

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PROGRAMS & SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7, 2001

Present: Ald. Merrill, Johnson, Baker, Tattenbaum, Parker Sangiolo

Absent: Ald. Gentile, Coletti

Also Present: Ald. Mansfield

Also Present Alan Licarie (Executive Secretary, Election Commission) Dan Funk (City Solicitor)

Re-appointments by His Honor the Mayor

40-01 The following individuals are re-appointed to the NEWTON COMMONWEALTH GOLF FOUNDATION (60 day Board action date 4/6/01:

C. Steve Meyer, 154 Woodchester Drive, Chestnut Hill, effective 12/31/00, for a term to expire 12/31/03.

ACTION: APPROVED 5-0

NOTE: Mr. Meyer said the Commission has been overseeing management of the Golf Course, that the contract with Sterling Management has been renewed, and that they are doing an excellent job. He added that he is also impressed with the work of the Chairman, Fran Rice. He said that what is clear to the members of the foundation regarding the pipe that spilled sewage recently is that the clean up and the fixing of the pipes should not be the responsibility of the course. The question is whether it is the responsibility of the City of Newton or of the MWRA, depending on whose pipe it is. Mr. Meyer has been on the Commission for about four terms. Ald. Johnson asked about the fertilizer seeping into the pond, particularly with respect to its effects to the Brighton side of the course. Mr. Meyer responded that there was some investigation of using a more natural fertilizing method and that Sterling Management had looked into that and was not opposed to it, if it could be done in an effective way that would take good care of the course. Ald. Merrill asked whether they had a relationship with GREENCAP and Mr. Meyer didn't know the name of the organizations that they talked with about pesticides and fertilizers and other environmentally-appropriate treatments for the course, but that there had been those kind of discussions. Ald. Baker moved approval and the

motion to approve was passed unanimously 5-0 with Ald. Sangiolo not voting, since she had yet to arrive.

REFERRED TO PROGRAMS & SERVICES & FINANCE COMMITTEES

74-01 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend \$55,000 from Budget Reserve for the purpose of supplementing the Law Department's Legal Assistance account, which principal use has been for labor counsel.

ACTION: APPROVED 5-0

NOTE: City Solicitor Dan Funk joined the Committee for discussion of this item. He informed the Committee the Law Department budget is a conduit for the labor counsel funds. In other words, he just pays the bills and doesn't necessarily really supervise the labor counsel. The labor counsel is hired for two primary reasons; collective bargaining and unfair labor practices disputes. He said that the intensity of bargaining this year and a number of unfair labor practices complaints has greatly increased the amount of time need for the outside counsel's firm this year. In particular, there have been a number of unfair labor practices and complaints from the Police Department, primarily grievances complaining about discipline procedures.

In the budget, \$65,000 had been set aside for outside labor counsel and half way through the year \$60,000 had already been expended. Thus, Solicitor Funk's request for another \$55,000 to get through the year at the same rate. In answer to a question, he said this appropriate request has nothing to do with a Boston College appeal. He already has \$20,000 in his budget to use for Stop & Shop and/or Boston College appeals and since there will not be a further Stop & Shop appeal necessary (that case is winding down) that \$20,000 will be used for the Boston College appeal and already has been encumbered for that purpose.

Ald. Tattenbaum has asked if something else is going on in the Police Department that is causing there to be so many complaints. The City Solicitor answered that all he could really point to was that the Police recently joined a new union and there was a new union counsel and those two factors might be combining to increase the number of complaints. He added that there has been good communication between his department and the outside counsel, the Mayor and the Police Department regarding these issues and they are aware of the problem and attempting to address it as best they can. Ald. Johnson moved approval, which passed 5-0 with Ald. Sangiolo not voting.

42-01 ALD. PARKER & LIPSITT requesting discussion of resolution endorsing state legislation to create universal system of quality health care for all Mass. residents.

ACTION: HELD 6-0

NOTE: Two Newton residents who are advocating passage of universal health care legislation for Massachusetts, Barbara Kovar-Selling and Marvin Miller, joined the Committee for this discussion. The legislation creates a Massachusetts Health Care Trust, which will provide universal coverage to all residents of the state. The cost of expanding coverage to residents who currently have inadequate coverage or none at all and the cost of this would be covered in part by existing state expenditures on health coverage and would effectively save both public and private payers money by cutting down on administrative overhead by an estimated 60%. The proponents testified to the Committee that Massachusetts currently spends as much on health care as the entire country of Canada and that right now many of the people who are paying a lot for health coverage in Massachusetts do not have the right to choose which doctors they see because they are members of managed care providers like HMO's and PPO's.

They explained that a universal single payer system would 1) cost less, 2) allow choice of providers, 3) provide universal quality coverage and 4) improve the fiscal climate of health care coverage in Massachusetts, providing stability for hospitals and other health care organizations that right now are having some fiscal times and certainly are being subjected to takeover bids and other fiscal strains.

The advocates estimated that this legislation is currently about 20 legislators short of passage and they hope it can gain momentum and support.

Ald. Merrill asked about what the limitations of HMO coverage were. The answer provided was that you can only see doctors in your group and also there is a lot of paperwork involved with HMO coverage, so doctors spend a lot of their time keeping records of all the different HMO's and completing the necessary paperwork, while patients are restricted in the doctor's that they can see.

The proponents were asked for an example of how the single payer system might work. The model they suggested was that of Medicare, which is a very efficient system with very little overhead. This proposal would essentially expand Medicare coverage to everyone and expand what is covered, so that medicines and other things currently left out of Medicare would be included in a single payer universal care health care system.

Ald. Tattenbaum moved approval of endorsing the legislation. Ald. Baker expressed concern that the healthcare system in Massachusetts is not in good shape now, but he is worried about whether this proposal is the right medicine for it. Although he said that in the past he always supported

single payer initiatives, he doesn't feel he has enough expertise to make that judgement. He is not sure if all of the objectives of this proposal could be achieved.

There was some further discussion among committee members about where the committee should go with this item. Ald. Johnson proposed that we have another discussion of the item where we invite in Newton's legislative delegation, particularly the sponsors of this item, Representatives Ruth Balsler, Kay Khan, and Senator Creem. Ald. Baker suggested we also be joined by the Human Services Benefits Manager Paul Deschenes and Ald. Tattenbaum suggested we take it up the item in time for any hearings that might take place on this item at the State House, so the endorsement of the Board of Aldermen could be included in the testimony at that point. With that desire to take it up as soon as possible, preferably the first meeting in April, the item was held 6 in favor, 0 opposed.

REFERRED TO PROG.& SERVICES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

55-01 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend \$14,600 from Budget Reserve for the purpose of adding an Assistant Executive Secretary position in the Election Commission department.

ACTION: HELD

94-00 ALD. PARKER, JOHNSON & SANGIOLO requesting discussion regarding the operation of the current voting machines and their possible replacement.

ACTION: HELD 5-0

442-00 ALD. JOHNSON & ALD. PARKER requesting a dialogue with the Election Commission & Executive Secretary of the Commission regarding election processes, procedures and practices. **(PENDING RULES SUB-COMMITTEE)**

ACTION: HELD 5-0

NOTE The committee was joined for items #55-01, 94-00 and 442-00 by Alan Licarie, Executive Secretary of the Election Commission. A number of committee members expressed concern that the Election Commissioners had decided not to participate in the Committee's deliberations on these items and not to join us, and also that they had sent a fairly hostile and unresponsive letter as a reply to our requests for some information on how they were planning on addressing some of the problems faced by the department and invitation for them to meet with us.

Ald. Baker said that the letter from the Programs and Services Committee to the Election Commission was “reserved” and “reasoned and proportionate,” but their response was unnecessarily adversarial in tone and that he found it troubling. Ald. Johnson said she was appalled at the tone of the Election Commission’s letter and she is struggling with the problem of how to deal with their response. She said that someone from the commission should have come to the meeting and that she was disappointed that none had chosen to do so. Ald. Tattenbaum said that she is not happy, to say the least, with the letter from the commission, but she doesn’t want to hold up progress on the position of Deputy Director of Elections/Assistant Executive Secretary.

Ald. Merrill said that it is unlikely we are going to have much dialogue with the current Commission because they seem pretty unwilling to engage in dialogue with us. Ald. Baker said it would not be appropriate trying to discuss this matter with the current commission members. Ald. Johnson moved hold on Item #442-00, in hopes there might be a possibility with the future commission and Ald. Sangiolo and Baker supported the motion to hold. The Committee voted to hold that item until there was a newly constituted commission that might be willing to engage in a dialogue with the Committee and the Board of Aldermen.

On item #94-00, the Committee briefly discussed the possibility of appointing a inter-departmental task force to evaluate different types of voting systems. Committee members felt that because the membership of the Election Commission was in flux, we should hold off in discussing this until we resolve the other issues. The item was held 6-0.

Item #55-01- Secretary Licarie said he needs someone with technical skills and computer skills to help recreate the systems the systems of his department. Ald. Johnson said that the job description was lacking a discussion of systems thinking and process improvement skills. Ald. Merrill said he didn’t think that the grade was consistent with the background that was being requested. Since a Bachelor’s Degree was optional , why was the position classified as an H8? Ald.Parker expressed the problem of combining two roles into one position, a technical role and a supervisory role. Ald. Baker said the job needs to be cast to allow a person to step into Secretary Licarie’s shoes. Ald. Johnson pointed out the applicant would need to have systems design skills and the job description needs to be revised to reflect those dimensions. After more discussion along these lines, the committee decided there should be more work on the job description before the Committee takes any action on the item.

The Committee asked Ald. Johnson to take the lead in working with the Human Resources Department to craft some new language for the job description and the Chair also offered the opportunity to participate in

those discussions to all other committee members and Ald. Parker, Johnson and others will meet with Human Services either via e-mail or in person prior to the next meeting so that there can be a draft that reflects the Committee's concerns prepared before that time. Secretary Licarie expressed concern that the committee may be holding off on action on this item by virtue of concern that Election Commission members were absent. The Chair responded that based on the substance of what was before the Committee, there was ample reason to support the motion to hold regardless of concerns about the professionalism of the Election Commission in refusing to meet with the Committee. The motion to hold was unanimously supported by all the members of the Committee, 5 in favor, 0 opposed with Ald. Tattenbaum not voting.

Respectfully submitted,

Ken Parker, Chair