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To: Councilor Leonard Gentile, Chair Finance Committee

Cc: Mayor Ruthanne Fuller  
Jonathan Yeo, C.O.O.  
All City Council Members  
Carol Moore, Clerk of the Council  
Stephen Curley, Comptroller

From: Maureen Lemieux, C.F.O.

Date: May 20, 2024

Subject: Responses to FY2025 Budget Resolutions

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Please accept this communication as the Administration's response to the FY2025 budget resolutions voted by the Honorable City Council on May 16, 2024.

**Budget Resolution # 3 – City Clerk's Office**

**Resolution requesting a review of the workflow, structure, and job descriptions of the City Clerk's Department**

*Proposed by Councilors Laredo, Kalis, and Baker*

Requesting that the Mayor, in conjunction with the City Council, establish a working group to assist in the review and potential restructure of the City Clerk's department, focusing on workflow, job descriptions of both union and non-union positions and compensation.

**Administration Response:**

The City Clerk's Office serves a critical role in the City of Newton running our elections, keeping our vital records, and supporting the important work of our 24-member City Council. Having an optimal organizational structure and workflow is vital.

The Fuller Administration is deeply committed to all of our more than 930 municipal employees across our many departments who are working every day to make Newton greater, better and more beautiful. As an administration we continuously focus on compensation, benefits, work/life balance, pay equity, career growth and development, and respect in the workplace.

Consequently, the Human Resources Department is focusing on several goals for FY2025 that include:

- Continuously improving the hiring process and employee professional development;
- Updating and reviewing position descriptions and compensation on a regular basis;

- Investing in employee development through training initiatives including a more comprehensive, inclusive, and accessible training curriculum that will address both the standard best practices in the workplace and topics that meet the growing needs of our workforce; and
- Enhancing organizational culture and retaining talent, fostering employee engagement, and reinforcing the City's reputation as an employer of choice.

The vast majority of our municipal employees are members of unions and our team works very closely with union leadership on changes to organizational structure, workflows, job descriptions and compensation. Similarly, for our non-union employees, our team works very closely with departments on this work.

We want to move forward with a compensation, classification, and position description study for our non-union employees across all our municipal departments. We will look to use funds from the fall Free Cash to hire a consultant to help us begin this work. One of the premier group's doing this work in the municipal field in Massachusetts is the Collin's Center for Public Management at UMass Boston. The Clerk's Office and the Comptroller's Office will be included in this study.

For those positions in the Clerk's Office that are part of a union, those salaries are subject to the bargaining process and that union represents more than just staff in the Clerk's Office. We are heading into negotiations for a three-year contract with this group.

In the meantime, our HR team will continue to work closely with Carol Moore on optimizing the organization structure and workflow. They look forward to working with a small number of Councilors selected by the Council President to help review organization options.

It may also be useful for the City Council to know that in response to the Clerk's recommendation, the FY2025 Budget includes additional funding for a part-time person to support the work of the Office.

### **Budget Resolution # 9 – Human Resources Department**

#### **Resolution requesting training to improve skills that build stronger relationships between the City and residents**

*Proposed by Councilor Oliver as Chair of the Community Dialogue Working Group*

Requesting that the City fund the same training that NPS has already executed with their extended leadership team and principals; the cost is \$25,000 (for 30 people).

#### **Administration Response:**

The Fuller Administration is a strong believer in training that improves our skills in building stronger relationships and effective engagement with our residents.

We look forward to our continuing work with the City Council and leaders within the Newton Public Schools (both administrative and elected) on the most effective training that we can do together that makes a meaningful difference.

We are committed to this work and our Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion, Hattie Kerwin Derrick, is leading our efforts. Together, we will look at a range of training opportunities and the optimal facilitator while thinking carefully about who should be involved in the training. We look

forward to exploring actively the training options over the summer and moving forward with implementation beginning in the fall.

We likely have sufficient training and professional development funding available for this vital training but may need to consider Free Cash once certified in the fall as a possibility.

**Budget Resolution # 8 – Planning Department**

**Resolution requesting an additional FTE be added to the Economic Development team in the Planning Department**

*Proposed by Councilors Wright, Getz, Malakie, Lobovits, Oliver, Lucas, Micley, and Block*  
Requesting that an additional FTE be assigned to the Economic Development team.

**Administration Response:**

The Fuller Administration is committed to keeping our villages and commercial corridors economically vibrant and expanding our commercial tax base. Our Economic Development Director, John Sisson, while the point person in the City for businesses seeking to expand or relocate in Newton, importantly is supported by a number of professionals in the Planning Department. This includes most directly our six-member Current Planning team (Chief Planner, Deputy Chief Planner, Chief Zoning Code Official, Urban Designer, and two Senior Planners) but the ED Director also frequently interacts with our Health and Human Services (licensing) and Sustainability (BERDO and electrification) to assist the business community.

With the passage of the Village Center Overlay District (VCOD) by the Council in December 2023, the Planning Director has assigned a team of six to eight members, including Mr. Sisson, to work together and meet regularly to support commercial, retail, manufacturing and other key stakeholders. Their work includes updating the City’s website and NewGov portal and providing outreach materials for property owners in VCOD. Additionally, the Planning Department, with the support of the Administration and several City-Council docketers, recently brought forward small business friendly zoning ordinance amendments to the City Council Zoning & Planning Committee – some of which have been passed by the full Council and others which are scheduled for public hearings.

Recent and ongoing duties for the Economic Development Director include:

- Meeting with landlords, potential tenants, commercial real estate brokers, and the City’s Assessing Department to keep on top of commercial opportunities, both available spaces and interested tenants;
- Working to advance economic development by amending the City’s rDNA ordinance to make the City more lab friendly, working with City departments to facilitate ordinance amendments to permanently allow outdoor dining, and supporting village center zoning efforts to promote mixed-use development;
- Partnering with the Charles River Chamber of Commerce, regional and state business centered entities to both promote Newton and understand the issues facing the business community;
- Collaborating with the Economic Development Commission to refresh strategically the City’s Economic Development Action Plan adopted by the Council in 2019.

The Planning Department as a whole is committed to and well-resourced in terms of personnel to advance the cause of economic development in the City of Newton as the department is presently

constituted and welcomes thoughts and ideas from the City Council as to where they believe additional efforts should be directed.

Additionally, our Planning team is extremely busy. The staff is working with the Zoning & Planning Committee on multiple projects, conducting critical project review for the Land Use Committee and Zoning Board of Appeals, staffing the Planning & Development Board, Affordable Housing Trust, Community Preservation Committee, five historic commissions, Urban Design Commission and the Conservation Commission, and leading many important transportation, conservation, housing and community development project teams. There is no underutilized position within the Department to eliminate in exchange for a new economic development FTE.

At the current time, the Administration will not add another FTE for economic development.

**Budget Resolution # 4 – Department of Public Works**

**Resolution requesting that the intersection at Washington Street and Lowell Avenue in Newtonville be added to the Supplemental Capital Improvement Plan**

*Proposed by Councilors Lucas, Albright, and Micley*

Requesting that the intersection at Washington Street and Lowell Avenue in Newtonville be added to the Supplemental Capital Improvement Plan, to improve sight lines for motorists, allow for left arrow traffic signals in both directions on Washington Street, and to improve walkability.

**Administration Response:**

The Fuller Administration agrees that the busy intersection at Washington Street and Lowell Avenue in Newtonville is very important to drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians and we are committed to safe passage for all types of users.

The traffic signal equipment and the operations of this intersection are not part of the Washington Street Pilot Project so we understand the impetus for this Resolution from City Councilors so that operations and conditions there can be addressed.

Please know that the Washington Street Pilot Project does include changing the lane assignment for the Washington Street westbound approach to Lowell Avenue from Through-Left/Through-Right to Left Only/Through-Right. DPW notes that this proposed lane assignment in the Pilot is consistent with the much higher westbound left turning volumes in comparison to eastbound left turns (as noted in the Washington Pilot project data Turning Movement Counts).

We will update the Supplemental CIP to add this intersection signal.

Newton DPW is already working with our signal maintenance contractor to develop a cost estimate for upgrading the Washington Street/Lowell Avenue traffic signal. In particular, DPW is investigating the cost and work required to make traffic signal equipment and operations changes to improve the intersection's safety and efficiency by providing dedicated left turn phases for westbound and/or eastbound Washington Street traffic. DPW's traffic signal contractor has let us know that achieving this will require full replacement of the existing traffic signal mast arm and controller cabinet. DPW's signal contractor is currently developing a cost estimate, and DPW will coordinate with the City Council and

other relevant City departments to determine next steps. We are encouraged that access to the Trio mitigation funds is possible to help fund these upgrades.

The Resolution also refers to “improve sight lines” at this intersection. Sight lines are generally good at this intersection, with the exception of the Lowell Avenue leg of the intersection south of Washington Street. For that leg of the intersection, vertical sight distance constraints result from the crest of the bridge over the Mass Turnpike, and the lower land elevation to the south of the Turnpike. Unfortunately, no changes to these conditions appear feasible.

#### **Budget Resolution # 6 – Department of Public Works**

##### **Resolution requesting a traffic light at intersection of Walnut and Centre Streets**

*Proposed by Councilors Kalis, Bixby, Humphrey, Danberg, Lipof, and Farrell*

Requesting that the traffic light at Walnut and Centre Streets in Newton Highlands be added to the Supplemental Capital Improvement Plan

##### **Administration Response:**

The Fuller Administration agrees that the busy intersection at Walnut and Centre Street intersection in Newton Highlands is very important to drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians and we are committed to safe passage for all types of users.

While the traffic signal equipment and the operations of this intersection are part of the Newton Highlands Village Center project and thus is already included in the CIP, we understand the impetus for this Resolution from City Councilors so that operations and conditions there can be addressed regardless of when the Newton Highlands Village Center project moves forward.

We will update the Supplemental CIP to add this intersection signal as a potential future stand-alone project.

For the Walnut Street/Centre Street intersection, DPW will also investigate in FY2025 upgrading the current traffic signal at Walnut and Centre Street to coordinate traffic signal timing with the newly installed signals at the Route 9/Centre Street intersection. DPW will also continue to coordinate with MassDOT on improvements at both intersections.

#### **Budget Resolution # 10 – Department of Public Works**

##### **Resolution requesting an increase in funding for traffic calming**

*Proposed by Councilor Greenberg*

Requesting that the Mayor increase traffic calming funding from the stated amount of \$400,000 for FY25 to \$600,000.

##### **Administration Response:**

The Fuller Administration is committed to continuing work on high priority traffic calming projects across the City. The operating budget line item “Traffic Calming Materials” in DPW Transportation was established for the first time in the City’s history by Mayor Fuller in the FY2019 Budget with an initial appropriation of \$150,000. In the past six years, we have dedicated more than \$1.5 million in operating budget appropriations and \$2.0 million in ARPA funds specifically to Traffic Calming. The Fuller

Administration also increased the Traffic Calming appropriation by \$50,000 from \$350,000 to \$400,000 in the FY2025 budget that is currently before the City Council.

The Fuller Administration dedicated \$2 million in ARPA funding to important traffic calming projects. The last of those projects (Waverley/Franklin and Brookline Street) was recently approved for construction by the Public Facilities Committee. The [2024 Traffic Calming Report](#), recently released by DPW Transportation, highlights a list of ongoing projects on Slide 8 and new priority street rankings on Slide 9. The ongoing projects are funded by a combination of FY24 and FY25 operating funds, ARPA and Commission on Disability funds and, to a more limited extent, project mitigation funds.

The Fuller Administration is not able to increase the appropriation for Traffic Calming by an additional \$200,000 in the FY2025 Budget.

We believe deeply in the value of Traffic Calming projects. Once Free Cash has been declared this fall, we expect to submit a docket item to your Honorable Council seeking authorization to appropriate \$200,000 for one-time funding for traffic calming needs.

### **Budget Resolution # 2 – Newton Free Library**

#### **Resolution regarding the library collection**

*Proposed by Councilor Albright*

Requesting that the Mayor increase the spending on the library collection to at least keep pace with inflation which is estimated at 7.7% representing an increase of \$53,000.

#### **Administration Response:**

The Fuller Administration firmly believes that the Newton Free Library is the jewel of our City and our collection of print and digital materials is at the heart of the library.

An additional \$68,451 in funding for the collections is already in process.

In order to receive Library State Aid each year, the City must meet Minimum Standards of Free Public Library Service. These standards include being open for a certain number of hours, not charging for library services, being open to all commonwealth residents, and meeting Municipal Appropriation Requirements. In addition, to receive Library State Aid we are required to spend a specified amount on our collection.

Each year to remain certified, the City spends 12% of our Municipal Appropriation toward the Library on the collection. This funding can and does come from a variety of sources, such as the operating budget collections appropriation, fund raising, and, interestingly enough, from the State Aid to the library.

In FY2025, the collections appropriation shown in the Operating Budget will be supplemented with \$68,451 so that we remain certified. The Library Board of Trustees determines the appropriate sources of the additional funding. We anticipate that fund raising and State Library Aid to be the likely sources.