

CITY OF NEWTON  
IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN  
PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2001

Present: Ald. Schnipper (Chair), Gerst, Antonellis, Salvucci, Yates and Mansfield

Absent: Ald. M. Lipof; one vacancy

Also present: Ald. Coletti, Merrill, Sangiolo, Lipsitt, R. Lipof and Samuelson

City officials present: Mayor Cohen, Michael Rourke (Chief Administrative Officer), Sandy Pooler (Chief Budget Officer), Maria Plati (Chief of Policy and Communication), Nick Parnell (Commissioner of Public Buildings), Robert Rooney, (Commissioner of Public Works), Fran Towle (Commissioner of Parks and Recreation) and Bob De Rubeis (Deputy Commissioner of Parks and Recreation)

**REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES**

#233-01      HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to expend \$400,000 from various gifts for the purpose of funding design and construction of the Balsamo Millennium Park adjacent to City Hall.

**ACTION:**      **HELD 6-0**

**NOTE:**      Mr. Ed Chang of Chang + Sylligardos, architects for the project, gave an overview of the Millennium Park. Design. The park will be an area of passive recreation. The park will be located on the south side of City Hall along Homer Street. It will encompass just over 50,000 sq. ft. One of the main pieces of the park is a long east-west brick path, which will run from the City Hall drive up to the War Memorial Circle. It will be a decorative path where all of the inscribed bricks will be placed. There will also be secondary paths coming from the south entrance of City Hall along the side of a garden wall and to the corner of the City Hall drive as it crosses Homer Street. The addition of the park requires a reconfiguration of the parking lot. The reconfigured scheme will square off and regularize the shape of the lot. There will be a loss of five parking spaces and one handicapped space. The displacement of the cars will be accommodated along Homer Street towards the intersection of Commonwealth Avenue, where there are all day parking spaces, which are under utilized.

Delivery and service to City Hall through the lot will take place as before. The three spaces by the dumpster will be removed allowing a direct 22' wide access for emergency services. The existing dumpster will be relocated to the opposite side of the lot. It will be out of the visual line of most people entering the lot and City Hall. The architects would also like to encourage a safer and more direct

route from the City Hall to the library. The park itself is largely shaded on the south side of the park toward Homer Street. To supplement existing crab apple trees at the western side of the park by the War Memorial Circle additional Hawthorne and crab apple trees will be planted. Every tree will be retained except for one tree, which will be transplanted. The congregational area of the park will be a large open space that is a flat table of grass upon which large gatherings can be held. There are also opportunities for intimate gatherings using game tables, benches and picnic tables scattered throughout the park. The inscribed bricks will not run the entire length of the path but will be mostly contained in the park area. The bricks by the parking lot need to be unadorned due to deliveries and snow plowing. The bricks are water struck bricks and called City Hall Pavers. They are very dense, very long lasting and the inscriptions will look beautiful in them. One of the hopes is to inscribe bricks with some of the poet Robert Pinsky's work and scatter them throughout the park.

Commissioner Rooney spoke on a portion of the cost for the park as it relates to the Public Works Department. The Public Works Department will provide labor services, which are estimated at \$107,000. This figure is based on the standard means of contract services if the work were done through a contractor. The City owns the equipment and has its own workforce; therefore, the cost including the labor cost is approximately \$54,000. The materials for the work would be charged to the project so the department would not incur those expenses. The type of work that the Public Works Department will contribute to this project is the kind of work that the department does everyday, such as asphalt, curbing and masonry work. It is very likely that the parking lot will be done by the Public Works Department in the next few years regardless of the park due to the condition of the lot.

The public hearing was opened and several people spoke on the project. Several of the speakers submitted letters and information to the Committee for their review. These items are attached to the report. Helaine Miller, 29 Ellis Road, voiced her support as President of the Newton 2000 Committee. She is very proud of all the work the volunteers have done. She sees the park as a legacy for Newton and the park will be a wonderful place for people to come together. Ms. Miller explained it has always been the plan of the Newton 2000 for the park to be located at City Hall. The following individuals voiced their support of the project: Janet Brandwein, 83 Greenlawn Avenue; Robert Zakon, 130 Oliver Road; Rohna Shoul, 9 Exmoor Road; Jean Husher, 1686 Washington Street; Sandra Fromm, 15 Maple Terrace; Maargery Cobb, 18 Washington Street; Richard Jefferson, 1229 Walnut Street; Messina Salias, 86 Fairway Drive; Heidi Vernon, 29 Stafford Road; Rocky Levin, 23 Prince Street; Giles Kelliher, 25 Chestnut Terrace; Donata Simonelli, 51 Clinton Street; Sam Glass, 61 Sheffield Road; Dennis Maguire, 742 Commonwealth Avenue; Anne Marie Abernathy, 45 Islington Road; Barbara Litwind, 63 Aspen Avenue; Drew Hymen, 244 Dorset Road; Richard Griffen, 74 Bennington Street; Ken Hamilton, 3 Oak Terrace;

Donna MacIntosh-Caney, 166 Waverely Avenue; and Elizabeth Brooks, 25 Kenyon Street.

Anita Capeless, 19 Saxon Road, spoke against the placement of the park at City Hall. She feels the space is appropriate as is and feels there is a better place for the park. Ms. Capeless feels that there is not sufficient parking around the site to support a park. She would also like to know how the cost for the maintenance of the park would affect other city departments. Andrea Kelley, although an advocate of open space and parks, feels that the site is inappropriate for the park. It is not a site, which needs improvement or change. It is original City Hall grounds with Olmsted landscape design. Ms. Kelley is very concerned about the maintenance of the grounds in the future. She feels that the city does not have the money or staff to maintain the park. Ms. Kelley would like money for the maintenance of the park to be set-aside at the outset, before construction begins. Doug Dickson, 17 Oxford Road, also addressed the Committee regarding long-term maintenance of the park. The City needs to find a way to account for the maintenance so the investment in the park will not be jeopardized. He also informed the Committee that the design for the park has not received final approval by the Landscape Advisory Council. The Landscape Advisory Council made recommendations and would like the project to come before them again. The Design Review Committee gave conditional approval of the project based on Landscape Advisory Council approval. Ald. Coletti stepped outside the rail to voice his concerns regarding the park. He has problems with the process of the decision making for the park and how the name was chosen.

Mayor Cohen reiterated his support of the project. One of the most important things that an elected official can do is to build community. Newton has so many people who are willing to give their time and emotion to making this city a better place. Newton needs a place that brings people together and creates a connection. The maintenance costs should not hamstring this project. There is already some funding in place for maintenance of the park. Mayor Cohen explained that Mr. Balsamo never requested the park be named after him. Mayor Cohen and members of the Newton 2000 Committee felt that it was appropriate to name the park after Mr. Balsamo for the wonderful gift he gave the city.

Several of the Aldermen had questions and concerns regarding the park. Ald. Coletti raised questions on the traffic flow, snow removal; the transformer located by the dumpsters, parking and brick replacement. He also has concerns about the naming of the park and would like copies of the letters pledging the \$250,000 from Mr. Balsamo to ascertain whether there was an agreement to name the park after him. He also requested an explanation of the legal status of City Hall land and the role of the Board of Aldermen regarding city land.

Ald. Mansfield would like to know what the Fire Department thought of the access to and from the parking lot and if the fire trucks would have to back out of

the lot. Ald. Lipsitt would like the breakdown of the Department of Public Works' cost estimates. She would also like more information on the naming and snow removal. Ald. Salvucci questioned how the labor can be used for this project when there are so many other essential projects that the City needs to complete.

Several Committee members requested the Design Review Committee, Designer Selection Committee and Landscape Advisory Committee minutes regarding the park. It would also be helpful to have a clearer understanding of the naming of the park. There were several issues raised in regards to the parking lot and ability to make deliveries to the lot. The minutes and information pertaining to the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting on the park is attached.

It was decided to hold the item until the next meeting in order to give the administration time to gather the requested information. The Committee voted to hold the item unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Sydra Schnipper, Chair