

BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION

Commission Meeting Report

Sunday, October 22, 2006

Present: Paul Levy - Chair, Jane O'Hern, Betsy Harper, Ruthanne Fuller, Matt King, Tony Logalbo, Sarah Ecker, Amelia Koch, and Malcolm Salter

Also present: David Olson (Clerk, Board of Aldermen), Sandy Guryan (Asst. Superintendent for Budget), Susan Burstein (Chief Budget Officer), David Wilkinson (Comptroller), Mayor David Cohen, Aldermen Kenneth Parker, and School Committee Members Dori Zaleznick, Claire Sokoloff and Anne Larner.

The first meeting of the commission was held on Sunday, October 22, from 2 to 4:20 pm at the Newton Public Library. After introducing ourselves and receiving a brief welcome and thanks from Mayor David Cohen, we heard an excellent presentation from David Wilkinson, City Comptroller, about the "General Fund Multi-year Budget Forecast". The forecast covers fiscal years 2008-2012 and contains actual expenditures for fiscal years 2002-2006 and the fiscal year 2007 budget.

David covered the revenue and expenditure estimates in the forecast and gave a high-level review of the assumptions implicit in the document. Based on this review, commission members indicated preliminary interest in a number of topics.

On the revenue side:

- The estimate for new growth in property tax revenues (including impediment to expansion of the city's commercial tax base).
- The in lieu of tax payments (in comparison to other cities).
- Other fees and charges.
- Rental income.
- Inspectional services department.

On the expense side:

- Salaries.
- Benefits (including funding of retiree health obligations).
- Pension contributions.
- Energy and utilities.
- Services.
- Capital and Reserve Creation (including the standard for debt service, transfers to capital fund.)

The group decided that the next step would be to establish a meeting in the very near future to brainstorm ideas and try to define its scope of work. Then subcommittees will go to work on the topics chosen and will report back to the full commission on

their findings. Commission members indicated a preference for meeting in the mornings at 7:45 or 8am.

The group also welcomed Carolyn Wood and students from Professor Linda Bilmes' class at Harvard's JFK School of Government. The students will be conducting staff work in support of the Commission's activities.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Levy, Chair