

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2004

Present: Ald. Coletti (Chair), Gerst, Linsky, Gentile, Stewart, Schnipper and Lipof

Absent: Ald. Parker

Also Present: David Wilkinson (Comptroller), Dan Funk (City Solicitor), Elizabeth Dromey (Director of Assessment Administration), Bob Rooney (DPW Commissioner), Elaine Gentile (Director of Special Projects, DPW), Sandy Guryan (Director of Finance, School Department), Dori Zaleznik (School Committee)

#317-03(4) HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting acceptance of and authorization to expend gifts received from various community groups totaling \$9,000 for the Hammond Pond Stormwater Project.

ACTION: **APPROVED 7-0**

NOTE: This item was presented by David Wilkinson under first call. The gifts received for this fund came from the Friends of Hammond Pond, Chestnut Hill Alliance, Newton Conservators, and Charles River Neighborhood Foundation groups.

Without debate, the Committee voted 7-0 to approve this item.

#354-03(3) HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting that the sum of \$31,400 be transferred from the Inspectional Services Department personal services accounts to the Planning Department personal services accounts in order to provide ample funding for the changes between these two Departments that came about as a result of the reorganization plan approved in November, 2003.

ACTION: **APPROVED 7-0**

NOTE: This item was also discussed under first call. Earlier this fiscal year, the Board of Aldermen approved a re-organization of the Inspectional Services and Planning Departments. This provides for transfers of some ISD staff into the Planning Department function. The actual transfer of current fiscal year funds in order to implement this staffing change was not yet performed. Therefore, this item seeks to put the funds in the proper accounts.

Without debate, the Committee voted 7-0 to approve this item.

REFERRED TO PROG. & SERV. AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#295-99 ALD. GENTILE, COLETTI AND SALVUCCI, requesting an ordinance that would require any proposed settlement, which would include any funds from the Liability Trust Fund, must be approved by a majority vote of the Board of Aldermen.

PROG. & SERV. APPROVED 7-0 ON 1/21/04

ACTION: **APPROVED 7-0**

#295-99(2) ALD. GENTILE proposing that Chapter 104 of the Acts of 1987 be amended so that the first sentence in paragraph 3 of Section 1 reads: "Said treasurer shall pay from the amount in the fund including the interest thereon such amounts as the city solicitor, with the approval of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen of said city determines to be necessary"

ACTION: **APPROVED 5-1-1 (Stewart opposed; Gerst abstaining)**

NOTE: Dan Funk was present this evening. He provided the language for the proposed revisions to Sec.15-5(C), which involves the authorization of any expenditures from the Liability Insurance Fund. Also, there is a certain procedure that involves the transfer of funds into the Judgements and Settlements account and the ultimate transfer from the Liability Insurance Fund for settlements in excess of \$5,000.

The Committee held a thorough discussion on this item. Ald. Gentile continued to press his concerns about the fact that he would like to see Chapter 104 of the Acts of 1987 amended so that the Special Legislation that the City received at that time establishing the Liability Trust Fund and the Ordinance (as it is now recommended).

During the review process, the Committee reviewed Attachment #1, which is the proposed Ordinance revision, and Attachment #2, which is a new item requested to be set up (as Item #295-99(2) to file Home Rule Legislation in order to modify Chapter 104).

The Committee had no problem with Ald. Gentile's request and approved the language for local ordinance Section 15-5(c) by a vote of 7-0. The Committee then established the second item (#295-99(2)) to amend paragraph 3 of Chapter 104 of the Acts of 1987 in order to include the additional language as requested by Ald. Gentile. The Committee held brief discussion on this issue and ultimately voted 5-1-1, with Ald. Stewart opposed and Ald. Gerst abstaining, to approve this item. (Please review Attachments 1 and 2 for details on these items)

REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

- #109-04 **HIS HONOR THE MAYOR AND COMMISSIONER ROONEY**
requesting approval of an inter-governmental agreement between the City of Newton and the Wellesley Municipal Light Plant for maintenance of City-owned streetlights, under the provisions of MGL Chapter 40 Section 4A. The current contract with WMLP expires on February 16, 2004.
PUB FAC APPROVED 4-0-1 (Yates abstaining; Mansfield, Gerst not voting) on 2/4/04
ACTION: APPROVED 7-0

NOTE: Commissioner Rooney joined the Committee this evening, along with Elaine Gentile, Special Projects Coordinator for the Public Works Department. They explained that the City is currently in a 4-year agreement with the Wellesley Municipal Light Plant that will expire on February 16th of this year. This contract is to maintain all city-owned street lights in Newton.

Commissioner Rooney submitted a letter dated January 27th that indicated that the proposal is for a one-year extension of the current contract. The City is charged with maintenance of 8,444 street lights. Basically, there is a monthly per-light maintenance charge of \$17,135.23. The scope of the work is to service routine street light outages, light transfers, knock-downs and related work. Until the City decides how it will implement its street lighting policy (including types of lighting, various colors of bulbs), it will be necessary to retain the assistance of the WMLP so that the existing lights will be well-maintained.

The Public Facilities Committee approved this item on 2/4, and with that recommendation, the Committee voted 7-0 to approve this request.

REFERRED TO FINANCE AND PROGRAMS & SERVICES COMMITTEES

- #420-02 **ALD. PARKER, GERST, LINSKY JOHNSON, STEWART, LAPPIN, BRYSON & LENNON** requesting local acceptance and ordinance to implement recent 41A revisions allowing expansion of tax deferral program.
ACTION: APPROVED 7-0

REFERRED TO FINANCE AND PROGRAMS & SERVICES COMMITTEES

- #420-02(2) **FINANCE COMMITTEE** proposing a RESOLUTION to the General Court to urge the passage of Bill #2901, as proposed by Representative Kay Khan.
ACTION: APPROVED 7-0

NOTE: Elizabeth Dromey was present this evening and reviewed information regarding the new House Bill and 41C and 41A revisions, which will provide a higher threshold of income in order for seniors to still qualify for property tax abatements. The Committee reviewed guidelines for tax deferral requirements, such as age and income and total assets.

Basically, the Committee is supportive of House Bill 2901 and what it accomplishes for the seniors in the city. The only question that was asked was to make sure that all information was provided to explain what the thresholds are. She agreed to submit that information to be included in the weekly Aldermanic packet on 2/13.

Please review attachment #3, which is information regarding property tax relief under 41C.

The Committee voted 7-0 to approve the item proposed by Ald. Yates. The Committee then voted 7-0 to approve a RESOLUTION in support of the revisions, as provided under House Bill 2901. **NOTE: BOTH OF THESE ITEMS WILL BE SCHEDULED FOR DISCUSSION IN PROGRAMS & SERVICES AT A LATER DATE.**

#380-02 ALD. YATES proposing that the City of Newton exercise the new option offered by Ch.184 and Ch.51 of the Acts of 2002 to adjust the age, income and asset requirements seniors must meet to qualify for tax exemption under Ch.59 and Ch.51 (41C) and the amount of the exemption granted to eligible seniors.

ACTION: **APPROVED 7-0**

NOTE: Please review the attached breakdown of details of relief offered under this new legislation. The Committee agrees with the extension of the eligibility requirements for exemptions.

Similarly to the previous item, the Committee voted 7-0 to approve this item.

REFERRED TO PROG. & SERV. AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#311-03 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR recommending the creation of a revolving fund with an expenditure limit of up to sixty-five thousand dollars (\$65,000). Said fund will be established in accordance with MGL Ch.44, Sec.53 ½. This fund will receive student parking fees and expenditures will pay the wages of campus aides and administrative salaries for the parking program.

PROG. & SERV. APPROVED 5-1 (Sangiolo opposed) on 2/4/04

ACTION: **APPROVED 5-1-1 (Gerst opposed, Coletti abstaining)**

NOTE: It is expected that this item will be placed on Second Call for further discussion at the Board meeting on 2/17, therefore, an abbreviated report will be provided at this time.

Sandy Guryan (Director of Finance for the School Department) and Dori Zaleznik (School Committee member) were present this evening. They presented a memo dated June 5, 2003 regarding high school parking fees. The FY04 School Department budget includes a charge of a maximum \$360 per year (approximately \$2.00 per day) for 150 parking permits to be issued to students at Newton North and Newton South in order to park at their schools. Students will not be permitted to park in faculty lots, although the number of spaces available at Newton North has been expanded to include a certain number of spaces in the faculty lot. Students will still be encouraged to take bus transportation. The parking fee is expected to become somewhat permanent.

An analysis of parking availability was performed at Newton North. The total number of spaces on-site is 337. They believe that there is only a limited number of spaces (less than 50 or 60) available to students. This means that, even though a student may have a parking permit, they will not be guaranteed that they will always have a parking space.

At Newton South, there are 376 parking spaces available. 256 of those are needed for faculty, which leaves approximately 120 spaces for student parking.

The Committee held discussion with Sandy Guryan about the need for this additional revenue and the establishment of the revolving fund, along with the continuation of the fund for more than one year. There is currently a study being performed in order to analyze whether the continuation of these parking fees is necessary. The fees, by law, are restricted to be used to pay for campus security (who will monitor activity in these parking areas) and the administrative costs of collecting and implementing the fee for the parking program.

The Committee was assured, by Ms. Guryan, that the funds that will be raised will, in fact, be used only to support the parking program at Newton North and Newton South, and that the money collected each year will be spent before the year is over.

With that understanding, the Committee voted 5-1-1, with Ald. Gerst opposed, Ald. Coletti abstaining, to approve this item.

All other items were held. The Committee adjourned at approximately 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul E. Coletti, Chairman

