

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PROGRAMS & SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2001

Present: Ald. Parker (Chairman) Ald. Merrill, Johnson, Sangiolo, Baker, Tattenbaum

Absent: Ald. Coletti, Gentile

Also Present: Public Works Commissioner Rooney, Associate City Solicitor Smalley, and Chair of the Board of Assessors Dromey.

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):
A. Roberta Kosberg 173 Lakeshore Road, #3, Brighton, effective 3/31/00, for a term to expire 3/31/03.

ACTION: NAN 6-0

NOTE: Because Ms. Kosberg is not a Newton resident, the Committee moved no action necessary which prevailed 6 in favor, none opposed.

- # 12-00(2) HIS HONOR THE MAYOR re-appointing on February 25, 2000 JOSEPHINE PEPPER, 859 Beacon Street, Newton Centre to the NEWTON PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION for a term of office expiring January 1, 2002 (Board action date 5/5/00).

ACTION: NAN 6-0

NOTE: Due to Ms. Pepper's passing away, the Committee voted no action necessary 6-0 and created docket item #12-00(2b) which is a testimonial resolution thanking Josephine Pepper for her years of service.

- #40-01(2) PROGRAMS AND SERVICES COMMITTEE requesting a report on the status of repairs and improvements to the Newton Commonwealth Golf Course.

ACTION: NAN 6-0

NOTE: Commissioner Rooney joined us to discuss the sewage pipe that runs through the golf course. He explained to the Committee that this pipe used to be part of the Cochituate Aqueduct and carried water through the City. It was converted for use as a sewage pipe a number of years ago. The last 500-ft. of the pipe runs under the golf course. The history of the problem goes back about a year ago where there was a break in the pipe, which spilled some sewage onto the site. When they went into fix the pipe, a wall on the property was damaged. Commissioner Rooney said that wall was built too

close to the pipe and the Golf Course Foundation should have consulted with the Public Works Department before building the wall and should have given them a 20 ft. easement and, therefore, it was necessary to damage the wall to get to the pipe. Six months later, there was another failure in the pipe one hundred feet upstream from the first failure, at which point a robot camera was sent through the pipe to check it for damage. The pipe is 40 inches in diameter and currently carries about 4 million gallons a day of sewage. Hydrogen sulfite gas, which is a corrosive gas, has been corroding the concrete. They do not know the source of that gas, but suspect it may be from the MWRA end of the pipe, not originating in Newton. The pipe is stepped in many places and that area cannot be relined and therefore needs to be replaced. There is another 200 ft. that can be relined. The replacement and relining are necessary because the pipe is disintegrating, the "rebars" or reinforcement bars are broken in several places and the concrete itself is corroding, although the Commissioner said he is not aware of any areas that are in imminent danger of collapse. He hopes to get the repair work done in the late winter or early spring.

Ald. Baker pointed out the need to allow the golf course to re-grow its grass after the work was done, so that hopefully the work could be done earlier rather than later. Commissioner Rooney said the project will take six to eight weeks of work to complete and they would be putting it out to bid soon. He said that it would only be a 10 to 15 ft. area that would be affected so the course could still be playable even if things weren't fully regrown.

Ald. Baker suggested that Commissioner Rooney work with the Conservation Commission and the Conservation Planner, Martha Horn, to get an order of conditions before they do any work because this is conservation land.

Ald. Merrill said that since we had such an excellent, thorough report first from Fran Rice and now from Commissioner Rooney completed that no further action was necessary so NAN was moved.

Ald. Parker asked whether other city pipes were at similar risk of failure. Commissioner Rooney reported that work is currently being done on Eddy Street and Watertown Street pipes, but that in general even though the pipes are old, he is not aware of anything that is likely to give out real soon although he said because of the pattern of freezing and thawing we had last winter, there were more pipes and culverts damaged than in most years and obviously with an old system we have these kinds of problems and we are taking longer to repair them than we had in the past.

The Committee voted no action necessary, by a vote of 6-0.

REFERRED TO FINANCE AND PROGRAMS & SERVICES COMMITTEES

#158-01 ALD. GERST seeking Home Rule Legislation for the purpose of raising qualifying income level for the Newton 41A (Senior Citizen real estate tax deferral) program.

ACTION: HELD 6-0

NOTE: Ald. Johnson began discussion by asking what the revenue impact of these proposals would be. Associate City Solicitor Smalley then made a brief presentation in which she referred to her confidential memo that she distributed to members of the Committee over the prior weekend in the Friday packet that relates to the legality of going forward with these items in their current form. Due to the confidential nature of the memo, it will not be detailed in this report, but members of the Board can get copies from the Law Department. The memo addresses concerns about what constitutes “low-income,” for purposes of the exemptions. The Committee discussed how best to make sure these programs are targeted for people who are truly in need and didn’t broaden them beyond a low-income definition. Low-income is defined by both federal and state law and local communities have a choice about which definition to apply.

Ald. Baker said he supports increasing the property tax deferral level, but not necessarily the water and sewer deferral. He asked what the right number for either program that represents a true level of need would be. The Committee had some discussion as to what would be equitable and what level of use the programs currently had.

Chair of the Board of Assessors Dromey said that 97 people used the 41A deferral program last year and there are about 200 outstanding deferral accounts that have not been resolved because not all of them are currently deferring, but they have participated in the program and interest is being accumulated. There are about 365 households who take advantage of the water and sewer discount program.

Ald. Baker suggested that the two issues be separated even though the language in the ordinance for the water and sewer discount refers to the 41A program. Ald. Baker suggested it would be easier to deal with them separately and he wanted a straw vote on that. Ald. Merrill said that he believes that 41A should increase but he is not ready to talk about water and sewer program. Ald. Johnson said she is not ready to talk about increasing either one until she knows what the extent of the problem is and what the financial impact of increasing the programs would be on the City. Ald. Sangiolo said she agrees with Ald. Johnson. Ald. Tattenbaum said she supports decoupling the items. Ald. Baker said that \$70,000 of income seems way too high. He then said he is not sure that we should really increase either one. He doesn’t want to talk about the water/sewer number, he thinks that should be left alone. He is not convinced that the property tax deferral threshold should be raised either and the question is there a real need to increase it.

Assessor Dromey said that senior citizens come into her office and say, I am having a hard time staying in Newton and that is when this program is helpful. Some of them unfortunately are making maybe \$5,000 or \$10,000 more than would be required to qualify for the 41A deferral program. There was more discussion as to what the real level of need is and that we needed that information before we could take any further action on these items. Ald. Merrill moved hold. Ald. Baker asked where is the true

hardship. Ald. Merrill suggested that once we had that information, there should also be some discussion with Ald. Gerst as to his intentions and several other members of the Committee, including Ald. Johnson, stressed the importance of knowing what the fiscal impact on the City would be of increasing these thresholds. With that discussion the motion to hold all three items prevailed 6 in favor, 0 opposed.

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

ACTION: HELD 6-0

REFERRED TO FINANCE, PUBFAC; & PROG&SERV COMMITTEES

#309-01 ALD. PARKER requesting increase in the income eligibility level of the 30% water/sewer discount for low-income senior citizens.

ACTION: HELD 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Ken Parker, Chair