



## Public Safety & Transportation Committee Report

### City of Newton In City Council

**Wednesday, January 17, 2024**

Present: Councilors Grossman (Chair), Downs, Greenberg, Lucas, Wright, Block, Bixby and Lipof

City Staff: Chief Greg Gentile and Assistant Chief Mike Bianchi, Newton Fire Department and Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctgbtDM3rCA>

**#54-24      Request to change the number of Deputy Chiefs in the Fire Department**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting to amend Chapter 10-28 of Newton Ordinances to change the number of Deputy Chiefs in the Fire Department from five to six.

**Action:      Public Safety & Transportation Approved 8-0**

**Note:**      Chief Gentile, Assistant Chief Bianchi and Ms. Lemieux joined the Committee.

Chief Gentile stated that this ordinance amendment would allow the department to increase the number of Deputy Chiefs from five to six benefiting and solving departmental issues. Over the years, Lieutenant positions have become more like managerial and administrative roles, which is more appropriate to be held by a higher-ranking member of the department. Lieutenants lead the hiring committee by hiring new firefighters, overseeing promotions and serving as the Public Information Officer (PIO). The Assistant Chief has ten people reporting to him, which is too cumbersome to be beneficial. This ordinance amendment would not increase the number of full-time employees.

Assistant Chief Bianchi, a former Lieutenant stated that the Lieutenant is directly involved with day-to-day happenings and works closely with the Chief and Assistant Chief with the rostering systems, swaps, schedules and vacations. The PIO works with the media, social media, community outreach and media on emergency scenes which should be a higher rank than a Lieutenant.

#### **Questions and answers:**

Please explain what you mean by swaps? Assistant Chief Bianchi answered that sometimes members work a different shift, swapping (exchanging) shifts with another member.

Does this position have any implications on the budget? Ms. Lemieux answered this has been an ongoing discussion. When we put the FY24 budget together, we budgeted this position but did not move forward without the City Council's approval to create another Deputy Chief position. A Lieutenant in the Fire Department is actually the first line of supervision which is why the position should be raised to a Deputy Chief. The difference between a Lieutenant's pay, and the Deputy Chief's pay is approximately \$30,000 or \$40,000. A Captain makes 17% more than a Lieutenant, a Deputy Chief makes 17% more than a Captain. Base pay is less than \$100,000.

Please explain the structure of the Deputy Chiefs' areas of responsibilities and why wasn't this proposed Deputy Chief position considered before? Chief Gentile answered that there is a tremendous amount of administrative work in the Chief's office including policies, procedures, staffing, hiring, promotions and the PIO. A Lieutenant, Assistant Chief and Chief run the administrative portion of the department. As things come up, the Lieutenant has taken on that responsibility which should be the role of a Deputy Chief. The PIO position began approximately five years ago which was taken on by a Lieutenant. Four out of the five Deputy Chiefs are shift commanders for the four shifts. One Deputy is assigned to each shift running the day-to-day emergency operations of the department. The Deputy is in charge of all the calls, initial incident command system and any large event. Their primary task is emergency services. A fifth Deputy is in the Fire Prevention Unit.

Are there bargaining implications to this change? Chief Gentile answered that the bargaining implications have been agreed upon by the union.

Was there consideration that this position should be a Captain instead of a Deputy Chief? Chief Gentile answered that when discussions began they were heading towards a Captain's position. We have made a commitment to expand the diversity of candidates. The hiring committee along with public outreach, public education, and community outreach really makes a difference. In the end, we felt it made the most sense to have that be the highest ranking member underneath the Assistant Chief, a Deputy Chief position.

Without further discussion, Councilor Lucas made a motion to approve. Committee members agreed 8-0.

**#53-24 Discussion concerning PS&T Committee workplan for the new term**  
COUNCILOR GROSSMAN requesting a discussion with the Public Safety & Transportation Committee concerning the work plan of the PS&T Committee for the new 2024-2025 term.

**Action: Public Safety & Transportation Held 8-0**

**Note:** Chair Grossman stated that this item is to discuss our priorities and passions for the 2024-2025 term. Suggestions included the following:

### **Washington Street Pilot Project**

The Washington Street pilot project should be heard in this Committee along with the Public Facilities Committee. This Committee should receive quarterly updates from the administration on the implementation.

A suggestion was made that perhaps the Council Rules need to be amended as to how Committee referrals are made with respect to discussions of large projects.

Chair Grossman stated that she would contact President Laredo about the possibility of the Committee discussing the project.

### **Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway Bicycle Project**

The City spent a considerable amount of money on creating new infrastructure along the carriageway. Updates are necessary on the project. How successful it is, what is the ridership, what sorts of incidents have occurred, are there ways it can be improved since the paint and signage is complete?

### **Data**

Suggestions for types of data the Committee would like to review in included looking by precinct at the number of police calls, fire calls and traffic crashes. Links are necessary for City Council and the public. Data on highly used intersections is developed when traffic studies are done. Is data available on the level of service at peak times?

### **Sidewalk conditions**

We'd like to discuss how we can better protect residents on sidewalks.

### **Fire hydrants**

What is the upkeep, age and are they all operational? How often are hydrants checked and are they adequate?

### **MBTA**

Updates on the train stations and express buses. Can we do anything about the lack of express buses from West Newton? If Mr. Koses can update us on the MBTA and its plans for changes, it may be useful.

### **Employee parking programs**

If Mr. Koses can update us on employee parking programs and the metrics used to judge their success

### **Traffic Calming**

What can we do or not do? Are speed humps used? In West Newton, there are many cut through streets and the Washington Street pilot project will force cars to use side streets.

Can we request the Transportation Department to explain their approach to traffic calming projects, because we receive resident requests on traffic calming. It is frustrating that our traffic calming budget is small, and how limited our ability is to respond to resident requests for traffic calming measures.

### **Traffic Council**

Approximately 19-20 years ago, this Committee was inundated with docket items for stop signs, crosswalks, etc., which led to the creation of the Traffic Council Committee. Traffic Council items are better reviewed by the Traffic Engineer, Police and Fire Departments allowing this Committee to discuss bigger items and situations.

### **State level**

How can we communicate with the state level on transportation on advocacy and awareness? MassDOT also needs some accountability and attention.

### **School areas**

Intersection safety and transportation remain necessary.

### **Police Department**

NPD has been reporting data to this Committee quarterly, when possible. The NPD has shared data on crashes and crime, as well as updates on programs such as Problem Oriented Policing, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, and the work of our social worker and Crisis Intervention Team. We have been following Transparency and IT. The website still needs to be updated, and crash reporting needs to be detailed enough to allow DPW and Planning Departments to determine if our infrastructure was an issue, as well as to figure out how to fix it. Staffing and any plans on changing our civil service enrollment.

### **Fire Department**

NFD has been reporting data to this Committee on a bi-annual basis, when possible. This can include responses, response times, hydrant conditions, inspections and progress on removing toxins from the firefighter work environment (we have mostly eliminated diesel fumes from the station. PFAS is more complicated). Other historic areas of concern are staffing, Human Resources, diversity, equity and inclusion.

### **Transportation**

The planning document is in process for the Bike/Pedestrian/Access Plan, which would allow us to plan and prioritize gaps and states of ill repair in the network. Projects include the Albemarle corridor safety improvements, and Washington Street pilot project.

### **Parking**

The Overnight winter parking ban will be on the 2025 ballot. Village centers, enforcement, and abandoned cars should be monitored.

### **Experts outside of City Government**

Do we have access to experts outside of City Government? Can this Committee make this request?

Chair Grossman answered that she did not know of any rules preventing outside participation. We certainly don't have any budget for outside consultation unless the administration requests it.

Councilors have reached out to other communities and reported their findings back to Committees. Councilor Downs added that we have had presentations from outside experts not on specific projects, but on general concepts of safety and transportation. Usually when we want outside expertise, we've brought in MAPC. The Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) is interested in transportation, and many have background in logistics, transportation planning, data and transparency.

### **Parking**

This Committee is interested in looking for compromises and solutions to our parking challenges in the City.

There are opportunities for us to go village by village. We have listened but not followed through with certain parking issues. Many business owners are upset about receiving tickets, feeding meters and moving cars. Councilor Downs stated that a sticker program is in place for Newton Centre and Newton Highland employees. It would be necessary to invite Mr. Koses in to discuss how it is working.

Councilor Downs stated that it is necessary to publicize the parking programs.

Chair Grossman encouraged Committee members to docket items for discussion.

Without further discussion, Councilor Greenberg made a motion to hold. Committee members agreed 8-0.

The Committee adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Becky Grossman, Chair**