

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, MAY 4, 2005

Present: Ald. Johnson (Chair) Hess-Mahan (Vice Chair) Merrill, Coletti, Parker, Fischman, Baker, Sangiolo

Others: Fred Guzzi (Veteran's Agent) Mitch Baker (Inspector Weights & Measures). Peter Karg, (Executive Secretary, Elections) Elaine DeFilipis (Elections) David Olson (Jackson Homestead) Ed English (Clerk) Christine Owen (Committee Clerk) Sandy Pooler (Budget Director)

BUDGET

VETERANS/LICENSING BOARD/WEIGHTS & MEASURES

Fred Guzzi and Mitch Baker were both present for this discussion. Mr. Guzzi noted that the largest expenditure is for services provided for needy veterans. Accomplishments include painting of City Hall flagpoles and increased attendance at Veterans' functions. Mr. Guzzi would like to have a display on Iraq in the City Hall Diorama area.

Ald. Hess-Mahan asked about the change to the date of the Memorial Day Parade. Mr. Guzzi explained that in the last four to five years, the attendance has dwindled. The old route often had no attendance on certain sections. After much discussion there was a change in the parade route with the new route proving to be positive. After two or three years of discussion, the change of date was decided on. This change will allow the Newton North Marching Band (50-60 students) to perform; State Championship Basketball as well as Boys and Girls Track teams will also be in attendance.

Ald. Parker focused on the question of how many people actually come in for services. Mr. Guzzi said the questions are constant but could not give a figure.

Chairman Johnson asked how many Newton people were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ald. Johnson would like to see as an objective for Mr. Guzzi to have some type of outreach with a **brochure** that would be proactive in welcoming veterans back to the community after completing military service.

Chairman Johnson questioned what the \$1900 in Licensing was used for and Mr. Guzzi explained it was needed for postage and printing. Mr. Guzzi could use a larger budget to deal with mailings to get out information to licensees.

In Mr. Parker's opinion, more information could be handled by both email and the internet.

Ald. Merrill moved approval and the Committee voted in favor.

Mitch Baker, Inspector of Weights and Measures, began his discussion by saying that up to date he has sealed more than 1000 various devices in the City. Ald. Parker inquired if there is any check to see if prices in super markets ring up as they should. Mr. Baker said once a year he does price verification in all the major markets. Verification is also done at any location with three scanners or more.

Ald. Merrill moved approval and the Committee voted on a straw voted 7-0 (Sangiolo not voting)

ELECTION COMMISSION

Peter Karg and Elaine DeFilippis were both present for this budget discussion. Mr. Karg said this past election was very busy and considerable time had been spent in preparation. There was an 89% turnout in Newton; 42,718 votes cast on Election Day. There were approximately 4500 absentee ballots. Mr. Karg and his staff were working seven days a week from approximately the end of September to almost Thanksgiving. He emphasized that it was an incredible effort with a very successful election in Newton. Approximately 225 elections workers were trained in new procedures and operations. New people were recruited through the census which resulted in strengthening polling locations. Mr. Karg indicated it had been a good effort by all the staff with few complaints.

Improving the census has been a top priority. An innovative post card was sent out the first of April to those who did not respond to the first mailer to elicit a response. Within a few weeks, a confirmation card will be sent out for those people who have not responded and are on the voter list and have not voted in the last two federal elections. After that, the residents' book will be printed. A real effort has been made to keep information updated. There has been positive feedback on the new one residents' book. This information is also available on disc. The Election Commission has also worked hard at keeping the web page up-to-date. Marker noted that an updated training manual has been worked on. Ald. Parker suggested using more on-line information from residents. Improving customer service has been a goal as well as increased web page information. An ongoing role is keeping the staff up-to-date on all new provisions of the Help America Vote Act which through training of election workers. Customer Service is improving. A brochure has been developed which explains to the public and elected officials some of the data information that is available for order on disc. Within the next year Mr. Karg hopes there will be some federal assistance that mandates that municipalities buy for each precinct a system that will assist visually impaired people with a voice activated system. Information is updated online every other week.

Ald. Hess-Mahan asked what the special election cost and Mr. Karg responded approximately \$55,000 to \$60,000. Mr. Hess-Mahan asked if there was any type of quality control on the voting machines. Mr. Karg noted that the Newton system does have a great deal of backup and the machines have a paper trail and we do have a very responsive local vendor.

Chairman Johnson questioned modem transfers that are done over phone lines causing possible security problems. Since there is a secure system of transporting information accompanied by a police officer, Chairman Johnson wondered why the modem was being used in view of the lack of security around packing. Mr. Karg said in his discussions with the Information Technology Department, it was felt this was secure. In talking to other communities who use the Accu-vote System, many of them have moved to sending them over the phone line back to City Hall. There is a printout of the actual returns that goes back to City Hall accompanied by a Police Officer. That printout can be matched to the card allowing an extra level of security. Ald. Johnson requested a copy of policies and procedures process for dealing with modem transfer process. Chairman Johnson concluded by asking Mr. Karg to have a plan available if it became necessary to count a paper ballot election. Chairman Johnson emphasized that she wants to be sure that Newton voters are as protected as humanly possible.

Mr. Karg said inserts are put in tax bills to help get voters out, sandwich boards go up 4 weeks before election in all the villages in the City, information is put on the City web site and both The Tab and NewTV.

Chairman Johnson suggested appearing on some of the local TV shows as a city official to explain the voting process. Mr. Karg said that his staff needs to stay current on various issues and he again noted that he had had an information session handled by the Office of Campaign and Political Finance with reporting requirements. He has been trying to promote cross-training with both his upstairs and downstairs office. Improving the ability to communicate with elected officials and with the general public is another goal. The Residents Book is now being printed as one book which is much more efficient.

Chairman Johnson questioned the impact of his new budget. Mr. Karg responded that for this year the funds are available to be able to do what is necessary. There is a vacancy that will be filled. A part-time census reader position has been eliminated. Through the senior tax program, three people have been helping to fill that void.

The budget was approved 7-0.

CITY CLERK/CLERK OF THE BOARD

Mr. English and Christine Owen were present for this discussion. Mr. English felt a copier was needed for the office. Mr. Pooler noted new machines have been purchased for the print shop and felt that the large printing should be handled by the in-house print shop. In view of the Friday workload in the Aldermen's office, there is often a time problem with copying documents in the existing machine. Mr. English explained that while a large portion (as many documents as are ready) of the copy load is forwarded to the print shop for processing, there is still a need to rely on the copier in the Clerk's office to finish out the weekly packet distribution process.

Chairman Johnson asked about the City Archivist position. Mr. English noted that the administration has agreed to retain the \$25,000 that had been appropriated in the last fiscal budget. Mr. English would like to see funds to revamp the City Hall vaults. He concluded this

discussion by emphasizing that the City Archivist, Susan Abele, should be complimented on her work.

Ald. Sangiolo suggested a lock box be purchased so all Committees could use digital recorders.

The Committee approved the budget 8-0.

NEWTON HISTORY MUSEUM

David Olson gave a brief synopsis on the great year that the Newton History Museum has had. The FY06 budget is level funded. He noted there would be a little bit of difficulty in FY06 as one staff member will be taking maternity leave and there is no money to hire a temp. From October to December, the administrative assistant who does data entry payroll, etc. will be out of the office. There is an IMLS grant (Institute for Museum and Library Services) that allows a Public Programs Manager to be hired for three years. She is on contract until June 2007.

There will be an opening for a new exhibit on Tuesday, May 10th at 5:00 p.m. on Civil War prints and images. Susan Abele will be present to talk a little bit about the process of putting this exhibit together. It was noted that Veterans Services and Carleton Merrill were responsible for saving many of the prints that are currently on display. The Historical Society provided the funds to have four of those paintings restored. This past year a new strategic plan for the Museum has been developed. The four major goals include finding high quality programs, getting the word out so that people recognize the museum as a cultural asset for the City and make sure that the means are available to carry out those programs. More space is also being looked into. The Jackson Homestead building is completely full with very little room to move around and there is a need to find better ways to care for collections and continue to be a collecting institution. The Historical Society has provided funds to hire Larry Bower to do a space planning study for the museum and his final report will be accepted shortly. There are plans to have an expansion planning Committee look at finding the funds to accomplish this in FY0-6. Chairman Johnson questioned if the Carr School was being used. Mr. Olson said two rooms on the second floor have been provided. They are totally secure and would not be considered collection spaces.

Ald. Hess-Mahan inquired about the stable being a possible site for the museum. Mr. Olson said that is one of the options presently on the table. The stable is brick and would be secure and has great potential for collection storage.

Chairman inquired about Mr. Olson's participation in CPA proposals for Washington Park and Farlow Park. Mr. Olson said both groups have used materials to put proposals together. Mr. Olson indicated that the fence project had been completed and new lighting will be installed by the city electricians. The Committee voted 8-0 to approve.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcia Johnson, Chair