

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2010

Present: Ald. Schnipper (Chairman), Lennon, Albright, Salvucci, Gentile, Crossley, Danberg, and Lappin

Also present: Ald. Fuller

City staff present: David Wilkinson (Comptroller), David Turocy (Deputy Commissioner of Public Works), Karen Griffey (Director of Administration; Public Works Department), Aaron Goldman (Citizen Assistance; Executive Office), and Robert Waddick (Assistant City Solicitor)

#242-10 NATIONAL GRID petitioning for a grant of location to install and maintain 60' ± of 6" gas main in HARWICH ROAD from the existing 6" gas main in Harwich Road at House No. 149 southerly to House No. 156. WARD 8 [08/10/10 @ 2:38 PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 7-0 (Gentile not voting)**

NOTE: Dennis Regan, National Grid Permit Representative, presented the petition to the Committee. The request is to extend a gas main in Harwich Road to provide service to a newly constructed home. The Department of Public Works has reviewed the petition and recommended approval with the standard conditions to be incorporated into the street opening permit. The public hearing was opened and no one spoke for or against the petition. National Grid sent letters to residents on Harwich Road, to determine if they were interested in gas service and did not receive any requests. Ald. Lappin moved approval, which carried unanimously.

#243-10 NATIONAL GRID petitioning for a grant of location to install and maintain 89' ± of 4" gas main in OLD FARM ROAD from the existing 4" gas main in Fairhaven Street southeasterly to 203 Old Farm Road. WARD 8 [08/26/10 @ 11:22 AM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 7-0 (Gentile not voting)**

NOTE: Dennis Regan presented the petition to install and maintain a gas main in Old Farm Road to provide gas service to a house under construction. The Department of Public Works has reviewed the petition and recommended approval with the standard street opening conditions. The public hearing was opened and no one spoke for or against the petition. Ald. Albright requested that Mr. Regan provide the Committee with a sample of the letter that National Grid mails to residents of a street where a gas main is being extended to determine whether they would like to convert to gas service. Mr. Regan will provide the Committee Clerk with a sample letter. Ald. Salvucci moved approval, which carried unanimously.

#258-10 NATIONAL GRID petitioning for a grant of location to install and maintain 110' ± of 6" gas main in BEECHER PLACE from the existing 6" gas main in Beecher Place at Beecher Terrace easterly to 50 Beecher Place. WARD 6. [09/01/10 @ 12:01 PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 7-0 (Gentile not voting)**

NOTE: Dennis Regan, National Grid Permit Representative, presented the petition for the installation of 110' of gas main in Beecher Place to provide gas service to an existing house. The gas service will provide heat and cooking fuel to the home. The Department of Public Works has reviewed the petition and recommended approval with the standard conditions including restoring the roadway to its original condition.

The public hearing was opened and Cynthia Raymond, 52 Beecher Place, stated that she is in favor of the petition. Mr. Regan explained that once the gas line is installed any residence that the line passes in front of could receive gas service, if requested by the property owner. Ald. Danberg moved approval of the item, which carried unanimously.

REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#231-10 **HIS HONOR THE MAYOR** requesting authorization to transfer the sum of thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) from the Angier School Boiler Replacement Project to the Williams School Boiler Replacement Project. [08/02/10 @ 5:02 PM]

ACTION: **NO ACTION NECESSARY 8-0**

NOTE: The item was discussed at a joint meeting of the Finance Committee and Public Facilities Committee on September 13, 2010 and held for further information. When the boiler replacement project originally went out to bid, the specifications on the boiler called for a prohibitively expensive boiler. The City switched to a boiler type that was less expensive and rebid the project. Due to the change in boilers, there was a chance that the City could get a second boiler as part of the bid; however, the bids came in high and a second boiler would require additional funds beyond the requested \$30,000. Therefore, the Public Buildings Department and Mayor's Office are recommending that the item be voted no action necessary. Ald. Crossley made the motion to recommend no action necessary, which carried unanimously.

REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#264-10 **ALD. CROSSLEY, SCHNIPPER & FULLER** requesting a discussion of the status of new water meter installations, and to consider payment mechanisms to help customers if they receive an extraordinary, one-time, water bill from an accurate accounting of past usage over an extended period of time. [09/16/10 @11:59 am]

ACTION: **NO ACTION NECESSARY 8-0**

NOTE: David Turocy, Deputy Commissioner of Public Works, provided the Committee with an update of the water meter replacement installation project. Approximately 3,957 or 16% of water meters have been replaced. The commercial installations were held up due to back ordered parts but are almost complete. The contractor has installed 88% of the residential water meters in areas 1-7 of the Water Meter Routes, as shown on the attached maps.

The City had hoped to be further along with the replacements but the contractor has fallen behind. It was expected that the installation of the new meters would take approximately 18 months but it is estimated that it will take over two years to complete the replacement of the meters. The City will be meeting with the contractor to discuss the installation schedule in the upcoming week. The contractor has stated that it is the intention to increase the number of

installer from six to ten or eleven. The contract does stipulate that if the contractor does not make the install dates as provided in the contract, there will be a monetary penalty.

The meter reading function of the installed new water meters is providing a reading to City Hall for 56% of the meters. The function is based on the ability for the wi-fi signal to leapfrog from one meter to the next all the way to City Hall. However, as not all of the meters have been installed, there are gaps in the relay of information. Repeaters will be installed on telephone poles throughout the City to boost the signals and should immediately improve the meter reading capability. It is expected that the repeaters will be installed in the near future. Ald. Danberg suggested that the contractor do the routes around City Hall first and work outward from City Hall to provide better connections between City Hall and the new water meters.

Committee members questioned the accuracy of the new meters. The meters are tested at the manufacturer and guaranteed to be accurate. The City has done random spot checks on the meter readings and found them to be accurate. There has been no indication that any of the installed meters are faulty. The Department of Public Works is satisfied that the new meters are accurate.

The item was also filed to address calls from residents regarding large unanticipated water bills. The large water bills are one-time bills and are based on actual meter reads instead of estimated reads. The number of estimated meter reads has increased resulting in estimated bills. For some time now, the City has requested residents read their meters and provide the read to the City. However, many residents have not responded to the request and are receiving estimated bills. Ald. Crossley pointed out that it can be difficult for some people to get to their basement. The city bears some responsibility for the large water bills and must try to reduce the number of estimates. If a property owner or resident calls the City, the City will send somebody to the property to read the meter. As the meter replacement program is not expected to be completed for over two years, people will still receive estimated water bills.

When the City actually reads the meter or the meter is replaced in the home an actual read is taken and the property owner is billed accordingly. On average, property owners have received five estimated bills and many owners have received rebates due to the estimated bills. The ratio of homeowners receiving rebates and owner receiving extraordinarily large water bills is 20:1. The number of property owners that have received a significantly large water bill is relatively small.

Attorney Robert Waddick from the City's Solicitor's Office explained that there is no legal issue prohibiting the City to work with the property owners. The Executive Office and Law Department are planning to put together a process to help property owners deal with an unanticipated, extremely large water bill. There would be some type of written payment agreement between the owner and the City and agreements can be done on a case-by-case basis. Ald. Gentile pointed out that this has been a problem for a number of years and no program was offered before now. It is not particularly fair to property owners who previously received large bills and struggled to pay them. It was pointed out that the program would need to be on a case-by-case basis and could be a needs based program. The City may not collect the money on a large water bill unless there is a program in place to help a strapped property owner.

Committee members felt that the portion of the docket item related to creating a mechanism to help property owners deal with extraordinary water bills should be further discussed in detail during the Finance Committee discussion on the item. The Committee was pleased with the update provided by the Department of Public Works. It was decided that the appropriate action on the item was no action necessary, which was voted unanimously.

#385-07 ALD. SCHNIPPER AND GENTILE updating the Public Facilities Committee on the progress of the Newton North High School Project. [11/21/07 @ 10:23 AM]

ACTION: **HELD 7-0 (Schnipper not voting)**

NOTE: The new school has opened and a tour of the building was offered. Four thousand people went on the tour and for the most part were pleased with the building. The City and School Department are still working on the traffic flow around the building. The old building is being abated. Unfortunately, a minimal amount of mercury was detected in the drains in the science labs. The City is being conservative and addressing the whole drainage system within the school. The discovery will require a change order to bring in a company to abate the mercury and will result in an additional cost of \$300,000. Due to the discovery, the demolition is approximately two weeks behind schedule but the contractor is working to get back on schedule. The Committee held the item for future updates.

Respectfully submitted,

Sydra Schnipper, Chairman

WALTHAM

WATERTOWN

WESTON

BOSTON

WELLESLEY

BROOKLINE

NEEDHAM

BOSTON

0 0.25 0.5 1 1.5 2 2.5 Miles



Water Meter Routes

City of Newton, Massachusetts



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS
Mayor - Setti D. Warren
GIS Administrator - Douglas Greenfield

SOURCE: City of Newton GIS

MAP DATE: September 21, 2010