

4 mos Like Reply 1



**Melissa Maciborski**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1129898878034077>

4 mos Like Reply 1



**Nathan Chung**

**Melissa Maciborski** Hi, I am guessing you are talking about the Support Our Schools group. Since it is both a school funding advocacy group and a political candidate campaigning group, I will keep myself at arm's-length. I am going to minimize being on Facebook or other types of social media, so please understand if I do not respond to you. Thank you.

4 mos Like Reply

Write a reply...

