

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2003

Present: Ald. Merrill, Coletti, Sangiolo, Parker, Lipsitt, Johnson, Fischman

Absent: Ald. Gentile

Other Alderman Present: Ald. Stewart

Others: Fran Towle (Parks and Recreation Commissioner) Robert DeRubeis (Deputy Commissioner) Jeff Young (Superintendent of Schools) Beverly Droz (Director of Volunteer Services) Beverley Stachowicz (Director of Human Services) Fran Zilonis (School Department, Director of Information Technology)

REFERRED TO PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AND FINANCE

#115-03 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting an appropriation in the amount of \$199,384 from Budget Reserve for the purpose of funding current and future snow and ice and tree emergency expenses in the Parks and Recreation Department.

ACTION: APPROVED 7-0

NOTE: Fran Towle and Robert DeRubeis were present for discussion of this item. Commissioner Towle explained that this request was for snow and tree emergency costs in the amount of \$199,384. This consists of costs for three snowstorms.

Ald. Sangiolo questioned why snow was not hauled to Nahanton Park and asked if a plan was in place to handle this. She noted Nahanton Park was not being considered for the Dog Park because the area was needed for snow dumping, but if it is not being used, Ald. Sangiolo would like it back on the table for further discussion for use as a dog park.

President Lipsitt noted there was a resolution approved by the Full Board and sent to the Mayor asking that the Aldermen not be approached for money after it has been spent. It appears that the Recreation Department has been spending money it does not have. President Lipsitt urged that when this item goes to the Finance Committee, the approved resolution be brought to the table for further discussion.

Ald. Coletti agreed with President Lipsitt and said if the money needed is beyond what was allocated, calls should be made either to the Public

Facilities Committee Chair or the Finance Committee Chair just to inform them. The concern is that a certain amount of money was spent in the first 48 hours and then a significant amount in the next 168 hours that was not of an emergency nature.

Ald. Parker felt it was the responsibility of the Mayor, Chief Administrative Officer, and Budget Officer to come up with a plan. Ald. Parker felt there should be a docket item to discuss with the Mayor's office handling snow and ice monies that go beyond the appropriation.

Ald. Lipsitt moved approval of the item and agreed to docket an item #115-03(2) to address procedures dealing with snow expenses. The Committee voted 7-0 in favor.

REFERRED TO PROG. & SERV.&FINANCE COMMITTEES

33-03 ALD. COLETTI requesting discussion with representatives of the School Department and Superintendent of Schools regarding lease vs. purchase options for technology equipment to develop a policy for acquisition of computers and technology for schools.

ACTION: NAN 4-0

NOTE: Superintendent Young and Dr. Fran Zilonis were both present for this discussion. Dr. Zilonis provided a very comprehensive handout (attached) for technology at Newton North High School, which was used as an outline for discussion on this, item. Supt. Young reported that this project is portable and can be used whatever the final outcome of the Newton North Citizens Task Force is. There is an Intranet already in the system and it is hoped to be able to post lessons and integration ideas. There are important conferences through the email system which people are not presently able to access. Ald. Parker agreed that this technology is needed as an important part of the educational infrastructure. He said the last time the schools purchased Apple Computer products, they overpaid.

Ald. Coletti would like the issue of technology for other schools addressed at the next Finance Committee scheduled for Monday, March 10, 2003.

Ald. Parker suggested a resolution to the Mayor requesting the release of funds so that necessary technology items for NNHS can be purchased during FY2003. Ald. Lipsitt indicated that at this time it was premature for a resolution but would support one when appropriate. Ald. Coletti expressed concern that the City enters into any lease agreement without getting approval from the Board of Aldermen. He went on to say the Comptroller is against leasing the equipment.

Ald. Parker suggested possible resolution not officially voted on by Committee (See attached draft)

Ald. Lipsitt moved NAN and the Committee agreed 7-0 on this item.

ITEMS REFERRED TO PROGRAMS AND SERVICES COMMITTEE BY FULL BOARD ON JANUARY 21, 2002

#303-02 MAYOR COHEN AND PRES. LIPSITT proposing an ordinance to implement a senior volunteer work for tax credit program under M.G.L. Ch.59, Sec.5K.

ACTION: APPROVED 5-1-1 (Sangiolo opposed; Parker abstaining)

NOTE: President Lipsitt said from her viewpoint there are issues such as how would this process work as a management issue and how would people be recruited. Ald. Stewart has concerns regarding this docket item. (See letter from Ald. Stewart dated March 5, 2003 attached) Ms. Stachowicz reported that in some communities this program has been used for the last 10 or 12 years. In many communities it is run by volunteers such as the Council on Aging. Ms. Stachowicz said if a person was deemed eligible, an appointment would be set up in Human Services and a social worker would ask questions regarding interests, talents, skills, etc. At that point the interviewers would meet as a team and pull up the available jobs and match skills. An interview would be set up with the candidate and the department head and then there would be certification of workers and hours by the department. Beverley Droz, Director of the Office of Volunteer Services, agrees that the start would be in the Human Services Department. Human Services will be involved in the selection process until such time they feel that it can be transitioned to another group or individual. There would be a database to match appropriate departments with seniors.

Thereasa Walch, a resident of 33 Wallace Street, Newton Highlands was very much in favor of this program and hoped it would be implemented.

Ald. Parker questioned if this item is designed to help people in need; it is not an efficient way. Ald. Parker asked what kind of supervision or training would be needed for volunteers that come into this program. He questioned what would be done if someone applied who had need but not the appropriate skills that match an available position. Ms. Stachowics hopes the schools would be involved in this as well as city departments.

President Lipsitt said it would be wonderful if we could say we have \$50,000 to divide up among the neediest. We don't have a mechanism for

that and what we have in front of us is many possible ways to address a series of needs in the community. There are ways to have reduced water /sewer bills depending on age and income. President Lipsitt sees this program as another step in support of people in need in our community. She strongly feels all options should be looked into in order to support our seniors in their need to pay their property taxes. Ald. Coletti agreed with President Lipsitt not to close off any opportunity of the \$50,000 to \$75,000 that would come out of overlay reserve that would put aside in a fund. In his opinion, this is just another mechanism to allow people to feel productive in their senior years. Ald. Stewart said after the override, a number of people created a group that met and talked about what could be done to alleviate the plight of people who could not pay their real estate taxes and the outcome was a proposal to look at the best thing for the City of Newton to be doing. There was a proposal to put together a tax equity task force, which has in effect become a tax equity study group. If it succeeds, there will be a proposal to create a very formal tax equity commission with appointments by the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen. The function of the group would be to look at the whole range of proposals to deal with the inequities of the property tax system. In some cases, seniors do not have to pay the full amount of their property tax that is allocated to schools because they don't have children in schools. There are a whole variety of bills in the legislature that would work with the property tax system all aimed at making it more equitable. Chairman Johnson stated it was important to be fair and consistent. Ald. Stewart distributed a memo to the Committee regarding questions and issues. (attached)

President Lipsitt said even if someone is income qualified, they are not guaranteed there will be a task for them to do. There are many requests from schools for volunteers. She feels this item has been thought through. We can indicate to the members of our community that this Board of Aldermen cares about the fact that there are people in this community who cannot meet their financial obligations.

Chairman Johnson questioned the criteria for selection. President Lipsitt noted that other cities and towns usually take people on first come, first served basis, after having done a skills match with departmental needs. Ald. Sangiolo shared the same concerns that Ald. Stewart has. She said if there is \$50,000 set aside for this program, why not just give it out to the people who are eligible and have applied to receive it She went on to ask why are we making seniors work in order to get a tax credit. Ald. Sangiolo is in favor of money for seniors or other people in need that meet an income eligibility requirement. From Chairman Johnson 's viewpoint, the benefit of a program such as this allows people who don't want a handout

but want to be able to receive help and this would be better for their self-esteem. Ald. Fischman said it was a multi-faceted opportunity. Fifty communities have implemented versions of the program and this could be a good opportunity for those who have never volunteered. Ald. Lipsitt stated this program is not meant to fit every problem for every individual, but the City is looking for a way to help. Ald. Merrill would like to see a mechanism for people to come in and file an application and have it handled in a very confidential manner.

Ald. Parker feels giving money to people directly would be the most efficient way of accomplishing that. If we are trying to help people in need, this is the wrong way to accomplish it because the people in the greatest need are not necessarily going to be able-bodied or mentally fit to come in and help. The people in the greatest need might be homebound. Ald. Parker said he would rather take the \$50,000 and give it to them if we are limited to \$50,000. If the idea is to help self-esteem and they are able bodied, why couldn't they get a part-time job. There is a potential harm if someone would like to volunteer but really is not able to handle certain tasks.

Ald. Sangiolo is not able to support this and would support something that helps everyone.

The Committee voted 5-1-1 (Sangiolo opposed, Parker abstaining)

#220-02

ALD. LIPSITT, BULLWINKLE, COLETTI & MAYOR COHEN requesting discussion and possible implementation of M.G.L. Ch. 59, Sec 5K to reduce local property tax liability by up to \$500 per year for senior citizens in exchange for volunteer service to the City.

ACTION: NAN 6-0

REFERRED TO PROGRAMS & SERVICES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#264-02

ALD. SALVUCCI AND LUCKY STAR GROUP requesting policy discussion regarding the feasibility of allowing taxpayers to voluntarily make donations to establish an Aid to the Elderly Taxation Fund for the purpose of defraying the real estate taxes of elderly citizens in Newton
FINANCE APPROVED 7-0 ON 01-13-03)

ACTION: APPROVED 7-0 (See Report)

NOTE: Mr. George Foord, a Trustee of the Lucky Star Group, was present to discuss this item. He said it was the hope that the Board of Aldermen would allow the citizens of Newton to send in some money to help this particular group of people. Mr. Foord further explained that Lucky Star is

a public charity group trying to engage in advocacy for seniors. Ald. Salvucci expressed his opinion that this is a worthwhile program. Ald. Lipsitt questioned whether there are any outstanding issues from the City's point of view. Chairman Johnson spoke with the City Solicitor and clarified that what we are adopting as written by the state legislation General Laws c. 60 §3D. Newton would not be drafting any special ordinance for this at this time. According to the legislation, a taxation aid committee will be established and three residents of the City that would sit on this committee who would be selected by the Mayor or "board of selectmen as the case may be". Ald. Parker had concerns regarding making sure there would be some input from the Board of Aldermen regarding membership, term limits and criteria. Ald. Parker suggested implementing ordinance that sets out terms, membership, etc. and have the Board of Aldermen approval. Ald. Lipsitt agreed regarding the need for an ordinance to be more specific on the details of operation. Ald. Parker considered it a friendly amendment to create a #264-02(2) to go on the Programs and Services Committee Agenda and approve #264-02.

President Lipsitt said the question for the Committee is whether we want to have the ordinance language at the same time we vote the acceptance of the State Statute or separately draft and approve language. Ald. Parker moved to create the following docket item: #264-02(2) PROGRAMS AND SERVICES COMMITTEE requesting local implementation ordinance for local acceptance of Sec. 60 §3D The committee voted to approve by a vote 5 in favor to create #264-02(02) (Fischman, Coletti, Johnson, Sangiolo, Parker) 2 abstaining (Merrill and Lipsitt)

There was a motion to approve #264-02 [the state legislation, as written] GL c.30 § 3D) The vote was 7-0 in favor.

#158-01(2) PROGRAMS & SERVICES COMMITTEE requesting ordinance to implement increase in eligibility threshold for Clause 41A Senior Citizen Tax Deferral program.

ACTION: HELD 7-0.

The meeting adjourned at 10:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcia Johnson
Chair

