



Programs & Services Committee Agenda

City of Newton In City Council

Wednesday, January 9, 2019

Present: Councilors Rice (Chair), Krintzman, Schwartz, Kalis and Albright

Absent: Councilors Baker, Brousal-Glaser and Greenberg

Also Present: Councilors Crossley, Leary, Norton, Kelley, Laredo, Danberg and Lappin

City Staff Present: Jonathan Yeo (Chief Operating Officer), Maureen Lemieux (Chief Financial Officer), Elizabeth Dromey (Director of Assessing Administration), Josh Morris (Commissioner, Public Buildings), Jayne Colino (Director, Senior Services), Karyn Dean (Committee Clerk)

#605-18 Appointment of Julie Irish to the Council on Aging

HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing JULIE IRISH, 8 Columbia Avenue, Newton Upper Falls, as a member of the COUNCIL ON AGING for a term to expire January 1, 2022.
(60 days: 2/1/19)

Action: Programs & Services Approved 5-0

Note: Julie Irish joined the Committee. Her resume had been provided to members for review prior to the meeting. She explained that she has been on the Upper Falls Area Council for a few years and has enjoyed learning about the City, being more involved in the community and meeting great people. She wanted to see what other opportunities might suit her personal and professional interests and the Council on Aging seemed like a good fit.

Committee members asked her opinion of the proposed expansion of the Senior Center (NewCal). She said she had not been in the Senior Center until a couple of weeks ago and it was clear that there is a need for more space and upgraded facilities. The community there is very engaged, and the population will be well served by an expansion of programming.

Jayne Colino, Director of Senior Services explained that Ms. Irish has stepped up to the role of chairing the Communications Committee and communications is one of the domain areas of the age-friendly process that the City is involved with. The committee is working on messaging so that residents know what is happening in terms of operational and age-friendly topics. She has the skills and expertise needed for the Council on Aging and Ms. Colino fully supports her appointment.

Councilor Rice moved approval and the Committee voted in favor, unanimously, with thanks.

#15-19 Appointment of Melissa Sommer to the Parks & Recreation Commission

HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing MELISSA SOMMER, 440 Wolcott Street, Auburndale, as a member of the PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION for a term to expire January 15, 2022. (60 days: 03/08/19)

Action: Programs & Services Approved 5-0

Note: Melissa Sommer joined the Committee. Her resume had been provided to members for review prior to the meeting. She explained that joining the Parks & Recreation Commission would be a natural progression to her long-time involvement with the City. She has been involved with Newton Bikes, the Pan-Mass Challenge and Newton Little League which included getting lights installed on fields, the concession stand and the horse trailer. She got to know Dana Hanson, Bob DeRubeis and others in the Parks & Recreation Department, and they asked her to consider serving on the Commission.

A Committee member asked her about off leash dog areas in the City. Ms. Sommer said her family has fostered approximately 50 dogs and she believes that they need areas to run off leash, but off leash areas must be handled in the right way. The owners need to be educated and to take responsibility for their animals and the off-leash areas. She has seen dog owners bring their pets onto playing fields and cause damage to the field, which is problematic. The Councilor noted that there is an off-leash dog specialist who works in the dog parks, but he is not allowed to ticket for violations. She asked that Ms. Sommer bring that up in meetings to see if the specialist may be authorized to ticket which will help with compliance.

Another Committee member asked Ms. Sommer how she felt about the lighting of playing fields. She said that she supported the lights at Lyon's Field because resources are scarce, and use needs to be expanded. That can be facilitated by lighting the fields for night use. While she prefers grass fields, lighting the turf fields allows for more use and the turf fields can take more activity without damage than natural grass fields. The Chair pointed out that the field at Newton South is actually on Parks & Recreation department land, therefore, they would determine whether lighting is appropriate or not.

A Councilor asked Ms. Sommer how she felt about Crystal Lake and the issue of swim-at-your-own-risk. Many neighbors have complained about swimmers coming off-season and changing in the bushes and areas around their homes, as well as causing some disruption including parking issues and trash. It is difficult to regulate the behavior of people when there is no guard on duty or any open facilities. There is also an issue of fairness in that some are swimming without paying. Ms. Sommer said she is always in favor of more swimming than less. The resources are very few for swimming in a city the size of Newton. The legal issue of swimming at one's own risk is something she cannot speak to, but she feels utilizing the beautiful natural resource of Crystal Lake should be encouraged. She does, however, understand there are issues involved with that.

Councilor Krintzman moved approval and the Committee voted in favor, unanimously, with thanks.

#635-18 **Appointment of Patricia Kerwin Derrick to the Parks and Recreation Commission**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing PATRICIA KERWIN DERRICK, 197 Spiers Road, Newton Centre, as the Ward 8 member of the PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION to complete Donald Fishman's term, which ends on February 25, 2019 (60 days: 02/15/19)

Action: **Programs & Services Approved 5-0**

Note: Ms. Kerwin Derrick joined the Committee. Her resume had been provided to members for review prior to the meeting. The Chair explained that there are two docket items for Ms. Kerwin Derrick's appointment to the Parks & Recreation Commission because she is finishing the term of a departing member that lasts only until the end of February. The Mayor is then re-appointing her in docket #636-18 for a full 3-year term.

Ms. Kerwin Derrick explained that until she recently started attending meetings, she did not realize the depth and breadth of the Parks & Recreation's reach to so many constituencies. Summer camps, practice fields, senior programming, dog parks and so much more are under the Parks & Recreation purview and she was very interested in contributing. She is also very interested in the proposed NewCal project which will expand senior programming and provide some multi-generational opportunities as well. The Chair explained that both Senior Services and Parks & Recreational Departments would be involved in that project.

A Committee member asked about the lighting of playing fields. Ms. Kerwin Derrick said she saw the preliminary presentation on lighting the fields and she felt it was a very thoughtful process. She did not see any major detriments at this point. There definitely need to be more playing fields and/or more ability to use the existing fields and lighting would help with that. There will be a public hearing soon, so she can get more information at that time.

A Councilor said that Little League and other sports leagues have pointed out that the City is not investing adequate funds to maintain its fields and parks. She asked Ms. Kerwin Derrick to look into this topic and to determine if perhaps Newton is spending appropriately compared to other communities. Little League has said that other communities' fields are in much better shape. Ms. Kerwin Derrick said that other towns have said they have fewer fields and they tend to be centralized (such as Wellesley) so they are easier to maintain. However, Newton has a bigger community and more fields so she will investigate this when she starts to serve. The Chair pointed out that lighting the turf fields would allow natural grass fields to be taken off line now and then for maintenance. Ms. Kerwin Derrick mentioned that there has been discussion of putting a turf field at the Albemarle Park area. A Committee member encouraged Ms. Kerwin Derrick to take a tour of the fields after it rains because flooding is a serious problem around the City.

It was also asked how Ms. Kerwin Derrick feels about off-leash dog parks. She said that dogs do need some space to run around, but they need to be socialized and owners have to be responsible.

A Committee member asked Ms. Kerwin Derrick her opinions on Crystal Lake. She said she works in the Newton Wellesley Emergency Room and has seen drowning victims. There is also some nefarious activity that goes on at Crystal Lake and these problems need to be addressed. It is impossible to always have someone guarding the area, but she does support using the natural resource to its greatest ability. It is a difficult issue.

Councilor Schwartz moved approval and the Committee voted in favor, unanimously, with thanks.

#636-18 **Re-appointment of Patricia Kerwin Derrick to the Parks & Recreation Commission**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR re-appointing PATRICIA KERWIN DERRICK, 197 Spiers Road, Newton Centre, as the Ward 8 member of the PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION for a term to expire February 25, 2022. (60 days: 02/15/19)

Action: **Programs & Services Approved 5-0**

Note: See note, above. The Committee voted to approve Ms. Kerwin Derrick's re-appointment unanimously.

Referred to Programs & Services, Public Facilities and Finance Committees

#34-19 HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) from the State Fiscal Year 2019 Legislative Earmark Funds to be used to conduct a feasibility study on the renovation, expansion and new construction of the Newton Senior Center.

Finance to meet

Public Facilities Approved 7-0

Action: **Programs & Services Approved 4-0 (Councilor Schwartz not voting)**

Note: The Programs & Services Committee joined the Public Facilities Committee to discuss this item. Josh Morse, Commissioner of Public Buildings explained that this is an earmark grant of \$100,000 sponsored by Senator Creem on behalf of the City to be utilized for the feasibility phase of the New Center for Active Living (NewCal) project. The City Council previously approved \$150K for the first phase of the feasibility study, and these funds will be helpful in continuing the process by providing monies the City will not have to otherwise expend on the project. Commissioner Morse noted that there is funding in the Capital Improvement Plan for this project of \$16M which is calculated in today's construction costs.

The Committee asked for a short overview and update on the NewCal project. The Commissioner noted that there are a number of committees working on this and many meetings have taken place with stakeholders to determine the varied aspects of the project and how to proceed. The programming for NewCal is currently amorphous and is being built upon the current programming at the Senior Center and senior programming through the Parks & Recreation Department.

The Executive Building Committee has created a very solid vision statement and has planned another community open meeting in conjunction with the Advisory Building Committee.

Councilors Rice and Lappin serve on this Committee. The Commissioner is hopeful that the community will be enthusiastic about the vision.

Ultimately, the facility will be designed in program predominantly for seniors but will provide opportunities for people of all ages in the community. The Commissioner noted that Jayne Colino, Director of Senior Services, has been able to offer very rich programming despite the woefully undersized Senior Center building. The current Senior Center is also utilized by other constituencies in the community. This new project will allow for a tremendous extension of the offerings by Senior Services and senior programming provided by the Parks & Recreation Department and will also allow that continued use by others in the City. There will be an increase in the number of seniors that will come to use the programs once an expanded facility is available, as has been experienced in other communities, and the number of seniors will continue to grow in the City. The senior programs will utilize peak hours and the off-peak hours could be utilized by other groups and care will be taken to be sure these are compatible uses.

Ms. Colino noted that a small group of seniors at the Senior Center have been concerned about the changes coming and she hopes this explanation eases their concerns. The City cannot invest \$16M and exclude the rest of the community. This fear of losing something is misguided because the senior population will be gaining a tremendous amount. There is also a population of seniors that do not use the Senior Center because it is called a "senior" center and they do not feel comfortable being labeled in that way. The NewCal project will provide a more neutral place and may provide an opportunity for people of all ages to visit without feeling out of place.

The working groups are very close to finalizing the high-level programming and still need to determine what new programs should be introduced. The finalization of that programming will allow the development of a site selection matrix to identify possible suitable locations. The location will be a challenge because the parameters are broad and there are many competing interests including issues like parking, walkability, access, open space, geography, etc. This is urban design and a balance will need to be struck. The perfect cannot become the enemy of the good. An approximately 2.5 acre site will be needed but Jonathan Yeo, Chief Administrative Officer noted that they are not yet looking at specific sites.

The Commissioner explained that he would like to present to the Design Review Committee in mid-February to allow them time to think about the breadth of the program and the type of facility that would be needed. It would also be helpful to get a sense of priorities from the City Council. In addition to finding an appropriate site and then building this new Center, the Commissioner explained that an inventory of existing assets will be considered to find other opportunities for programming for those who may not be able to get to the larger Center. Having a decentralized model, however, is not being considered.

It was asked if a park might be considered as a location. Commissioner Morse noted that the Marlborough Senior Center was sited on parkland. Because it is considered a recreation use, it is not a violation of Article 97. If the City determines a park is a suitable location, then conversations

will take place with stakeholders including neighbors and the Parks & Recreation Commission to determine if it is an appropriate location. This will be citywide search and some recommendations may not be ideal to start out, but it is part of the process.

Councilor Rice noted that because he and Councilor Lappin are on the Building Committee, they will be able to provide information going forward.

The Programs & Services Committee approved this item 4-0 and the Public Facilities Committee also approved the item 7-0 with thanks to Commissioner Morse and Ms. Colino.

Referred to Programs & Services and Finance Committees

#588-18

Amendment to increase income eligibility for clause 41A tax deferral program

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting an amendment to Section 27-10 of the city of Newton Revised Ordinance to increase the maximum qualifying gross receipts amount for the purposes of the Tax Deferral Program from \$60,000 to \$72,000 for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2018 and for all subsequent years.

Finance to meet

Action: Programs & Services Approved 4-0 (Councilor Schwartz not voting)

Note: Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer, and Elizabeth Dromey, Director of Assessing Administration joined the Committee. Ms. Lemieux explained that the administration recently came to the City Council to request a special act from the legislature, which has been approved, enabling the City of Newton to raise the income level for this program to as high as the senior citizen circuit breaker tax credit amount of approximately \$86K. The current maximum qualifying income amount for seniors to be able to defer their real estate taxes in Newton is \$60K and this request it to increase that to \$72K. The amount has been not been adjusted since 2004. Currently there are 64 participating residents and it is impossible to know how many more people will qualify with this adjustment and how many of those will want to take advantage of the program. The City is not raising the limit to the full \$86K currently, because of that uncertainty. At the proposed level, those who are coming of qualifying age (65), or those already of qualifying age who are between the current \$60K and the proposed \$72K could be added to this program if they choose. Ms. Dromey noted that the City will do a big burst of advertising in order to educate residents on the program. The City has until April 1 to enroll new participants for the coming fiscal year.

Ms. Lemieux noted that some people feel they would be taking something from their children's inheritance by participating in this program, so they choose not to. This could be one of the most prudent actions many residents could take, however, in order to allow them to stay in their homes through their older years. Qualifying residents can defer up to 50% of the value of the home. A home valued at \$500K could defer up to \$250K in taxes. The taxes on a \$500K home are about \$6K a year so this allows deferral for many, many years before reaching the \$250K maximum. This allows residents to use that extra cash flow for whatever needs they may have. It is a very flexible program, therefore, a resident could defer only a portion of their taxes, or only for a certain

number of years. As long as the resident qualifies, they can return to the program whenever they like, and the total never comes due until the home is sold or the homeowner dies.

Ms. Lemieux reported that about \$500K of taxes are currently being deferred each year. Because the program has been in place for many years, the City recoups about \$200K to \$300K each year so it “costs” the City about \$200K-\$300K each year, which results in a decrease of Free Cash by that amount. A small interest percentage is applied to the deferral, which is tied to the federal discount rate. This rate has been below 1% for several years and was just raised to 2% which is a minimal interest fee for such a beneficial program.

A Committee member asked if Ms. Dromey or Ms. Lemieux have seen any adverse effects of using this program that could potentially put a homeowner at any financial risk. Ms. Dromey explained that the Law Department does a title search on applicant properties and then places a lien on the homes for the deferred amount. One person was in the program for 29 years and she had a great life. She was able to stay in her home, travel, and be involved in the community. Her home sold for over \$1M and \$300K was owed in taxes, which left her heirs with a significant amount of money. Ms. Colino said this is a resource for aging in place as well. A homeowner could defer taxes for a year or two and use that money to put in a first-floor bathroom or other amenities to make the home safer for them as they age. This ultimately increases the value of the home. The City is trustworthy and is not looking to make money on this, so this can be a very safe product to use compared to others that might be on the market.

A Committee member asked for some data on the impact of adjusting the maximum income level as the program progresses and how many more residents apply. Based on that data, perhaps the maximum could be increased to the full \$86K.

Councilor Krintzman moved approval and the Committee voted in favor, 4-0, with Councilor Schwartz not voting.

Clerk’s Note: The Committee approved the following re-appointments unanimously, with no discussion.

#634-18 **Re-appointment of Sam Figler to the Parks and Recreation Commission**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR re-appointing SAM FIGLER, 63 Sumner Street, Newton Centre, as an alternate member of the PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION for a term to expire October 31, 2021. (60 days: 02/15/19)

Action: **Programs & Services Approved 5-0**

#573-18 **Re-appointment of Matthew Stafford to Health & Human Serv Advisory Council**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR reappointing MATTHEW STAFFORD, 100 Cragmore road, Newton Upper Falls, as a member of the HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL for a term to expire January 1, 2022 (60 days: 01/18/19)

Action: **Programs & Services Approved 5-0**

- #574-18** **Re-appointment of Asa Fanelli to Health and Human Services Advisory Council**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR reappointing ASA FANELLI, 8 Kerry Court, West Newton, as a member of the HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL for a term to expire January 1, 2022 (60 days: 01/18/19)
Action: **Programs & Services Approved 5-0**
- #575-18** **Re-appointment of Lisa Terrizzi to Health and Human Services Advisory Council**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR reappointing LISA TERRIZI, 63 Ridge Avenue, Newton Centre, as a member of the HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL for a term to expire January 1, 2022 (60 days: 01/18/19)
Action: **Programs & Services Approved 5-0**
- #633-18** **Re-appointment of Dina Conlin to the Licensing Board**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR re-appointing DINA CONLIN, 46 Shornecliffe Road, Newton, as a member of the LICENSING BOARD for a term to expire June 5, 2023. (60 days 02/15/19)
Action: **Programs & Services Approved 5-0**

Respectfully Submitted,

John B. Rice, Chair