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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Citizen Advisory Group Named to Study Newton Finances

NEWTON -- Mayor David Cohen, Board of Alderman President Lisle Baker, and School Committee Chair Dori Zaleznik today announced the formation of a Citizen Advisory Group "to assist in planning for additional tactics and strategies to improve the City's operational efficiency and effectiveness in future fiscal years including the functions of the Executive, School Committee, and Aldermanic branches of Newton's government." They are responding to a resolution passed by the Board of Aldermen, which asked them to appoint this group prior to May 20, 2008 when the citizens of Newton will vote on the override request.

"We are fortunate to have a distinguished group of residents who have answered the call to serve, who care about our City, and who are well qualified to provide us with important fiscal advice and guidance," said Mayor Cohen.

In making the initial appointments, Mayor Cohen, President Baker, and School Committee Chair Zaleznik indicated that they had relied on the recommendation of their colleagues to create an advisory group with a mix of skills and abilities, and regretted that there were many able candidates recommended they could not include.

"I want to thank my Aldermanic colleagues for their suggestions, especially Aldermen Marcia Johnson and Ken Parker, who docketed the request that the three of us establish this group," said President Baker. "This important group will provide research, comparables, forecasts, and ultimately will provide us with key information I and my colleagues can draw upon as we make key long term fiscal decisions in the future. The work of this Group will have a lasting impact on how we approach future fiscal challenges in Newton."

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In undertaking the appointments, they sought residents who had not served in Newton elective office before, though they anticipate that the group will rely on input from others both within and without Newton government as the Group forms up and gets started on its work.

“With capped revenues and essentially indexed costs driving Newton ever so predictably into operating deficits, we have been charged with reexamining the basic economic model of the City and its way of delivering services” said Chair Malcolm Salter. “This working group draws upon the considerable intellectual capital and experience base of the City, and is poised to move forward on this mandate in an open minded and transparent fashion.”

“On behalf of the School Committee, we appreciate the willingness of citizens to undertake this important task,” said School Committee Chair Zaleznik. “We look forward to reviewing their work, and we are hopeful that there will be opportunities to maximize the efficiency of the Newton Public Schools while ensuring our ongoing tradition of excellence and innovation.”

The Group’s preliminary charge is:

- To help define the choices facing the City with respect to municipal and educational service levels and their long-term funding requirements.
- To help identify, within this context, innovative ways of increasing short- and long-term operational efficiency and effectiveness and developing new or enhanced sources of funding for City services—including the people, facilities, and equipment that make the delivery of such services possible.
- To make sufficient progress in these tasks by the end of this calendar year so that the Mayor, the School Committee, and the Board of Aldermen to integrate promising strategies and actions into the process of planning for the fiscal 2010 budget and beyond.

City Clerk David Olson (dolson@newtonma.gov, 617-796-1210) will serve as the Group liaison and contact. The members of the Group are attached.