



Finance Committee Report

City of Newton **In City Council**

Wednesday, November 13, 2024

Present: Councilors Gentile (Chair), Malakie, Grossman, Bixby, Humphrey, and Greenberg

Absent: Councilors Lipof and Micley

City staff present: Comptroller Stephen Curley; CPA Program Manager Mollie Hutchings; Fire Chief Greg Gentile; Assistant Fire Chief Michael Bianchi; Commissioner of Public Works Jim McGonagle; Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux; Director of Housing and Community Development Lara Kritzer; and Assistant Superintendent Liam Hurley

Others Present: Community Preservation Committee Chair Susan Lunin and Newton Affordable Housing Trust Vice Chair Peter Sargent

All Finance agendas and reports, both past and present, can be found at the following link:
<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/city-clerk/city-council/council-standing-committees/finance-committee>

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link:
[Finance Committee - November 13, 2024](#)

#401-24 Appointment to the Financial Audit Advisory Committee

PRESIDENT LAREDO appointing Patrick Moriarty, 9 Hill Side Rd, Newton, as a member of the FINANCIAL AUDIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE for a term to expire on November 4, 2027.
(60 days: December 20, 2024)

Finance Held 7-0 on 10-28-24

Action: **Finance Voted No Action Necessary 6-0**

Note: Chair Gentile explained that Patrick Moriarty had recently changed jobs and was waiting for approval from his new job to join this committee. In the future, if Mr. Moriarty receives this approval, this item will come back for approval or President Laredo will find another person to nominate.

Councilor Grossman motioned to vote No Action Necessary which passed unanimously.

Referred to Public Facilities and Finance Committees

#405-24 Authorization to appropriate and expend \$1 million for the Vehicle Replacement Program

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend the sum of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) from June 30, 2024 Certified Free Cash to support the Vehicle Replacement Program.

Public Facilities Approved 6-0 (Councilor Kalis Not Voting) on 11-6-24

Action: Finance Approved 6-0

Note: Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux joined the committee to discuss this item as well as the other eight Free Cash items on the agenda. Ms. Lemieux explained that the City had 23.6 million dollars declared as Free Cash this year and their goal is to have 13-14 million dollars set aside throughout the year which left 10.5 million dollars for some of the agenda items tonight. She also explained that without this Free Cash, some of these items would have been bonded and that using Free Cash this way would free up bonded debt service money so that it can be repurposed to the operating budget. All nine Free Cash items on the agenda total 6.5 million dollars so it is her intention to bring forward items in the coming weeks that will cover the rest of 10.5 million dollars.

Commissioner of Public Works Jim McGonagle also joined the committee to discuss the Vehicle Replacement Program and explained this was in addition to \$850,000 DPW has in their operating budget to support this program.

A councilor asked if there was an order of priority for vehicle replacement and the Commissioner confirmed that the Fleet Manager goes through the fleet each year to evaluate which vehicles need to be replaced. The same councilor asked about the bidding process for these vehicles and the Commissioner answered that the City uses state or federal contracts which are the most advantageous for pricing.

A councilor asked about the trade-in value for the vehicles and the Commissioner confirmed that there was but the City chooses to auction the retired vehicles off because they get more money for them that way.

Councilor Malakie motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

Referred to Public Facilities and Finance Committees

#406-24 Authorization to appropriate and expend \$200,000 for FY25 Traffic Calming projects

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend the sum of two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) from June 30, 2024, Certified Free Cash to support the planned FY25 Traffic Calming projects in line with a Resolution from the City Council during the budget process.

Public Facilities Approved 7-0 on 11-6-24

Action: Finance Approved 6-0

Note: Commissioner Jim McGonagle joined the committee to discuss the FY25 Traffic Calming projects. The Commissioner explained this money would supplement \$300,000 from the DPW's operating budget and will be used for most of the design and construction of four Traffic Calming projects.

A councilor expressed thanks to the Administration for making Traffic Calming a priority.

Councilor Greenberg motioned to approve, which passed unanimously.

#413-24 Authorization to appropriate and expend \$43,189.52 to Newton Public Schools
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend the sum of forty-three thousand one hundred and eighty-nine dollars and fifty-two cents (\$43,189.52) from June 30, 2024 Certified Free Cash, to Newton Public Schools which has been collected from FY24 Helpsy textile collection and recycling at school locations.

Action: Finance Approved 6-0

Note: Assistant Superintendent Liam Hurley joined the committee to discuss this appropriation for the Newton Public Schools. Mr. Hurley explained Helpsy is a vendor NPS uses to facilitate textile recycling and NPS is paid per pound of textile collected. The goal is to put this money into environmental initiatives in the schools to support the school green teams. Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux explained this is a housekeeping item as this money goes into Free Cash but it is already designated for NPS.

Councilor Malakie motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

Referred to Programs & Services and Finance Committees

#412-24 Authorization to appropriate and expend \$338,119 for McKinney-Vento Homeless Student Transportation
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend the state reimbursement in the sum of three hundred and thirty-eight thousand one hundred and nineteen dollars (\$338,119) from June 30, 2024 Certified Free Cash to Newton Public Schools for FY24 McKinney-Vento Homeless Student Transportation.

Program & Services Approved 6-0 on 11-6-24

Action: Finance Approved 6-0

Note: Assistant Superintendent Liam Hurley joined the committee to discuss this appropriation from Free Cash to Newton Public Schools for FY24 McKinney-Vento Homeless Student Transportation. Mr. Hurley explained this is 88% of the total cost to the district that the state reimburses back to districts. This reimbursement covers NPS costs for transporting students within Newton and to surrounding districts which is covered by a 50% cost sharing plan with the other district.

A councilor asked if the district had experienced any additional challenges after a state level policy change was made regarding emergency shelters and Mr. Hurley said that he had not.

A councilor asked about the trend in past years on how much the state reimburses and Mr. Hurley answered that it has been between 70-88% in the past. The same councilor asked if the wealth of a community factors into the state's reimbursement and Mr. Hurley answered that it does not.

Councilor Malakie motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

Referred to Programs & Services and Finance Committees

#409-24 **Authorization to appropriate \$2,000,000 to the NPS Educational Stabilization Fund**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate two million dollars (\$2,000,000) from June 30, 2024 Certified Free Cash to the NPS Educational Stabilization Fund.

Programs & Services Approved 6-0 on 11-6-24

Action: **Finance Approved 5-0-1 (Councilor Gentile Abstained)**

Note: Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux joined the committee to discuss this appropriation to the Newton Public Schools Educational Stabilization Fund. Ms. Lemieux explained that this appropriation is in addition to the 22 million dollars put in this Fund last year and that NPS used 4.1 million from the Fund for their budget this year. The Administration's goal is to extend the life of the Fund with this additional money.

A councilor expressed support for NPS and asked for an update on the projected funding gap in NPS that was discussed in previous meetings about this Fund. Ms. Lemieux said that the projections have not changed much and that both the City Administration and NPS Administrations are working closely to plan for the future.

A councilor conveyed their initial support for the establishment of this Fund, but they were surprised that within a year of establishing the Fund, the City Council was already being asked for additional money.

Councilor Grossman motioned to approve which passed with Councilor Gentile abstaining.

Referred to Zoning & Planning and Finance Committees

#403-24 **CPC Recommendation to appropriate \$1,841,719.78 in CPA funding**
COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE recommending appropriation of one million eight hundred forty-one thousand seven hundred and nineteen dollars and seventy-eight cents (\$1,841,719.78) from FY25 Community Preservation Housing Budgeted Reserves Account and Unrestricted Prior Year Reserves to the control of the Planning & Development Department for a grant to the Newton Affordable Housing Trust for their FY25 funding.

Zoning & Planning Approved 8-0 on 10-28-24

Action: **Finance Approved 6-0**

Note: CPA Program Manager Mollie Hutchings and CPC Chair Susan Lunin joined the committee to discuss this appropriation to the Newton Affordable Housing Trust for their FY25 funding. Chair Lunin explained the origins of the NAHT and shared that 35% of the Community Preservation Program's FY25 annual fund budget is targeted for Community Housing. Because of that, the CPC would like to allocate that 35%, or \$1,753,541.65, to the NAHT in addition to \$88,578.13 from a reimbursement.

A councilor asked why there was a remaining balance in one account after the allocation had been made to NAHT and Ms. Hutchings explained that this was a buffer as they wait to hear the state match for funding. The same councilor asked for clarification on what the reimbursement was for that was mentioned in the funding sources. Director of Housing and Community Development Lara Kritzer said that the City had run a homebuyer assistance program for several years and this was money from a sale of a unit through this program that was no longer considered affordable.

A councilor asked if there had been any discussion on changing the percentage allocated to Community Housing within the CPC's budget and Chair Lunin said there had not been.

A councilor asked if people who want to apply for funding for affordable housing would now go directly to the NAHT rather than the CPC to apply and Chair Lunin said yes, the goal was to improve efficiency.

A councilor asked for clarification on the funding sources and Ms. Hutchings explained that every year 10% of Newton's CPA revenue (\$500,000) is put into an account dedicated to housing but the City's goal is 35% so that difference comes from CPC funds.

A councilor asked how the public can learn more about the NAHT's work and NAHT Vice Chair Peter Sargent said that their meetings are public and that they are working on identifying ways to spread information about their work. Another councilor encouraged the NAHT to post meeting recordings to their website.

Councilor Grossman motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

#407-24 Authorization to appropriate and expend \$50,000 for the purchase of Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) Bottles

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend fifty-thousand dollars (\$50,000) from June 30, 2024 Certified Free Cash for the purchase of 30 new Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) Bottles in the Fire Department.

Action: **Finance Approved 6-0**

Note: Assistant Fire Chief Michael Bianchi joined the committee to discuss this appropriation for 30 new SCBA Bottles for the Fire Department and explained the use for the bottles.

Councilor Grossman motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#408-24 Authorization to appropriate and expend \$1,000,000 to purchase PFAS-free Firefighter Gear

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend one million dollars (\$1,000,000) from June 30, 2024 Certified Free Cash to purchase one set of PFAS-free firefighter gear for each Firefighter of the Newton Fire Department.

Public Safety & Transportation Approved 5-0 (Councilor Block recused) on 11-6-24

Action: **Finance Approved 6-0**

Note: Chief Greg Gentile joined the committee to discuss this appropriation for PFAS-free firefighter gear for each Firefighter of the NFD. Chief Gentile explained that eight years ago, the City had changed manufacturers to a company that had reduced their use of PFAS in this gear but at the time, no company was making PFAS-free gear. However, he said that this summer there was a change in state law that now requires all gear be made PFAS-free and because of this change, there has been PFAS-free gear that has come to market. Chief Gentile anticipates many communities will be eager to buy this new gear, so they are trying to be proactive in assembling the funding, going through testing, and then selecting the vendor.

A councilor expressed support for this gear.

A councilor asked for more information about the testing the Fire Department will conduct, and Chief Gentile explained the testing will determine gear that balances both breathability and protection. The same councilor asked how many companies sell this gear and Chief Gentile said two companies currently offer this gear and he is hoping that a third will come to market in the coming months.

Councilor Grossman motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#414-24 Authorization to appropriate and expend \$75,000 for Fire Shift Commander's Vehicle Replacement

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) from June 30, 2024 Certified Free Cash for the purchase of a new Shift Commander Vehicle (C-2) in the Fire Department.

Public Safety & Transportation Approved 5-0 (Councilor Block recused) on 11-6-24

Action: **Finance Approved 6-0**

Note: Fire Chief Greg Gentile joined the committee to discuss this appropriation to purchase a new Shift Commander Vehicle for the Fire Department. Chief Gentile explained this is the Deputy Chief's vehicle, they are responsible for responding to most fire related incidents and do over 2,700 runs per year. The current C-2 vehicle will become the backup and will start a cascading replacement process ending with the retirement of a 2009 Ford Taurus with over 100,000 miles on it.

A councilor expressed concern that the current C-2 was being replaced with relatively low mileage. Chief Gentile explained that this vehicle gets a lot of wear and tear responding to emergencies so around this mileage, they start to see it be out of service more frequently which is problematic for operations.

A councilor asked if this was another vehicle that is purchased through state contracts and Chief Gentile confirmed that was correct.

Councilor Malakie motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#415-24 Authorization to appropriate and expend \$1,800,000 for Fire Ladder Truck 3 Replacement

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend one-million eight-hundred thousand dollars (\$1,800,000) from June 30, 2024 Certified Free Cash for the purpose of funding the purchase of a new Fire Ladder Truck 3 for the Newton Fire Department.

Public Safety & Transportation Approved 5-0 (Councilor Block recused) on 11-6-24

Action: Finance Approved 6-0

Note: Assistant Fire Chief Michael Bianchi joined the committee to discuss this appropriation for the purchase of a new Fire Ladder Truck 3 for the Fire Department. The current Ladder 3, in Newton Corner, was purchased in 2009 and the plan is to have this truck become a spare. The new truck will be shorter to improve maneuverability in the City but will include the same ladder length and compartment space. It can take two to three years to receive a new truck once ordered.

A councilor asked what company this ladder will be manufactured with and Mr. Bianchi answered that it will be KME which is the same company for Ladder 7 which will be delivered in a few months.

A councilor asked about the bidding process for a fire truck and Mr. Bianchi responded that they use the Houston Galveston Area Council, which is a competitive procurement process and meets state requirements.

Councilor Grossman motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

The Committee adjourned at 8:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Leonard Gentile, Chair