

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2002

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

Absent: Ald Merrill

Other Aldermen Present: Ald. Baker, Stewart, Mansfield, Schnipper, Yates, Basham and Lennon

Officials Present: City Solicitor, Dan Funk, Assoc. City Solicitor Gayle Smalley, Election Commissioners Smith and Moffenson, Acting Executive Secretary of the Election Commission, Karen Griffey and new appointee Peter Karg, Commissioner of Parks & Recreation, Fran Towle, City Clerk/Clerk of the Board, Edward English. Chief Budget Officer Sandy Pooler, Mayor Cohen, Asst. Superintendent Jim Marini, former School Committee members, Susie Heyman, Verne Vance, and Andy Vizilus

#9-02 Approved

Voting Yes: Ald. Coletti, Parker, Lipsitt;

Voting No: Ald. Gentile and Sangiolo;

Abstaining: Ald Johnson and Fischman

Note: President Lipsitt thought the date should be the latest date possible, Version 1 (referring to the several versions presented by the City Solicitor) with the goal being to maximize the availability to all who want to run as possible. President Lipsitt is not unalterably opposed to Version 4. Ald. Baker prefers version 4 as it provides a level of certainty to the process. Ald. Sangiolo preferred Version 4 over version 1. It is important that candidates to be forthright about their place of residence. Also she has a concern regarding the fact that in Version 3 allows others to take out nomination papers on the behalf of someone else - "any person acting on his [the candidate's] behalf pursuant to his signed authorization secures blank forms for nomination as a candidate..." Ald. Fischman thought that Version 4 was better than Version 1. Ald Johnson spoke in favor of the set date of Version 4. Ald. Parker thought those Versions 2 & 3 seem rather arbitrary and difficult to enforce. Version 4 limits the availability for those who want to run for office so prefers Version 1. Ald. Mansfield reiterated his support for Version 1, seeing that it is our current practice, and agrees that it should be codified in our City Charter. Ald. Gentile cannot support Version 4, as it does not allow enough flexibility for those who want to run for office. However, he did state that what is most important is that a candidate is a resident, when collecting signatures, of the Ward from which s/he states s/he is running. He has faith in our Election Commission and office that they will effectively administer the process and

therefore supports Version 3. Ald. Colletti thinks that the date for submitting papers, Version 1, presents the best opportunity for flexibility. Ald. Baker believes that Version 4, rather than 1, actually represents our current practice and that a floating date, Version 3, is more difficult to administer. The two major points, though very different, made by the Committee are as follows:

- The date for determining residency should be as flexible as possible to encourage more not less people from running for office – Version 1
- The date for setting residency should in fact ensure that when a candidate is collecting signatures s/he should be a resident of the Ward from which s/he says s/he is running.

#20-02 Approved 7-0

Note: President Lipsitt was honored to be able to recommend Edward English for reappointment as it is one of the great pleasures she has as President of the Board. Mr. English is honored and grateful for the opportunity that he has had to support the Board of Aldermen. Mr. English spoke a moment on his accomplishments, most notably the integration of Legistar. Ald Parker and Johnson spoke of Mr. English's contribution to the Board and the city.

#56-02 Approved 6-0, Ald. Sangiolo not voting

Commissioner Towle explained that there has been very little snow and that the city has done an excellent job to do as much work in-house [without the use of Contractors] for the two storms that we have had. They have been dealing with trees, both in preparation for storms as well as dealing with trees and limbs that have fallen during a storm. The seed money of \$24,000 plus Overtime, \$10,000 is immediately gone after the first storm. A 2-inch storm uses up the seed money. Ald. Coletti expressed concern of freezing this \$176,442 that could be otherwise used for another purpose, while we wait for a storm. It seems premature and she should request on 50% of this amount. Ald. Parker expressed his concern about the seed money year, after year, being too low – as Parks & Recreation always need to come in for an additional appropriation. They should budget more realistically.

#59-02 Held 7-0

Note: Mayor Cohen presented the history as to how he arrived at his decision to request that the override question be placed on the ballot. He also expressed that Newton is not unique and that other communities are in a similar situation. Since 1992 virtually all of the surrounding communities have had an override and a number of communities are considering pursuing one as well. Newton will have new revenue of \$4.9M [\$35.M for the schools and \$1.4M for the city side] The schools need the additional funding to address, security, makeup of certain structural deficits and to keep pace. On the city side Newton has to allocate funds for its security initiatives, that were not needed prior to September 11th, 2001. If the city went with a level-funded budget, he thought that the cuts that would be necessary would be too much for the city. Mayor Cohen stated that 65% of the city-side of the budget is allocated to the DPW, Fire, and Police. So if we have to make cuts,

this is where they would be. The people of Newton have a right to expect more than this budget would provide. Therefore there is no responsible way to adequately maintain our services without a 2.5 override. He also wants to ensure that our schools continue to be excellent. Newton is a role-model for other cities. Ald. Gentile asked the longevity and impact of the override. The Mayor stated that if this override passes, the \$11.5M will permanently be added to the tax base. The cost will be about \$280 for residences that are valued at \$600k or less. Ald. Parker asked if the Executive Department had considered other options for raising money, other than an override, e.g. a local income tax which can be achieved through a Home Rule Petition. He raised this as many residents are land-rich and cash poor. Cohen was open to looking at other options, but the length of time it takes for a Home Rule Petition [up to 6 months] rules it out for this budget cycle – but would be interested in ideas in the future. He did remind members of the Committee that there is a State law that provides for a \$700 credit for those over 65 who pay more than 10% of their income for property tax. He also would like to see this same group of people being exempt from the impact of the override and discussions are occurring regarding this fact.

Ald. Coletti asked if an override vote were to take place on April 30th when would the Board receive the budget for FY'03. Mr. Pooler stated that the budgets would be submitted by April 15th [the allocation budget] and if the override passes, then a new budget with restoration of funds would be submitted. Ald. Coletti expressed concern regarding the lack of five-year budget plan. He also expressed other concerns regarding utilization of Budget Reserve, and the impact that upcoming Collective Bargaining will have on the future and possible overrides being needed. He wants to see the monetary value of the proposed cuts. The Mayor did not agree with Ald. Coletti on how to utilize the Budget Reserves in relation to operating budget. Mr. Pooler and the Mayor disputed the value of five-year plans in making financial predictions.

Ald. Parker asked if the override passes would the city be having a more responsible CIP budget. The Mayor stated free cash is our safety net of funds left over to use for a long list of capital items. He stated that maintenance comes out of the operating budget. Ald. Parker encouraged an increase of capital spending to be commensurate with salaries so that the people who work for the city have the equipment that they need to do the job.

Ald. Gentile expressed concern that we [Executive Department and Board of Alderman] should have seen the need for an override coming before October'01. Mayor Cohen stated that in his State of the City address he gave a warning. He stated that Newton has and will continue to be prepared. Ald. Gentile stated that maybe we need to be more reliant on free cash in 2003 and the city needs to tighten up before spending more. Mr. Pooler supported the Mayor in his statement that the city should reduce its reliance on free cash. Pres. Lipsitt wondered if our SBA money will be slower in coming from the State. The Mayor assured us that old commitments for this money will not be effected as the Legislature has authorized the funds. Also the funding plan for the high schools has a cushion built in should there be an SBA delay. Pres. Lipsitt asked, since the School Committee had not yet approved the budget, had the Mayor and the School Committee considered the enormous budget, e.g. in areas such as Human

Resources. She also asked how we can we be sure that \$11.5 is the right amount. Mayor Cohen and Asst. Superintendent Marini shared that they had considered consolidations of city and school departments, e.g. Human Resources, Building Maintenance and had dismissed them as the gains were not there. Pres. Lipsitt wanted a clearer sense of where the \$11.5 M would be going, i.e. what are we buying with this money.

The Committee asked that for our next meeting that Mayor present, in writing what cost saving options have been made and/or considered and dismissed [and why] along with potential areas for savings, e.g. Printing. Pres. Lipsitt and Ald. Johnson expressed the thought that the override cannot be successful unless the schools make a good faith effort to economize as much as possible – we need to see the number of what has and could be done to do so. Some other thoughts brought forward by Alderman Parker and Baker, what about city employees who take home city cars at night, the Mayor should also speak to the implications for the future with collective bargaining and make a projection as to budgetary implications. Ald. Gentile stated that the city needs to tighten up and that an override is putting off the problem.

The expectation of the Committee is that the Mayor will be able to speak to our collective concerns at our next meeting.

#57-02 Held (7-0)

#45-02 Held (7-0)