



Finance Committee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Monday, August 14, 2023

Present: Councilors Grossman (Chair), Malakie, Humphrey, Norton, Gentile, Oliver, Kalis and Noel

Also Present: Councilor Lucas

City staff present: Director of Transportation Planning Josh Ostroff, Commissioner of Parks Nicole Banks, Director of Parks and Open Space Luis Perez Demorizi, Executive Director of NewTV Robert Kelly, Comptroller Stephen Curley, Senior Financial Analyst Perry Rosenfield, Senior Financial Analyst Connor Roach

#256-23 Acceptance of \$150,000 from the Massachusetts State Budget

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) earmarked in the 2022 State Economic Development Bill for Newton's Bluebikes system.

Action: **Finance Approved 8-0**

Notes: Josh Ostroff, Director of Transportation Planning presented the council with the requesting authorization to accept the sum of \$150,000 earmarked in the 2022 State Economic Bill for Newton's BlueBikes system. Mr. Ostroff explained to the council that his department plans to expand this BlueBike system by working with the school district to get stations installed in both Newton South and Newton North High Schools.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: Besides adding two stations to the High Schools, can you share some of your ideas for locations that would be included in the broader plan to expand this system?

A: Mr. Ostroff told the council that he can come back to the council with more specific locations as they continue to work with the mayor's Office.

Q: Would this funding go towards the two stations at the High Schools Initially?

A: Yes. As well as operations.

Councilor Oliver motioned to approve which passed 8-0.

#257-23 Acceptance of grant funding for the Marty Sender Greenway Phase 2 Restoration Project

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend the sum of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) from the National Recreation and Park Association's 2023 Danaher Biodiversity Grant Program to the Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture for the Marty Sender Greenway Phase 2 Restoration project.

Action: **Finance Approved 8-0**

Notes: Director of Parks and Open Space Luis Perez Demorizi presented the council with the request for authorization to accept and expend the sum of \$50,000 from the National Recreation and Park Association's 2023 Danaher Biodiversity Grant Program to the Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture for the Marty Sender Greenway Phase 2 Restoration project. Mr. Perez explained to the council that this grant will be used solely for the purpose of increasing biodiversity throughout the trail. Mr. Perez also noted that in previous efforts to receive bids for this project, there were no responses.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: Of the total amount of funding that has been received, has any of this funding been deployed yet?

A: We have deployed portions of this funding for permitting, the design of the boardwalk and trail, but no construction cost has been deployed yet for this project.

Q: Including this \$50,000 grant, how much will there be for construction?

A: There will be \$350,000.

Q: What do you think is the reason you did not get any bids for this project in the past?

A: The timeline of the project (April to end of June in the same year) has seemed to put off some contractors. We quickly went to Mass Trails Grant Administrators so we could get an extension, in which we were granted an extra year to continue to try and get bids.

Councilor Kalis motioned to approve which passed 8-0.

#260-23 Acceptance of \$1,250,000 from the Massachusetts State Budget

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend the sum of one million two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$1,250,000) earmarked in the 2022 State Economic Development Bill for the Christina Street Bridge and Path Project.

Action: **Finance Approved 8-0**

Notes: Josh Ostroff, Director of Transportation Planning presented the council with the request for authorization to accept and expend the sum of \$1,250,000 earmarked in the 2022 State Economic Development Bill for the Christina Street Bridge and Path Project. The intention of this project is to design and construct a replacement bridge from Christina Street to connect west to a trail network in Needham. To the east it will ultimately connect to the Upper Falls Greenway. Mr. Ostroff said this sum of \$1,250,000 will get the city about a quarter of the amount they will need to fully fund this project, and they are continuing to work with other developers and fundings sources to fully fund the project. Rough estimates for the project are currently around \$4,000,000.

Mr. Ostroff mentioned that his department has met with DCR and will continue to meet with them to continue discussing design, funding, and partnerships within the projects scope. The department has drafted a request for quotations and has been shared with DCR to make sure the bridge will be built to DCR specifications, and to make sure that the department is asking for the right scope of work. Mr. Ostroff mentioned they will be talking with Mass DOT to see if they can get this project on the State Transportation Improvement Plan, as well as federal funding for construction.

Mr. Ostroff also mentioned that the ARPA money that has funded the earmark must be expended by December 31st, 2026.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: At the beginning stages of this project, we had gotten an estimate that it was feasible to do a renovation versus a full replacement. Could you comment on what the thinking is that has evolved there and why it is getting to this point in terms of cost?

A: When we received this earmark, we reached out to DCR and gave them a scope of work along with a draft budget. We came back with the estimates for 4 million when this Scope of Work and draft budget was updated. There is a tradeoff between the upfront cost and the life cycle cost of a replacement versus a renovated bridge. It would probably be cheaper to renovate the existing structure, but I don't know if this will serve the city well for 50 to 100 years that we want this bridge to provide great service.

Q: In the memo sent out, it refers to anticipated Needham side contributions. Is that referring to private sector Needham side contributions or is this the town of Needham participating?

A: They are not currently participating. We plan on speaking to the town manager and the select board about opportunities. I envision a private sector.

Councilor Humphrey motioned to approve which passed 8-0.

#258-23 Transfer \$200,000 to the Newton Communications Access Center, Inc. (NewTV)
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to transfer and expend a sum of two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) from the PEG Access and Cable Related Fund to the Newton Communications Access Center, Inc (NewTV) to support public, educational, and governmental access cable television services and this financial strategy.

Action: **Finance Approved 8-0**

Notes: Robert Kelley, Executive Director of NewTV, presented the council with the request for authorization to transfer and expend a sum of \$200,000 from the PEG Access and Cable Related Fund to the Newton Communications Access Center, Inc (NewTV) to support public, educational, and governmental access cable television services and this financial strategy.

Mr. Kelley explained to the council that over the last three years, the city has lost over 6,100 cable subscribers (about 26% of cable subscribers lost from 3 years ago), and the estimation is that they will lose approximately another 8% of subscribers this calendar year in 2023. This has resulted in funding to go down \$230,000 over the last 3 years. To continue to provide adequate services to the City, the network requests a supplemental appropriation from the PEG Access and Cable Related Fund.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: What is the recent history of Payments out of the PEG Fund, and what will you anticipate needing in coming years if the decline in cable subscribers continues?

A: Comptroller Stephen Curley confirmed with the council that the PEG Access and Cable Related Fund ended FY 23 with \$1,030,000, and that the city has already received \$143,200 in revenues this year. If this \$200,000 was approved tonight, this would leave the fund with \$973,000. Mr. Kelley added that he believes they would be asking for about 4 more years of funding.

Q: Is it still the case that streaming services in the city do not pay taxes, but cable companies do?

A: Yes.

Q: Is this something we would potentially be able to enforce on the local level?

A: This has been done in other states across the country.

Councilor Gentile motioned to approve which passed 8-0.

The committee adjourned at 7:41 PM.

**Respectfully submitted,
Rebecca Walker Grossman, Chair**