



# Programs & Services Committee Report

## City of Newton In City Council

**Wednesday, February 26, 2020**

**Present:** Councilors Krintzman (Chair), Noel, Greenberg, Wright, Humphrey, Albright, Baker, Ryan  
**Also Present:** Mayor Fuller

**School Committee:** Ruth Goldman (Chair), Bridget Ray-Canada, Matthew Miller

**City Staff:** Carolyn Stapleton, Rec Program Manager; Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; Liam Hurley, Assistant Superintendent; David Fleishman, Superintendent of Schools; Nathan Giacalone, Committee Clerk

**#136-20**      **Appointment of Nicole Banks as Commissioner of Parks, Recreation & Culture**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing NICOLE BANKS, as COMMISSIONER OF PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURE pursuant to Sec. 3-3 of the City Charter. (30 days: 03/19/20)

**Action:**      **Programs and Services Approved 8-0**

**Notes:**      Mayor Fuller introduced Nicole Banks to the Committee and gave an overview of the process used to appoint her. Mayor Fuller said that after the opening was posted, over 30 applications were received, and that the hiring committee felt that Ms. Banks was the most qualified out of all the applicants.

Ms. Banks then introduced herself to the committee, saying that she was excited for the job, referring to it as a “pinnacle position” in Massachusetts. The Committee then asked Ms. Banks the following questions and her answers are also provided:

*What are some of your priorities for this position?*

Ms. Banks answered that she has researched the department and has found it to be a solid and well-run operation. She does not expect to make any major internal changes right away and first wants to get to know the community members involved in the department. She has also been brief on ongoing capital projects and development, which Ms. Banks said she will approach with her prior experience from Westwood.

*Citing issues of field maintenance along with a constrained budget, how do you plan to work with these conditions?*

Ms. Banks answered that while she has not dealt as much with this issue, it is a familiar enough story in the field. She has toured the city and has seen its recreation sites and their maintenance levels. Her plan is to prioritize and work within the budget, first focusing on safety before other improvements such as beautification. One initiative she mentioned was exploring a possible turf field to reduce the strain on grass facilities in the city.

How have you dealt with LGBTQ accommodations?

Ms. Banks responded that in public service, it is important to be inclusive and open. In her prior post in Westwood, she has had experience with this through the indoor pool facility there with different options for accessibility and transgender access. This initiative was something she said Westwood was able to be proud over as it had the support of the town. She also said how important it was to have input from community members and role members to be as inclusive as possible and to try and replicate this in Newton.

*How do you plan to focus on the play structures in neighborhood parks and make them ADA compliant?*

Ms. Banks answered that she has already met with [Stephanie] to learn about the Department's current approach to ADA guidelines. For playground equipment that is aging out, Ms. Banks has worked with it in her prior posts, collaborating with the Lions Club, neighborhood organizations, the Young Women's Club, and others to cite how partnerships can achieve this goal.

*How have you dealt with park vandalism in the past?*

Ms. Banks said that in her experience, more remote parks tend to attract the most vandalism. One response is to simply fix the vandalism as fast as possible in order to act as a deterrent to future acts. Another possible deterrent would be working with the police and the community to explore the option of security cameras.

*How would you plan to get a comprehensive study of Newton recreational space done? What is your experience with this?*

Ms. Banks answered that on the scale of this study, it would be best to hire a consultant for it as this study could pay off in the long run. This type of planning would require a priority list and overcoming the initial challenge of starting to work on it.

*Will the outgoing Commissioner DeRubeis continue to be involved at all?*

Ms. Banks answered that Mr. DeRubeis will first be taking a well-deserved vacation, after which he has agreed to meet with the newly appointed commissioner. There may also be opportunities for him to continue to be involved in an appropriate capacity.

*What is the status of the CPC-funded project at the Waban Hill Reservoir?*

Ms. Banks answered that she has toured the site but does not yet have the specifics on the project.

*Your title is Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture, what do you see as your role with "Culture?"*

Ms. Banks answered that she has enjoyed seeing the various art and sculpture exhibits around the city and would use her background of event planning in this area. She explained that these events have included spirit days, music performances, and other entertainment varieties.

*Have you seen the new Arts Plan?*

Not yet, but Ms. Banks said that she understands that a new director is in place and is looking forward to working with them.

*What is your familiarity with the corporate use of turf?*

Ms. Banks answered that she has some familiarity with this as she has worked with the DPW on it before in prior positions. Though the structures may have been different in these cases, she said the issues at heart are the same.

Councilor Noel moved approval which carried 8-0

**#138-20      Requesting amendments to rename the Department of Parks & Recreation**  
Requesting amendments to the City of Newton Ordinances, Chapters 3, 7, 10, 13, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22 and 30 to rename the Department of Parks & Recreation to the Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture.

**Action:      Programs and Services Approved 8-0**

**Notes:**      It was asked what the distinction was between items #138-20 and #99-20. Nathan Giacalone, Committee Clerk, answered and said that after review from the Clerk's Office, it was determined that the changes to Chapter 30 were so minor that a referral to the Zoning and Planning Committee was not warranted. A committee member elaborated that the Mayor's office has already been using the name Parks, Recreation and Culture and that this docket item is to formally make the change.

Councilor Albright moved approval which carried 8-0

**#99-20      Referred to Zoning & Planning and Programs & Services Committees**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting amendments to the City of Newton Ordinances, Chapters 3, 7, 10, 13, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22 and 30 to rename the Department of Parks & Recreation to the Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture.

**Action:      Programs and Services No Action Necessary 7-0 (Councilor Baker not voting)**

**Notes:**      Councilor Greenberg moved No Action Necessary which carried 7-0 (Councilor Baker not voting).

**#100-20      Requesting a discussion on the fees in Newton Public Schools**  
COUNCILORS KRINTZMAN AND CROSSLEY, LAREDO, NORTON, GREENBERG, LIPOF, KALIS, NOEL, AND MARKIEWICZ requesting a discussion with appropriate members of the School Department and School Committee about fees in the Newton Public Schools. The discussion should include an explanation of the basis upon which fees are set and how the fees factor into the overall budget request of the schools.

**Action:      Programs and Services No Action Necessary 8-0**

**Notes:** The committee was joined for this item by members from the School Committee and School Department. Liam Hurley, Assistant Superintendent, presented to the Committee and the presentation is attached to this report. His presentation gave an overview of the use of fees in the Newton public schools. David Fleishman, Superintendent of Schools, also spoke and said that fees are an important source of funding for the school system.

Mr. Hurley began his presentation and said how Newton, like other neighboring districts, has been charging fees since the 1980s to generate much needed funding in areas such as athletics and transportation. He said that fees have not kept up with cost increases over the years. Financial assistance is also provided to families with difficulties paying the fees. Among the challenges on the horizon for the school system Mr. Hurley cited was that the bus vendor will need a new place to park their vehicles soon, which could drastically change the costs and the fees.

After Mr. Hurley concluded his presentation, the committee deliberated on the item. The following questions were asked along with the comments and questions were raised:

*Based on available information it seems that when fees were first implemented, they were meant to be a temporary measure but are now a permanent revenue stream. Is this accurate and if so, are there plans to limit or reduce dependency on fees?*

Fees were not introduced, but rather re-introduced in the 1980s as years prior, families used to pay for bus tickets to the private company hired by the city.

Mr. Fleishman said that for the time being, fees are a permanent part of the funding strategy due to their critical importance to a wide variety of programs.

*Is there still declining membership in extracurriculars such as the music programs? Is this linked to the use of fees?*

Some of this decline was actually a data collection error which has since been corrected to show no unordinary fluctuation in student participation. There is always fluctuation in student participation in groups over the years.

Fees do serve as an added financial burden on families and may be an additional factor in participation rates.

*What are the tradeoffs for fees, i.e. if they were eliminated what would happen to the school system's finances?*

If fees were eliminated, it would negatively impact staff pay as most of the school budget is dedicated to paying staff.

*If the city allocated the two million dollars raised through fees, could fees be eliminated?*

This is difficult to say because of how transportation costs are subject to so much change. Flat fees are not necessarily realistic as they sometimes need to be adjusted to account for how transportation prices changes. The budgeting process may not be able to account for this. The money needed to eliminate school fees every year changes.

*Could eliminating fees result in a net savings for Newton?*

It could lead to a loss as no fees may mean more participation leading to higher costs which need to be covered. The staff cost for processing fees is minimal.

*Are school fees reviewed regularly as needed for compliance and with wider goals?*

Fees are reviewed to make sure that they minimize disincentives to participation. The parking fee at Newton South High School was increased in order to disincentivize driving in order to meet Climate Action Plan goals, but it also resulted in inequity as this same fee control is not possible at Newton North.

The two priorities are to make sure that fees do not prevent students from participating in desired activities and to make sure that all programming needs are funded.

*Have fees impacted programming options?*

No. This availability is impacted by staffing and space concerns. Fees have been a negligible factor.

*Is there a mechanism to track if families are at fee caps?*

No. There are efforts underway to improve this system such as MySchoolBucks, but currently this is a work in progress.

Due to this lack of cap mechanism, it is possible for families to end up paying well over the cap. With a budget of close to 500 million dollars, the city should be able to cover the two-million-dollar hole filled by fees. The school system needs to explore how to make the bus a more affordable option to meet the goals of the Climate Action Plans. This also could require the school system to reassess what it believes students are entitled to or not in order to determine how best to allocate its funding.

The school has many interconnected funding priorities, and fees are part of that and not easily taken out entirely without affecting other parts.

There are two methods for Newton to collect its school funding: taxes and fees. Each has valid points in support and criticisms against them. There is often an inverse relationship between fees charged and the tax rate.

Though fees are unappealing, eliminating them and relying on taxes may not be a viable solution.

*Are there fees for clubs?*

Not anymore. These were eliminated after seeing the abysmal collection rate and determining it unreasonable to charge student-run organizations which use a minimal amount of school resources. Fees would only be used in cases with paid supervision or other resources used.

Students are often too ashamed to push their parents to apply for financial assistance and this is part of the reason why fees should be eliminated.

The biggest problems with bus ridership are not fees, but the scheduling.

Is there collaboration with state-level authorities to fix the bus issue?

There have been some discussions to get the Attorney General involved, but there needs to be dialogue with the Massachusetts Association of School Committees.

*How is the field trip fee set?*

There is no set formula. It depends on the individual cost of each trip.

*If the schools were to get this two-million-dollar hole covered, then could they explore expanding foreign language education?*

Almost all financial hardship waivers received are approved.

Sometimes those most guilty of avoiding fees are those in the best shape to pay them.

*Can the school system explore collaboration options with the YMCA and Boys & Girls Club to mitigate bus costs?*

Councilor Noel moved No Action Necessary which carried 8-0.

The meeting adjourned at 9:01 PM.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Josh Krintzman, Chair**



# Fee Overview


## February 26, 2020

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## Agenda

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- Fee overview
- List of fees & fee revenue
- Family cap, Super cap and other revolving accounts
- School bus fee budget information
- New online payment system
- Other school based charges
- Final considerations



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## Fee Overview

- NPS, consistent with peer districts, has had fees in place for many years
- Reviewed annually as part of the budget process
- Revenue generated must be used to offset program expenses
- Fees have not kept pace with actual cost increases
- FY18 had small fee increase (\$20 to \$40) mainly due to higher transportation costs
- Fees typically cover only a percentage of actual program cost
- Financial assistance is encouraged and generously granted to families in need
- Family caps and Super caps apply



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## List of Student Fees

Program	Fee
School Bus – Annual Round Trip	\$350 with \$700 Supercap
High School Athletics	\$325 per sport per season, except football, ice hockey and alpine skiing which are \$425 each. Family cap is \$975.
Middle School Athletics	\$180 per sport per season. Family cap is \$540.
Middle School Student Activities	\$60 per student per year, or \$100 with drama.
High School Drama	\$150 per participant per play, maximum \$450 per year.
Elementary School Instrumental Music	\$150 per student per year
All City Band, Chorus & Orchestra	\$150 per student per year
High School Parking	\$350 per year, payable on a semester basis of \$175
Elementary School Early Morning Program	\$12 per day with payment by semester.



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## Fee Revenue

Program	Estimated Revenue in FY20
School Bus – Annual Round Trip	\$520,000
High School Athletics	\$770,000
Middle School Athletics	\$184,000
Middle School Student Activities	\$24,000
High School Drama	\$25,000
Elementary School Instrumental Music	\$165,000
All City Band, Chorus & Orchestra	\$11,000
High School Parking	\$45,000
Elementary School Early Morning Program	\$300,000
Total	\$2,044,000



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## Family cap and Super cap and other revenue

- *Family cap* refers to the maximum dollar amount a family pays for any one fee per school year. A *Super cap* of \$1,500 is the maximum amount a family pays for all fees per school year
  - Excluding high school parking, elementary school early morning program, and the school lunch program.
- Other Revolving Accounts not included here include: School Lunch, Use of School Buildings, Newton Community Education, Preschool Tuition, Space Camp, After School Music Lessons, Non- Resident Student Tuition, Graphics Communication, Tiger Loft Program, Lost Textbooks, Newton Teacher Residency



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## School Bus Fee Information

### 2019-20 (FY20) Regular Education Transportation

	Total Eligible Ridership	Average Daily Ridership	# Buses	# Days	Cost per Day	Annual Cost
Public School Transportation	3,153	2,649	29	180	\$555	\$2,897,100
Public School Transportation (shared bus)	130	100	2	180	\$720	\$259,200
Private School Transportation	110	63	3	180	\$555	\$299,700
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,393</b>	<b>2,812</b>	<b>34</b>			<b><u>\$3,456,000</u></b>
<b>Fee Revenue:</b>						
Bus Passes @ \$350 per pass						\$520,000
% of Cost offset by bus fee						15%
<b>FY20 Net School Cost</b>						<b><u>\$2,936,000</u></b>



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## New Online Fee Management System

- Moving to online, integrated fee management system with MySchoolBucks this spring
- Integrates with Student Information System – Aspen
- District will absorb all credit card transaction fees to encourage online payments



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## Other School Based Charges

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- Schools may offer families the option to purchase their own text or curriculum materials so students can mark them (e.g. English novels, science goggles)
- Schools may charge families for costs of supplemental field trips and other student activities.
- Partial math workbook cost no longer collected
- Additional charges are waived for families with demonstrated financial need
- Funds are managed in the school student activity revolving accounts



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## Final Considerations

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- Fees are an important and critical revenue source for NPS
- Reductions in fees would need to be covered by other sources or a reduction in program/services
- Finding bus parking on school/city land is an idea to lower bus fees without impacting service



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