

CITY OF NEWTON

BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8, 2005

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

Absent: Ald. Colletti

Other Alderman Present: Ald. Mansfield

Also Present: Fred Guzzi (Veterans' Agent), Fran Towle (Parks/Recreation Commissioner) Peter Karg (Executive Secretary, Elections Commission) Jane Bourque (President Newton Highlands Area Council)

Appointment by His Honor the Mayor

#53-05(2) JOANNE KAZARIAN, 131 Cypress Street, Newton appointed as a full member of the Newton Youth Commission for a term of office which will expire on October 31, 2007. (60-day Board action date 07-01-05.)

ACTION: **NAN 5-0 (Fischman, Sangiolo not voting)**

NOTE: Ms. Kazarian's appointment had been on a previous docket and she was unable to be present at prior meetings. She will not be able to be attending our next two meetings. The Mayor will be requested to resubmit a letter requesting her appointment.

Appointment by His Honor the Mayor

#151-05 JAMES H. MITCHELL, 83 Countryside Road, appointed to the Board of License Commissioners for a term of office expiring June 1, 2011. (60-day Board action date 07-01-05)

ACTION: **APPROVED 5-0 (Baker, Sangiolo not voting)**

NOTE: Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Guzzi joined the Committee for this discussion. Mr. Mitchell was born in Newton, attended all Newton Schools (Bowen, Weeks, Meadowbrook and Newton South). His wife and two daughters also went to Newton schools. He believes Newton is a good city and feels an obligation to give back.

The Committee approved his appointment 6-0 (Ald. Baker, Sangiolo not voting)

Appointment by His Honor the Mayor

#195-05 JANE BROWN, 104 Atwood Avenue Newton appointed as a member of Newton Human Rights Commission for a term of office which will expire on April 30, 2008. (60-day Board action date 8-05-05)

ACTION: **APPROVED 6-0 (Baker not voting)**

NOTE: Jane Brown was present for this discussion. Ms. Brown was a speech and language pathologist working in the Revere Public Schools for 27 years. She is presently very active in the Human Rights Commission. She said her agenda is sending the message of Human Rights. She feels we have a wonderful community with great diversity, but there are pockets of intolerance. Ms. Brown has formed an outreach committee with one goal which is to carry the message throughout the City of diversity. There are study groups planned as well as a Human Rights Fair.

This appointment was approved 6-0

Appointment by His Honor the Mayor

#196-05 KENNETH R. HARTFORD, 30 Clarendon Street, Newton 02460 appointed as a member of the Newton Election Commission for a term expiring on April 1, 2009 (60-day Board action date 8-05-05)

ACTION: **APPROVED 6-0 (Baker not voting)**

NOTE: Mr. Karg and Mr. Hartford were both present. Mr. Hartford will be filling a Republican Seat on the Newton Election Commission. He comes highly recommended by the Republican City Committee. Through the years, he has been very active in the City and is a life-long resident. Mr. Hartford has been involved in politics and hopes to be able to contribute and do what he can to make elections fair and honest.

Ald. Parker said he had the opportunity to talk to the Chair of the Republican City Committee who spoke very highly of Mr. Hartford and recommended him for the position.

Chairman Johnson asked what Mr. Hartford thoughts are regarding security of voting machines. Mr. Hartford responded that Newton has done, in his opinion, reasonably well over the years. Chairman Johnson requested that the Commission really make sure that the electronic machines are protecting the votes of our people and that everyone stays very educated on what is happening outside of Massachusetts with various machines. She emphasized that she would like the Election Commission to be aware of what is happening at the state and national level regarding security of voting machines and be proactive in determining a "plan B" should we have to go to only paper ballots because our machines are determined, at a higher level, to not meet security requirements. She stressed that we should not get caught by surprise.

Ald. Parker said one of the advantages over other machines is that we do have a paper record. He continued to say he hoped the Election Commission would look at getting taller privacy partitions.

Ald. Sangiolo asked about including unenrolled membership as well on the commission. Mr. Karg noted that he had a preliminary discussion with Gayle Smalley and said it would require a home rule petition. Ald. Fischman would like to promote getting more voter participation.

The Committee voted 6-0 in favor.

#198-05 EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION requesting the Board of Aldermen approval of the following:
To fix the date of November 8, 2005 for the election of nine (9) members of the Newton Highlands Area Council. The polling location will be the Hyde Community Center and will open for voting from 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM.

ACTION: **APPROVED 6-0 (Baker not voting)**

NOTE: Janice Bourque, President of the Newton Highlands Area Council and Ald. Mansfield were both present for discussion of this item. Ms. Bourque said normally voting for this Council occurs in June and it is very hard to raise awareness. What is presently being proposed would allow visibility to be raised through Village Day as well as give people the summer to get nomination papers.

Mr. Karg said since these elections would occur simultaneously and there needed to be some separation. Paul Berg of NewtonTV has agreed that his conference room may be used for voting purposes during this election. Mr. Karg noted that having the election and term of office coincide with the regular schedule of the Board of Aldermen would encourage voters. He further emphasized that the final Board Order be clear on the fact that the term of office would begin on January 1st and coincide with the regular scheduled voting for elected officials that will be in November. Ald. Mansfield pointed out that, unlike elections for the Mayor, aldermen and school committee members, the Newton Highlands Area Council does not involve a preliminary.

Mr. Karg noted that information will be available in the Election Commission office and that there will be support in providing technical assistance to the Council to hold the Election. The Council in general facilitates their own election. Mr. Karg has contacted the League of Women Voters who may be able to help staff the election and the Election Commission will provide the worksheets, print the ballots and certify the election results.

Ms. Bourque stated they are trying to raise awareness to get the information out in their newsletter. Functions such as Village Day will offer the opportunity to recruit potential candidates. There has been discussion to possibly engage some high school students who are involved in political clubs to help publicize the forthcoming election. Ms Bourque also stated that she would encourage local merchants to post in signage in their windows. Another suggestion was to get the Tab and NewTV interested in doing a story on the Newton Highlands Area Council.

The Committee voted 6-0 for approval.

REFERRED TO PROGRAMS & SERVICES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#210-05 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting an appropriation in the amount of \$31,540 from Lottery Receipts for the purpose of funding tree emergency response costs by contractors working for the Parks and Recreation Department. Most of these costs were incurred as a result of the spring Nor'easter at the end of May. This request also includes additional funds in the amount of \$5,200 for the remainder of this fiscal year in case there are more high wind storms during the month of June.

ACTION: **APPROVED 7-0**

NOTE: Ms. Towle, Parks and Recreation Commissioner, explained that the May storm resulted in 20 trees coming down throughout the City along with limbs that had to be cleaned up. Ald. Fischman asked if the \$5,200 was absolutely needed and was told the figure was based on storms occurring during the prior five Junes. The Committee voted to approve \$31,540 needed for contractors work as well as the \$5,200 in additional funds for the remainder of this fiscal year in case there are more high wind storms during the month of June.

#79-04 ALD. PARKER & GERST requesting discussion of the development of a Citywide wireless internet access network in Newton.

ACTION: **APPROVED 6-0**

NOTE: Ald. Parker said there have been meetings with Anne Cornaro (Director of Information Technology) Joe Mulvey (IT) Bob Rooney (Public Works) Theresa Parks, (Planning) and Eileen McGettigan (Law) to look into what can be done to offer wireless internet access in Newton.

City Interest in this Initiative Reasons to do this include revenue generation as well as providing services. Bob Rooney, Public Works Commissioner, is interested in participating in this effort. His department had 30,000 water meters in different buildings throughout the city and presently employees must be sent out to read every one of those meters. With a wireless system, an electronic transponder could be placed on every meter that would send that information back to City Hall. This would save the City money as well as be an additional benefit to the property owner. If residents go on vacation and have a leaky pipe, there could be a signal that would warn that an unusual amount of water is being used. There is a photo sensor on city street lights. That photo sensor could be unscrewed, this unit could be plugged and then the photo sensor replugged fitting right on the existing street lights.

Steps to Take - A survey could be done for approximately \$14,000 to see how many of these units would be needed. The purchase and installation would be well under a million dollars. Customer service would probably be contracted out. Ald. Parker is working with Ms. Cornaro and Mr. Rooney on a proposal to the Mayor for \$14,000 necessary to do the site survey for the City.

Benefits - Practical advantages include the fact that it works anywhere in the city, much lower price point, and money would go to the city. If you were in another city that uses it, you too could have availability. In Ald. Parker's opinion, there is enormous upside potential on the

revenue side. He continued to say that if the million dollars were spent, we would see it back within a year and after that the net could be between two and three million dollars a year. Ald. Parker would like to report back to the Committee in a few months.

The Committee voted to hold 7-0.

#432-02 ALD. PARKER, JOHNSON, LINSKY, LIPSITT, LAPPIN, BAKER requesting ordinance change and home rule legislation to implement a policy of indexing automobile excise tax to emissions and/or fuel economy, so low-pollution vehicles have lower taxes than those that pollute more.

ACTION: **HELD 7-0**

NOTE: **Background** - Ald. Parker indicated to the Committee that Ms. Smalley of the Law Department had done quite a bit of research on this item. Mr. Funk said that there was limited staff time available and wanted to get a sense from the Committee whether this item would be worth the time spent by staff to proceed.

Presently our auto excise tax rates are based on a formula that is consistent with every city and town in the state which essentially is based on the value of the vehicle. What this proposal seeks to do is to say the heavier, more polluting cars tend to be doing more damage to our streets and more damage to the air we breathe, whereas a more fuel efficient car (hybrid) would have ultra low emissions doing less harm. In order to encourage that, the idea would be to have the most fuel efficient cars get a slight discount on their auto excise tax and the less fuel efficient vehicles get a penalty. Under existing state laws, we cannot do anything that changes taxes on a local level except as explicitly permitted by State law. However, there have been a number of bills floating around the legislature that talk around the corners of this issue. Ald. Parker has had discussions with people in the State House, including in the Speaker's Office and House Ways and Means where they think that a bill like this might have a chance.

Questions/Concerns - Ald. Fischman questioned if people with economic issues and had older cars could be negatively impacted. Ald. Parker responded that a possible approach to addressing this would be that the existing tax is based on the value of the vehicle; a brand new car could possibly be paying as much as \$100. to \$200. a year and an older car could only be paying \$20. a year. Even the worst offender would only have an increase of \$6.00. Ald. Hess-Mahan commented that one way to deal with this would be not to have it be retroactive so only new cars would be affected. President Baker pointed out that since the tax on older vehicles is so small that maybe this idea should only apply to cars that are three years of age or less. Another concern of Ald. Hess-Mahan was he had been advised that if this were approved, the Citizens for Limited Taxation would encourage local groups like the Newton Taxpayer's Association to sue.

Next Steps - Chairman Johnson suggested that the Ald. Parker convene a meeting with the co-docketors in order that a plan be put in place to make sure that as many questions and concerns are addressed before any home rule petition is written and brought to the full board. She also would like to have a conversation with members of our state delegation to determine its likelihood of being taken up/passage. All of this should be completed before the item is scheduled again.

There was a motion to hold by the Committee and the vote was 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcia Johnson, Chair