

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16, 2004

Present: Ald. Schnipper (Chairman), Albright, Salvucci, Stewart, Yates and Mansfield

Absent: Ald. Gerst and Lappin

Also present: Ald. Danberg and Sangiolo

City personnel: Lou Taverna (Utilities Director), Sandy Pooler (Chief Budget Officer), Robert Rooney (Commissioner of Public Works), Karen Griffey (Business Manager; Utilities Division), Elaine Gentile (Director of Environmental Affairs; Public Works Department) and Shawna Sullivan (Committee Clerk)

REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#282-04 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting that the sum of \$290,000 be appropriated from the Environmental Solid Waste Fund (a.k.a. the Sale of Recyclables fund) for the purpose of supplementing the FY04 refuse collection budget in the Department of Public Works.

ACTION: **APPROVED 6-0**

NOTE: Elaine Gentile presented the item to the Committee. The amount of trash left by residents for pick-up has increased in tonnage this year. The increase is more than two thousand tons and the Department is responding to the increase by implementing further recycling programs and emphasizing the importance of recycling. The Department has also received a grant from the Department of Environmental Protection to create an education flyer on recycling of paper.

Ald. Stewart pointed out that many of the flyers sent out by the City contain too much information for one flyer. He suggested getting input from a small citizen's group before publishing a flyer. The Public Works Department is working with a marketing consultant to get the recycling message across in the simplest way possible.

In the past two years, the amount of tonnage has risen about 1,800 tons per year. Part of the reason that the tonnage has gone up is due to illegal dumping by non-residents, contractor and clean-out companies. The Public works Department is starting to track down the violators and are investigating possible enforcement measures.

The Public Works Department also removed \$60,000 from the solid waste budget in anticipation of new fees for the removal of white goods, which were not

approved. However, the City did save approximately \$5,000 by having appliances picked up separately from regular trash. Ald. Mansfield asked why a washing machine was left on the curbside for over a month. Ms. Gentile explained that it would probably occur until residents are aware that they need to call for a pick up of large appliances. The City has been stickering appliances left for regular trash pick up with the contact information.

Ald. Salvucci asked if the City had to guarantee a certain amount of tonnage to the contractor who provides waste removal. Ms. Gentile explained that when the contract was initially negotiated the contractor required a guarantee, as it was the start of the company and he needed to bring a certain amount of refuse to the incinerator. Since then, the company has expanded and has never penalized the City for having less tonnage than guaranteed.

Ald. Yates moved approval of the item, which carried unanimously.

REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#281-04 **HIS HONOR THE MAYOR** requesting that the sum of \$110,000 be expended from Water Surplus for the purpose of funding overtime expenses in the Water Division of DPW and to fund the final phase of Police Detail charges for reservoir security for the remainder of this fiscal year. ***NOTE: request received by City Clerk on 6/10 seeking to amend this item to \$145,000 to cover the costs for overtime and police details related to the 6/5 Dedham Street water main break.***

ACTION: **APPROVED 6-0**

NOTE: Lou Taverna, Director of Utilities, presented the item to the Committee. The Mayor has requested that the item be amended by increasing the sum requested to \$145,000 to cover \$35,000 in overtime costs and police detail costs due to the water main break in Dedham Street. Half of the requested funds will be used to reduce the backlog of 80 water service renewals, including 40 new services. The other half of the funds will be used to pay for the final police details for security at the City reservoir. The police details will no longer be necessary as of July 1st, as the new security system will be fully on-line. Currently, the security infrastructure is fully operational but there is copper wire between the Police Station and the reservoir, which needs to be replaced with underground fiber optic cable. Jeff Knight of the Fire Department will be replacing it in the next two weeks.

Ald. Mansfield asked who has the authority to remove the police detail. Mr. Taverna responded that he believes it is the Chief of Police and/or the Mayor. He is confident that the details will be removed as soon as the security system is fully operational. Ald. Yates asked if any of the cost of police details or the security system at the reservoir were reimbursable by the Department of Homeland Security. Mr. Taverna explained that those funds would not be reimbursed for a city of Newton's size. Ald. Mansfield pointed out that the Town of Carlisle receives Homeland Security Grants frequently through their Health Department but the town can use the funds on anything related to security purposes. Mr.

Pooler responded that the City of Newton has received grants through the Health Department, Fire Department and Police Department but the grants were used for other security purposes. Mr. Pooler will get a report on the use of the grants from each of those Departments. Ald. Salvucci asked if the Utilities Department was paying the 10% administrative cost charged for police details and if so, the department should receive a refund of those costs. Mr. Pooler does not believe that the department is being charged any type of administrative cost but will look into it.

Ald. Yates moved approval, which carried unanimously.

REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#55-02 ALD. YATES requesting that the water/sewer discount rate be made available to homeowners who receive Fuel Assistance, Supplementary Security Income, Food Stamps, Supplementary Disability Income, General Relief, Low Income Sewer and Water Assistance, School Breakfast and Lunch and other income based State and Federal programs.

APPROVED 6-0

NOTE: This item was discussed on June 19, 2002 and held by the Committee. Ald. Yates docketed this item because he feels that if the water/sewer discount rate is tied to various federal and state aid programs more people will benefit. People who are part of the programs would be in need of the discount if they owned their own home. More people would be eligible for the discount and there would be very little administrative burden to the City. Currently, there are only a few ways to obtain a discount and for the most part, you must be 65 or older to qualify.

Commissioner Rooney stated that there are approximately 500 out of 25,000 households that currently get the water/sewer discount. The implementation of Ald. Yates docket item would have minimum impact on the water/sewer rates.

The Chair stated that she has no problem supporting this item, as it has become so expensive to live in this City and for those people who qualify any help and support the City can give them is important. The small number of people who qualify are not going to create a major shift in the rates and as they are already involved in a program it is not going to create major administrative costs.

Ald. Stewart asked what the discount would be. Ms. Griffey responded that the discount is 30%. He asked what are the current qualifiers to be eligible for the discount. Ms. Griffey explained that the discount is piggybacked on four different tax exemption and deferral programs. If a person applies and qualifies for certain tax exemption and/or deferral programs, they are eligible for the water/sewer discount. Also, a person who applies for a water/sewer discount program qualifies if they meet the following criteria: 1) must be over 65 years of age as of July 1, 2004 2) must have primary residence in Massachusetts for ten years and owned property in the state for five years and must have occupied property as of July 1, 2004 and must have a total income of less than \$40,000 per year. The Assessing Department makes the determination of eligibility and notifies the Utilities Division.

The Committee discussed how the program will be administered and how people will find out about the new discount program. Ald. Yates stated that some of the qualifying programs are already administered by the City and that there would need to be press releases. The program will be administered in the same way that the current water/sewer discount is handled. The ordinance amendment will spell out that the applicant needs to provide the City with documented proof that they receive aid from any of the programs included in the item.

The Law Department will need to draft language for the ordinance amendment but the Committee felt that it was important to approve the item, as the water/sewer rates are to be discussed next week. The Finance Committee still needs to discuss the item. Ald. Yates moved approval unanimously.

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**

NOTE: The item is a proposal to raise the income eligibility level of the 30% water/sewer discount rate. The Programs and Services Committee recently voted to request Home Rule Legislation to increase the income eligibility for 41A tax deferrals from \$40,000 to \$60,000. Ald. Sangiolo believes the two items are tied into each other and if the tax deferral eligibility level is raised it makes sense to raise the level for water/sewer discounts. There was some discussion regarding whether assets were included in making the determination of eligibility. The Committee felt that they needed more information on the eligibility. The Committee opted to hold the item for further information from the Law Department, as Ald. Parker was unavailable to comment and there was no specific information from the Law Department.

REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#258-02 PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE requesting discussion of feasibility and appropriateness of more progressive water/sewer rates.

ACTION: **NO ACTION NECESSARY 3-2-1 (Mansfield, Stewart opposed; Albright abstaining)**

NOTE: Commissioner Rooney and Lou Taverna presented the item to the Committee. They provided the Committee with a presentation on progressive water rates (attached). The Commissioner felt that this should be an opener discussion to scope out what type of progressive water/sewer rates the Board would like to pursue, as the choices are very broad. He needs this information before the City purchases new water meters, as it could possibly affect what types of meters are purchased.

The MWRA requires that the City have an increasing or uniform rate structure. The Utilities Department as a water purveyor has conflicting goals. On one hand,

they would like to sell as much water as possible. On the other hand, they are morally and ethically obligated to conserve as much water as possible. These goals affect everything the department does in terms of maintenance and operation.

The Committee seemed most interested in the alternative seasonal rates, the micro tier for low end users and the macro tier for heavy users. There was also some discussion of a base charge per bill. If a base charge were added, it would decrease the rate. Some Committee members' felt that the current water/sewer rate structure worked for the City, as it is a zero sum gain. Ald. Stewart requested information on who consume what volume of water in the City and what percent is contributed to the City. He would also like an analysis of the correlation between assessed values and water use.

Ald. Salvucci moved no action necessary on the item. It was suggested that a more specific docket item be filed.

Respectfully submitted,

Sydra Schnipper, Chairman