

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2006

Present: Ald. Vance (Chair), Ald. Baker, Danberg, Hess-Mahan, Johnson, Lennon, Parker, Sangiolo Also: Linsky, Burg, Weisbuch City personnel present: City Clerk David Olson, City Controller David Wilkinson, Chief Budget Officer and Chief Administrative Officer Sandy Pooler. Guests: Paul Berg and Tony Mastantuono of NewTV.

The first meeting of the new term of the Long Range Planning Committee was called to order at 7:45 p.m. Ald. Vance stated that the goal of this meeting is to establish priorities for the committee for the 2006-2007 term. During the committee's last (and maiden) term, various topics were discussed, including enhancements and improvements in the budget process, establishing the search process and job description for the position of City Clerk of the Board, and other items. Tonight's agenda included four main topics with sub-headings under each, the first group of which includes initiatives in the financial and budgeting area.

**1. Financial/budget initiatives:**

Item a: Executive Department response to the report to the Long Range Planning Committee by Alderman Parker's task force on proposals for revenue enhancement and cost containment within City government. Mr. Pooler continues to examine items in the proposal and although he is not yet ready to make a formal response, at a future date he will share some thoughts of the executive department regarding this report.

Mr. Pooler first discussed cash management and investment practices. He noted that in the July 1-Dec. 31, 2005 revenue budget to actual report issued by the Comptroller, investment income budgeted at \$1.4 Million for FY 2006, by Dec. 31 had brought in \$1,280,834.00, or 91.49% of goal, due to a healthy investment climate as compared to a trough two years ago. He also praised the Treasurer for an excellent job in investing the City's money and for creativity while staying within the City's published investment policies. Mr. Pooler stated that there was no investment vehicle of which the City could take advantage that offered a better yield than the current investment portfolio. Yields have risen from 1% to as much as 4.25% to 4.5% for all city cash. Choices under state law are limited to the State money market fund, CDs, and bank accounts. In a rising market, the City moves its money to the money market fund so as not to lock up funds in CDs, which are a better vehicle in a declining market. Alderman Parker added that the Treasurer has added some additional higher yielding CDs on the suggestion of the Task Force. Mr. Wilkinson has been working with the Retirement Board on diversifying their portfolio to obtain some stronger returns by investing in the State PRIT fund, run by

PRIM (Pension Reserve Investment Management). The Board voted in November of 2005 to adopt some of the task force suggestions on investment vehicles. Mr. Pooler appreciated advice received from Mr. Gifford and others on the task force regarding funds and in analyzing asset allocation in alternative investments (hedge funds, etc) that can help stabilize returns and reduce risk over the long run.

**PILOT (Payment In Lieu Of Taxes) Programs:** Mr. Pooler noted that PILOTS have been long discussed and agreed that it would be beneficial to the City to increase revenue through such programs. However, absent the ability to trade something off with the non-profits, we cannot force them to make payments and are limited in what we can do. He noted that former Newton Treasurer Steve Cirillo, during the 1990's, wrote the manual on how to seek PILOT revenue. Mr. Pooler pointed out that relationships between non-profits and the City are often complicated and colored by other issues such as parking in neighborhoods and noise. Also, those communities not subject to the Dover Amendment, such as Boston and Cambridge, have far more leverage in seeking PILOTS.

Mr. Pooler mentioned some items that the City has moved forward on in this area, such as increased recycling. Under discussion are health insurance, implications for wireless for City departments, and the issue of energy efficiency in our buildings. The City is looking to fill the key Energy Engineer position vacated by David Tannazinni. Citywide wireless and a municipal power company issues are on the back burner at present. The City will continue to use citizen advisory committees with specific foci such as retirement, health liability cost, and investment.

**Citistat and municipal benchmarking:** Municipal benchmarking is now done on an informal basis, but Mr. Pooler felt that the services offered by the municipal benchmarking company that made a presentation to the City were not worth the \$12,000 fee charged. He and Mr. Wilkinson felt that working with the communities deemed most like Newton by the benchmarking company (Wellesley, Weston, Lexington and Brookline) made the most sense. A discussion followed of the value of using statistical analysis to examine how the City is using its resources. Public Works and Parks and Rec. make extensive use of their own stats to improve performance. The Police Dept. has done the same through use of COMPSTAT. It was agreed that further exploration of the above as management tools is warranted.

Ald. Lennon requested that department presentations be made at times when more aldermen may attend.

The committee next discussed **No. 4, Initiatives for improving aldermanic communication** with respect to issues that relate to the public. Item a: Enhanced aldermanic presence through programming ideas with NewTV. Alderman Baker reported that he has been working with Jennifer Adams of *NewTV* on doing a bi-weekly informational report, the first of which dealt with the organizational structure of the board and what the various committees do. He also mentioned the new Newton Community

Report which will include periodic comments by and about the Board, and the new web page with a more user friendly format.

Mr. Mastantuono of NewTV distributed a program proposal for a 29 minute show consisting of five segments of five minutes each, featuring individual aldermen speaking on issues of interest. NewTV would air the segments as produced and also edit them into half-hour shows. Participation by particular aldermen would be optional, but participation by some aldermen would be necessary to generate a program.

Executive Director of NewTV Paul Berg distributed a memo outlining four possible vehicles for enabling aldermen to reach the public with information on projects, programs and City plans and decisions:

1. **Public Access:** One or more aldermen would be trained to produce a 30-60 minute show for NewTV. Basic, but considered by Mr. Berg to be the least satisfactory choice.
2. **Newton News:** Produced by NCAC, could be employed to report on the activities of the Board of Aldermen. Advantages: NewTV staff handles all production duties, flexible schedule, a new program each week and airing on an already popular show. Also possible would be a live interview segment Wednesday evenings from 6 to 6:30 p.m.
3. **Government Access Channel:** The Board of Aldermen might approach the Mayor to authorize production of a regular (monthly?) program for *Legislative Roundtable*, a co-production of the League of Women Voters and NewTV Government Access. Such programs would be live and at the discretion of the Mayor.
4. **Automated video recording equipment in City Hall committee rooms** with control provisions and a big red light (!) when the system is on. Cost: \$75,000-\$80,000, which is NCAC's total annual capital equipment budget. 2-3 remote controlled cameras would be needed. Another challenge: How the rooms are set up, with participants on all sides of a table.

Tony would be in charge of the above options, so required time on his part will determine what is feasible. Interns now working on NewTV news could assist.

An additional idea suggested was to begin the Board of Aldermen broadcast at 7:30 with a preview of the evening's agenda. Committee chairs with significant issues coming before the board could do a 1-2 minute piece on topics to be discussed. A teleprompter could be provided. A possible venue would be commentary of former aldermen who would be familiar with the workings of the board.

## LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

February 1, 2006

Page 4

Ald. Baker commented that it is important that the commentary be reportorial and not editorial in nature. Alderman Johnson suggested that the Board take up the issue of improved communication in general, and report to this committee on their findings.

Mr. Mastantuono stated that the Mayor normally looks to him to make the determination of what is feasible and within his available time frame. The many ideas discussed require evaluation before any one is formally proposed. It was discussed and deemed important that these venues not be used or abused by any individuals who wish to air platforms or otherwise dominate air time.

Ald. Baker suggested that we focus first on how we can make what is aired on the government channel more understandable. Another consideration is the amount of work required just to produce a 3-5 minute segment. We should thus start small and build to something grander once we have established a track record.

Ald. Johnson suggested that a group evaluate all of the above options and report findings to the appropriate body. Alderman Baker suggested that the findings come first to this committee, then to the Chairmen's Committee. Mr. Berg thought it would be a good idea for the City Clerk to come on air at 7:30 and describe what was up for discussion that evening. Different topics could be taken up each meeting to educate the public on items of interest, i.e., what are first call and second call. The committee concurred that the above would be a good idea.

Ald. Baker summarized that a good initial step would be for him to bring up before the Chairmen's Committee the idea of a preview of the evening's agenda. Depending on its reception, mechanics and details could then be worked out. Other ideas could be kept on hold in this committee. Mr. Berg offered that pre-taped items could be made, and aired as desired.

Ald. Linsky asked if there were ways that the visuals and acoustics of the Chamber itself could be improved for the benefit of the Board itself, in addition to the viewing audience. Ald. Vance summarized that the committee would send to the Chairmen's Committee the issue of programming around the aldermanic meetings.

Ald. Baker reported that he has been working with City Clerk Olson on improvement of the Aldermanic web page and making it easier to access and navigate. Ald. Johnson suggested that easy public access to agendas, reports and ordinances were of greatest concern. We need to improve the search engine on City topics.

Ald. Vance concluded that the committee will adopt the suggestion within this committee of identifying the problems and needs of the web page, and forward them to the technical staff for resolution. The pros and cons of assembling a citizens' task force to assist on this idea were discussed. The committee favored hiring a professional to accomplish the design once it has been decided on. A downside of using volunteers is the lack of important maintenance and follow-up.

## 2. Aldermanic research support initiatives

- a. Ald. Vance reported re **training personnel in the Office of the Clerk of the Board in internet-based research tools** such as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Mass. Municipal Association web sites and Google. He said that Ms. Sullivan of the Clerk's Office informed him that the office staff is already trained in use of Google and other search engines to obtain such information as the Aldermen might request. He suggested that we first educate the Board as to this available service.

Mr. Olson suggested bringing requests to him first and he could re-assign them to the committee clerks. Ald. Danberg reported that she has been pleased with the research information she has requested and received. Ald. Hess-Mahan asked whether staff is trained in Lexis-Nexis and was told by Mr. Olson that we do not have this program. The committee clerks go across the street to the library to do their research. Ald. Baker suggested that we install a terminal in the Clerk's office with access to library search engines.

- c. Regarding **enhanced use of the City Comptroller to provide expert support to the Board of Aldermen**, Mr. Wilkinson reported that he is happy to spend whatever time is necessary to assist the Board in understanding financial issues.

Mr. Wilkinson further explained that no financial item would ever come before the Board of Aldermen for a vote without the Comptroller having certified funds for the item. Certification takes place prior to its coming before the Finance Committee. One area where he feels we are deficient in the financial management area is that we do not have our policies and procedures in written form in other than a loose collection of documents.

One of Mr. Wilkinson's goals and objectives for the coming year is to get the outline completed for the financial policies and procedures. The Audit Subcommittee of the Finance Committee will review those policies and procedures. In the corporate world, he explained, much time, energy and money are spent compiling and monitoring such information. In the government world, due to a lack of resources, we are not there yet. Every year the outside auditors appointed by the Board of Aldermen review the work of the City and render a report with the financial statements on the accuracy of our work. They also produce a Management Letter that identifies areas needing improvement. Department heads review and act on its recommendations at their discretion. The Audit Subcommittee would help enforce adoption of resolutions in this document.

One area identified in the Management Letter as in need of attention is our disaster preparation. Although much work has been done in backing up our

data off-site, we have no back-up hardware. If our hardware fails, the City would be out of business for 3-4 weeks. An appropriation for \$40,000. is needed for this equipment. Ald. Lennon requested that ideas for the Audit Subcommittee be directed to him. One idea is that Mr. Wilkinson give a presentation on the various reserve funds to the Finance Committee or the Board as a whole. Another is to break down the various fund groups and make various presentations or create an executive summary of these fund groups and a Management Summary of the budget document as a whole. Ald. Danberg suggested that these presentations be given at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. to accommodate more interested parties, especially as plans for Newton North unfold.

Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Pooler are working together to create a financial document to assist with the understanding of financing Newton North. Step 1 is to pull data out of Mr. Pooler's work papers and put them into summary form. Step 2 is to understand how the financing works; i.e. is there enough there to finance the debt on the new high school. Step 3 is to understand how it all affects the operating budget. For example, there should be nothing left in the end in the Capital Stabilization Fund, but the way it currently works, there is money left in the fund. Sandy is reworking it and will hopefully soon make a report. Ald. Baker commented that it is a work in progress which in the end, not only do we need to understand it, but be able to explain it to the citizens of Newton.

- b. **Establishment of a volunteer Citizens' Research Support Group to provide expert assistance to aldermen in developing and dealing with various docket items:** Ald. Vance suggested that it would be useful to have an in-house data base of citizens with expertise to assist the board with needed research or work on discrete problems. Mr. Wilkinson mentioned how a recent presentation to DOR was enhanced by his bringing with him a local citizen (Rob Gifford) with expertise in the area of discussion. Ald. Johnson suggested that we start with Commission members. Ald. Danberg suggested that resumes or areas of expertise of commission members be entered into a database for this purpose.

Ald. Vance asked that committee members consider before the next meeting any problems in the effective functioning of the Board that we should address.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, March 29, 2006. The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Verne Vance, Chair  
Victoria Danberg, Vice Chair