



Public Facilities Committee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

Present: Councilors Albright (Chair), Getz, Laredo, Kelley, Leary, Kalis, Gentile, and Danberg

Also Present: Councilors Malakie, Farrell and Greenberg

City Staff: Commissioner of Public Works James McGonagle, Deputy Commissioner of Public Works Shawna Sullivan, Commissioner of Public Buildings Josh Morse, and Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link: [Public Facilities Meeting](#)

Referred to Public Facilities and Finance Committees

#112-24 **Appropriate \$1,191,000 for the replacement of Newton's Free Library HVAC System**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend \$1,191,000 from June 30, 2023 Certified Free Cash to complete the funding for the Newton Free Library's chiller and related cooling equipment replacement project.

Action: **Public Facilities Approved 8-0**

Notes: Commissioner of Public Buildings Josh Morse joined the committee to discuss the docket request. He opened the conversation stating that the budget breakdown as well as the timeline/history of this HVAC system was in the backup materials noting that we now need to fully replace the system. Commissioner Morse continued that the selected provider has a very good reputation.

Commissioner Morse explained that this is phase one to electrify the library which is a huge step forward towards total decarbonization. Ms Mercurio, the Library Director expressed her hope that the Council would approve this project.

A discussion followed with Councilor questions:

In response to a question on past chiller repairs, Mr. Morse stated that the chiller is 30 years old, well past its useful life. It has been expensive to maintain this system which has failed several times. He explained that while it is best to replace rather than repair equipment when

it begins to fail, resources for this are limited throughout the city. He further explained that cost is slightly higher than the \$2 million predicted but we are fortunate to have a \$500,000 green communities grant to supplement city funds.

In response to his criteria for selecting a vendor and specific equipment, Mr Morse replied that he considered cost return on investments, reliability warranty periods and a track record proven over a long period of time. He then explained that he hopes Phase II which will complete replacement of the chiller, would happen in three years.

Some councilors offered that it would be beneficial for the city to be more proactive In considering replacement instead of repairs to avoid long time maintenance costs. All expressed appreciation that this project is being done now instead of further repairs.

Councilor Danberg moved approval of this docket item, which was approved unanimously.

#102-24 Periodic Updates from Commissioner of Public Buildings regarding the city's construction projects

COUNCILOR ALBRIGHT on behalf of the Public Facilities Committee requesting periodic updates on construction projects.

Action: Public Facilities Held 8-0

Notes: Commissioner Josh Morse joined the committee to discuss this docket item. He opened his presentation by listing all the Major Capital Projects, including their cost and anticipated completion date. He explained that Newton has not has such a large building program since the 1950's when schools were being built to accommodate the baby boom.

Horace Mann School Renovation

The Horace Mann Elementary School project, will be coming back to the Public Facilities committee in the next couple of months once the schematic design phase of the building is complete. He shared exterior renderings and proposed floor plan. He added that the schematic design and site approval stage is going to include designing improvements in parking and traffic, stormwater, sustainability, exterior lighting, massing ,building envelope and Commissioning. Commissioner Morse, asked if the neighbors had discussed issues with the site plan, explained they had not expressed any problems.

The Franklin School

Commissioner Morse showed the building design and drop off area. He explained that there were several site plan options but the final one, just recently voted by the building committee will place the building to the west of the site and will demolish the existing building where the athletic fields will be placed. He suggested that it might be possible to allow students to remain in the existing building as the new school is constructed. He also showed the floor plans and overall early design of the building. A councilor was concerned with the impact of the site changes impact on the neighborhood. Specifically, concern was raised that western neighbors would now view a parking lot instead of open space and that a baseball diamond on the eastern

most part of the site would pose errant baseball threats to the neighbors backyards. Mr. Morse explained concerns were discussed during the review process and that the current approved plan was the optimum plan recognizing the site elevations on the eastern part of the site and its impact on accessibility. Councilor Kelley who sits on the Design Review Committee confirmed this.

The Countryside School

Commissioner Morse reminded the Committee that he had presented this school to the committee recently and not many details have changed since that presentation. He showed the proposed site plan, highlighting work with the Conservation Commission to protect the wetlands and with the Department of Public Works to maintain and clean the wetlands adjacent to the school. He highlighted the design developments, showing images of the floor plans and the interior and exterior of the school. A councilor expressed concern over the wetlands cleanup and hoped that this would be monitored on a more regular basis.

The Lincoln Eliot School

Commissioner Morse explained that construction has begun, and the department has been hosting virtual School Project Community Update Meetings to update the public on project progress. He showed images of the site under construction as well as of the proposed interior and exterior of the building. He concluded saying that the department hopes to have the school fully completed by the Summer of 2025.

The Gath Pool

Commissioner showed the before/after images of the site, followed by recent pictures of the current construction taking place. He concluded showing how the pool facility will look like when it is fully completed including the two pools and splash pad area, mentioning that the bathhouse will also be updated. The pool will be completed in time for this summer season.

The Cooper Center for Active Living

Commissioner Morse showed images of the current demolition work explaining, there is still some cleanups to be completed by 2/23. Commissioner Morse then showed the committee the interior design concepts. He concluded adding the Department will have a ground breaking ceremony on March 7 at 10 am. A councilor expressed concern over the price of this project and how it had grown from \$16 million to \$29 million and what the impact of this price increase had on projects not able to be done. Commissioner Morse explained this is an unprecedented increase and unavoidable to complete this important project.

The Police Facility

This project will address conditions of the Police Headquarters, garage and Annex, and it will address the lack of adequate and appropriate spaces to support a 21st century Police Department. Commissioner Morse explained that he is working with a large building committee that represents all aspects of the department and is currently in the early stages of design to determine department needs and appropriate working proximities. He explained that the

parking garage is a large building and other uses for that space are being considered to take advantage of the possible added space.

Other Projects

Commissioner Morse ended his presentation showing a list of smaller scale projects which were recently approved by the Council as part of the \$11.7 million docket item for the use of free cash including school roof replacements and school bathroom renovations.

The Chair thanked Commissioner Morse for his comprehensive presentation.

Councilor Laredo moved to hold the item, which passed unanimously.

#120-24 **Discussion on Water/Sewer plan and open capital improvement projects**
COUNCILOR ALBRIGHT on behalf of the Public Facilities Committee requesting an update on the Water/Sewer plan and open capital improvement projects.

Action: **Public Facilities Held 8-0**

Notes: Commissioner of Public Works James McGonagle joined the committee. He reviewed the Water Division Budget, describing its divisions. The Water Division FY 24 Operating Budget includes the MWRA Water Assessment, and the Debt Service payments for a total of 23 million dollars.

Commissioner McGonagle described the water division projects, including

- the Water Meter System Replacement program and ongoing plan to repair and reline water system pipes,
- major water infrastructure projects including the Waban Hill Covered Reservoir Rehabilitation Project,
- Phase 1 of the Ward Street water main replacement and
- Phase 2 of the Ward Street water main replacement projects.

Commissioner McGonagle added that there are over 300 miles of water main across Newton, and the city aims to replace or reline 1 – 3 miles per year focusing on the most leak-prone pipes particularly pipes laid during World War 2 time frame.

Commissioner McGonagle went on to discuss the Utilities Sewer Division Budget, which includes the Sewer Division FY 24 Operating Budget, the MWRA Sewer Assessment and the debt services, for a total of about \$30 million. Commissioner McGonagle highlighted the FY24 Sewer projects part of an ongoing 11 year phased plan to investigate, repair, seal, reline sewer collection system (FY-24 Newton Upper Falls, Newton Highlands, Chestnut Hill and Thompsonville areas). Commissioner McGonagle explained that the city will be upgrading 11 pump stations across the city. He finished by adding the city will continue with the Sewer Illicit discharge detection and elimination program.

A Councilor asked if the DPW would like to be able to inspect the lateral pipes that connect city infrastructure to homes. The Commissioner explained that DPW has no authority over these

pipes. A brief discussion ensued about the value of a docket item to require such inspections on the home's sale. This would require careful consideration.

The Committee thanked Commissioners McGonagle and Sullivan for their presentation.

Councilor Laredo moved to hold the item, which passed unanimously.

The committee adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Albright, Chair