

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

ZONING & PLANNING BUDGET REPORT

THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2009

Present: Ald. Yates (Chairman), Ald. Lappin, Danberg, Baker, and Linsky; absent: Ald. Ciccone, Harney, and Swiston

City staff: Steve Gartrell (Associate Director of Community Development), Michael Kruse (Director of Planning & Development), John Lojek (Commissioner of Inspectional Services), Sandy Pooler (Chief Administrative Officer), Linda Finucane (Chief Committee Clerk)

REFERRED TO FINANCE AND APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES

#70-09(3) HIS HONOR THE MAYOR submitting in accordance with Section 5-1 of the City of Newton Charter the FY10 Budget totaling \$333,411,747, passage of which shall be concurrent with the FY10-FY14 Capital Improvement Program.
Effective date of submission: 4/21/09; last day to pass budget: 6/5/09

REFERRED TO FINANCE AND APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES

#70-09 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR submitting the FY10-14 Capital Improvement Program, totaling \$192,908,572, and the FY09 Supplemental Capital budget, which require Board of Aldermen approval to finance new capital projects over the next five years.

Inspectional Services Budget

Mr. Lojek presented an upbeat budget report (PowerPoint attached) combined with his department's accomplishments over the past year and plans for the upcoming year. He is pleased to have several Planning Department staff members in his department, saying it contributes to collegial, useful discussions of common issues. David Norton, who is the new zoning enforcement official is doing a great job resolving zoning violations. Attached to the presentation is a Zoning Enforcement Progress Report. Morale has improved significantly with the new cars and new computer laptops and upgraded telephones will enable inspectors to do most of their work outside city hall. A major task is catching up on the inspection of multi-family housing, which is supposed to be performed every five years. Mr. Lojek noted that citizens would be able to apply and pay for mechanical permits from outside City hall. A new administrative assistant will input on-line mechanical permits and work at the counter as well. One vacant plumbing inspector's position will not be re-filled. There is a vault full of plans. He would like to allow people to take the plans – in exchange for some type of security such as a credit card – and return them to the city on CDs. Brookline has been doing this for sometime.

He wants all as-built plans submitted on CD. Several staff members have 20-inch computer screens for reading plans on-line.

Included in Mr. Lojek's presentation is a list of the top ten priority issues, one of which is the illegal landscaping businesses that remain an ongoing problem in parts of the city. He said that he and Mr. Norton would like to sit down and talk with the landscapers, who often move their equipment from one property to another to avoid enforcement. The Zoning Enforcement Task Force, a group consisting of a number of departments, meets once a month to discuss various complaints. This team approach has been very successful.

The Committee complimented Mr. Lojek and his department and voted 4-0 to accept his budget as submitted (Alderman Linsky not voting).

Planning Department

Mr. Kruse presented a PowerPoint (attached) of his department's accomplishments, plans and budget. An organizational chart shows changes in staffing since the retirement last year of the prior chief zoning code official. Staff changes in the federally funded Community Development program include the retirement of long-time Associate Director for Housing and Community Development Steve Gartrell at the end of this fiscal year. Amy Yuhasz will move up into his position and her current position will be eliminated. Due to loss of funding and less apparent need for housing rehab, three staff members of the housing division have been laid off. Mr. Kruse noted that the Open Space Plan needs to be updated. He hopes to have a committee for the preliminary work in place before summer. Included among notable accomplishments are the establishment of a permanent Fair Housing Committee and pending funding for 10 new units of affordable housing on Lexington Street; a new shuttle service to link the Woodland T and Framingham (the Chairman asked if the shuttle made any stops); the nomination of the Crafts Street stable to the National Register; CDBG funding and permitting for Crystal Lake path behind 230 Lake Avenue; and, completion of Phase I of the structural and exterior repair of barn for the Angino Farm.

The Committee voted 5-0 to approve as submitted the Planning Department budget and the Planning Department and Conservation revolving funds, most of which await donations.

The Committee voted 5-0 to accept the Planning Department budget as submitted.

ITEM REFERRED TO ZONING & PLANNING on 4/21/09

#97-09 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend an additional six hundred three thousand five hundred thirteen dollars (\$603,513) in FY09 Community Development Block Grant funds and a grant of nine hundred twenty three thousand nine dollars (\$923,339) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to fund the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program made available

through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. [03/31/09
@ 6:11 PM]

FINANCE APPROVED 7-0 on April 13, 2009

ACTION: APPROVED 5-0

NOTE: Alderman Yates asked that this item be referred to Zoning & Planning because the amount was almost the same as that received by the city of Lowell, which is where the agency he works for is located. He asked some questions about this item based on his knowledge of the subject of homelessness prevention based on his agency's work and noted that Lowell has a much larger and lower-income population than Newton. He pointed out that the Mass. Rental Voucher Programs (MRVP's) were proposed to be cut in half by the House Ways and Means Committee and urged that the city be ready to reach out to current residents who loose MRVP's and prevent them from becoming homeless or rapidly rehouse them. Citing the high rents in the city, he urged the department to give out rental assistance at a high enough rate to be useable in the city. Mr. Gartrell said the department would probably use the higher exception rents for the city. Alderman Yates encouraged doing so without seeking possible denial by HUD, i.e., "it's better to ask forgiveness than to seek permission."

Mr. Kruse revealed that the extra \$650,000 in CDBG funds will be used to carry out most of the improvements to the Stearns and Pelligrini Parks in Nonantum that were unsuccessfully proposed for CPA funding previously. The Committee was delighted to hear that the needs of Nonantum residents were to be met in this way and voted approval of the ESG-CDBG item. This item is not part of the FY10 budget and will be report out to the Board of Aldermen on May 18.

Committee members taking note that this is Mr. Gartrell's last budget thanked him for his many years of service to the city and wished him well in all future endeavors.

All other items were held without discussion.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian E. Yates, Chairman