

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2010

Present: Ald. Sangiolo(Chairman), Baker, Hess-Mahan, Merrill, Rice, Linsky, Blazar

Absent: Ald. Fischman

Also present: Ald. Danberg

City Staff: Bob DeRubeis (Commissioner of Parks and Recreation), Bob Rooney (Chief Operating Officer), Carol Stapleton (Recreation Manager), Rebecca Smith (Committee Clerk)

REFERRED TO PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

#298-10 **HIS HONOR THE MAYOR** requesting authorization to transfer the sum of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) from the FY2011 Budget Reserve to the Parks & Recreation Forestry Vehicle Rentals Account for the purpose of supplementing the accounts related to tree emergencies. [10/08/10 @2:20PM]

WITH FINANCE COMMITTEE TO MEET

ACTION: APPROVED 7-0

NOTE: Bob DeRubeis joined the Committee to discuss the need for these funds. He shared with the Committee how costly tree emergencies are to the Parks and Recreation Department and that the funds allocated for equipment rental for these emergencies is depleted. Mr. DeRubeis informed the Committee that since September another \$10,000 has been spent on tree emergencies. With this \$50,000 transfer the Department would still have \$19,000 for equipment rentals this winter. Alderman Baker questioned whether this sum of money for tree emergencies would be enough to carry the Department through the winter. Mr. DeRubeis replied saying that it depends on the severity of the winter weather; should we have significant tree damage from the snow, it's possible that they would need to come back to request additional funds.

Bob Rooney, Chief Operating Officer, joined the table to further discuss questions relating to the budget. He shared with the Committee that the Executive office is tracking expenses for emergency tree work and, as the Committee will see in the C.I.P, they are trying to put more money into the budget to do preventative work without tying up too much of the City's funds. Mr. Rooney raised the question of using the Public Works Department in situations where emergency equipment and crews may not be necessary. Alderman Baker agreed that using City crews is preferable for less severe problems, but pointed out that Public Works and Parks and Recreation are two separate accounts, so there would need to be a discussion about protocol. Mr. Rooney agreed and added that the goal is to strike a balance between assigning funds for tree emergencies and assigning funds for routine maintenance. The Committee and Mr. Rooney agreed that the more the

City spends on maintenance the less it will have to pay for emergencies. After this conversation, Alderman Merrill moved approval of the item which carried unanimously.

#306-08 ALD. BAKER, DANBERG, MANSFIELD & PARKER requesting discussion of how swimming at Crystal Lake might be lawfully and safely extended beyond mid-August. [08/26/08 @ 5:03 PM]

ACTION: **HELD 7-0**

NOTE: Former Ald. Parker, Ald. Danberg, and Bob DeRubeis joined the table for this discussion. There were two separate issues discussed at the meeting. The first was the difficulty that the Parks and Recreation Department has finding lifeguards for late August, and the second was whether or not the City should allow a swim-at-your-own-risk policy when the lake is closed for the season. Mr. DeRubeis noted that in order to properly staff the public beach during late August the Department would need to hire at least 8 lifeguards. Despite all their recruitment efforts and job listings, the Parks and Recreation Department only received 2 applicants. This difficulty in staffing is due to funding, but also because the majority of the staff are college students who return to school in mid-August for academics and sports. This would probably be an issue as well if the Department focused on recruiting high school students instead of college students but, as Ald. Linsky noted, high school students may still be a good resource for late-season guards as they are at least local, even if they do have other commitments at certain times on certain days. Mr. DeRubeis is open to any suggestions on how to find lifeguards, but noted that anyone hired or recruited would have to have, or obtain, training that contains a lake component since lifeguarding at a lake is much more challenging than lifeguarding at a pool.

Mr. Parker addressed the Committee and shared that when he was an Alderman it was apparent that residents were concerned about their inability to swim at the lake past mid-August; residents were further concerned that they were not permitted to swim at their own risk. Mr. Parker suggested that the Board pass a resolution directed to the Mayor and the Parks and Recreation Commission so that the City can begin the process of establishing a swim-at-own-risk policy. Mr. Parker's personal opinion is that the policy should apply only to the public beach off season.

The Committee members clarified that it is the Commission's responsibility to institute a swim-at-your-own-risk policy, not the Board of Aldermen's. Mr. DeRubeis recounted that the Commission has voted down the proposal of a swim-at-your-own-risk policy twice. He also shared his personal disagreement with the policy stating that it's too much of a risk to the public's safety. With that said, he will discuss the idea with the Commission again and see where they stand.

Many members of the Committee vocalized their trepidation about instituting swim-at-your-own-risk. They too are concerned for the public's safety and are also concerned that the City may shoulder some liability should an accident occur. Ald. Rice shared his viewpoint that programming is important but when it comes to programming versus safety, safety must take precedence. Ald. Baker moved hold on the item and suggested that Mr. DeRubeis discuss some self-financing mechanism with the Executive office in an effort to expand the opportunity for late season swimming by increasing compensation to attract staff. The motion to hold carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amy Sangiolo, Chairman