



Public Safety & Transportation Committee Report

City of Newton **In City Council**

Wednesday, September 23, 2020

Present: Councilors Downs (Vice-Chair), Malakie, Grossman, Markiewicz, Ciccone and Bowman

Absent: Councilors Auchincloss (Chair) and Lipof

City Staff: Sergeant Daniel Devine, Newton Police Department, Chief Gino Lucchetti, Newton Fire Department and Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer

Others Present: Lahcene Belhouchet, Boston Cool Ride Limo, Inc. and Any Warner, NetCars Inc.

#355-20 **Requesting new public auto license**
LAHCENE BELHOUCHE, 32 Adams Street, Newton, MA 02460 requesting **one (1) new public auto license** for Boston Cool Ride Limo Inc.

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation Approved 5-0, Councilor Ciccone not voting**

Note: Sgt. Devine and Mr. Belhouchet joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Mr. Belhouchet stated that he has one public auto and has been in business approximately ten to twelve years with the majority of his work is to Logan Airport.

Sgt. Devine stated that the department inspected Mr. Belhouchet's 2018 Cadillac Escalade on August 21, 2020. The vehicle passed inspection as required by City Ordinance.

A Councilor stated that Mr. Belhouchet has been in business approximately ten to twelve years, and asked why now is he requesting a public auto license? Committee Clerk Delaney answered that Mr. Belhouchet was not aware a public auto license is necessary in the City.

Vice-Chair Downs opened the discussion to members of the public who were present. There was no public comment.

Without further discussion, Councilor Markiewicz made a motion to approve this one new public auto license request. Committee members agreed 5-0, Councilor Ciccone not voting. Vice-Chair Downs stated that the City Council will be voting on this new public auto request on

October 5, 2020. If approved, the Council Order will be forwarded after the 20-day waiting period.

#376-20 Requesting three (3) new public auto licenses

ANDY WARNER, 6 Silver Lake Avenue, Newton, MA 02458 requesting **three (3) new public auto licenses** for NetCars Inc.

Action: Public Safety & Transportation Approved 5-0, Councilor Ciccone not voting

Note: Sgt. Devine and Mr. Warner joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Mr. Warner stated that he has three public autos and was not aware a public auto license is necessary in the City until he received an email request from Mass Port Authority informing him a license is necessary to conduct business at Logan Airport. He then stated that when he obtained his business certificate in the City Clerk's office, he was not informed a public auto license is necessary to conduct business in the City. The business certificate requests what is the "purposed use"? Mr. Warner stated that he wrote "limousine transportation".

Sgt. Devine stated that the department inspected Mr. Warner's 2016 Lincoln Navigator, 2017 Lincoln Navigator and 2018 Lincoln MKT on September 3, 2020. The vehicles passed inspection as required by City Ordinance.

It was asked if a public auto license is a new requirement by Mass Port Authority? Committee Clerk Delaney answered that when a person requests a business certificate in the City Clerk's Office for a transportation company, they are not informed a public auto, taxi, van or bus licenses is necessary and that the vehicles must be registered in the City to conduct business.

Sgt. Devine stated that it is unfortunate the taxi business is fading in the City, but Public auto licenses are increasing. He then said that Mass Port may be becoming stricter.

A Councilor stated that business certificate applicants should be made aware upfront that a license is necessary and agreed to speak with the City Clerk's office to correct the problem of business certificate applicants not being made aware that a public auto, taxi, van or bus license is necessary to conduct business in the City.

Without further discussion, Councilor Malakie made a motion to approve these three new public auto licenses request. Committee members agreed 5-0, Councilor Ciccone not voting. Vice-Chair Downs stated that the City Council will be voting on this new public auto request on October 5, 2020. If approved, the Council Order will be forwarded after the 20-day waiting period.

#233-20 Semi-annual taxi license/public auto inspections
POLICE DEPARTMENT submitting reports of semi-annual taxi license/public auto inspections for review.

Public Safety & Transportation Held 7-0 on 06/17/20, Councilor Ciccone not voting

Action: Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0

Note: Sgt. Devine joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Committee Clerk Delaney stated that this item was held on June 17, 2020. Due to the pandemic, the department did not conduct the semi-annual taxi and public auto inspections between March and May which are required by City Ordinance.

Sgt. Devine stated that the department conducted the following taxi inspections on September 1, 2020: Holden's Taxi (2 vehicles), Newtonville Cab Co, Inc. (1 vehicle) and Newton Taxi Co (1 vehicle) all with a business address of Union Street. It is unfortunate that Veterans Taxi of Newton is now out of business. All vehicles passed inspection as required by City Ordinance.

The department conducted the following public auto inspections on September 2, 2020: American & Equipment, Bace Limousine Service, Don's Car Service, Izmo Limo Service, Mahase Livery Services, LLC (2 vehicles), Newton Limo, LLC and Omsai Enterprises. All vehicles passed inspection as required by City Ordinance.

Covenant Transportation (1 vehicle) has not been inspected, a revised police semi-annual report is attached to this report.

Newton Taxi Co. has one vehicle, a 2009 Dodge Caravan which is older than the ten-year old maximum age allowed per City Ordinance. Committee Clerk Delaney stated that when she sends the taxi renewal applications in October 2020, she will inform Newton Taxi Co., that if they choose to renew their public auto, the vehicle will have to be newer than ten-years old for the vehicle to be approved in December 2020.

A Committee member asked if Veteran's Taxi was sold? Sgt. Devine answered that he did not know. Sgt. Devine spoke with a member of Veteran's Taxi informing him that they unfortunately went out of business. He then stated that Uber has heavily affected the taxi business.

Without further discussion, Councilor Bowman made a motion to approve the report of the semi-annual taxi license/public auto inspections. Committee members agreed 6-0.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#365-20 **Authorization to expend a \$164,863 grant from Assistance to Firefighters**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept, appropriate and expend a one hundred sixty-four thousand eight hundred sixty-three dollar grant (\$164,863) from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant for Rapid Intervention and Vehicle Operator Training in the Newton Fire Department.

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0**

Note: Chief Lucchetti joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Chief Lucchetti stated that this request is to accept, appropriate and expend the sum of \$164,863 from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant for rapid intervention and vehicle operator training. Two key areas were identified by the department where training would be beneficial. The department requested \$120,900 to provide emergency vehicle operator training from an outside company and funding necessary to "back fill" positions while members receive the training. Additionally, the department requested \$43,963 for rapid intervention training (RIT). RIT training reduces fatalities and injuries and is critical to the safety of both firefighters and civilians. These specialty training techniques on extrications and thermo imaging, are specialized academy classes, and are important for some emergency calls.

The \$164,863 grant requires a 10% match from the City, or \$16,486.36. The City's match is available in the Fire/Rescue Overtime Account.

Committee members questions and suggestions.

Questions:

- Regarding the vehicle operator training, are operators trained on road safety and how to safely drive and yield to pedestrians? Chief Lucchetti answered to be very clear all firefighters who drive the vehicles obey the registry of motor vehicle laws. The classes teach the operators how to drive more cautiously. The vehicles weigh approximately 80,000 pounds. Drivers are taught turning radius, safety issues, they check the air and tire pressures and they are made aware that the vehicle does not stop immediately.
- What would happen if the department was not awarded the grant and the City did not have funding set aside to train firefighters on how to operate large equipment? Chief Lucchetti answered that the more experienced firefighters drive the vehicles. Newer firefighters begin by driving in parking lots to get familiar with the vehicle. The department has a budget for training. Training is provided on a daily basis for newer drivers until they feel comfortable behind the wheel.
- What is the percentage rate of firefighters qualified in driving and their comfort level? Chief Lucchetti answered that he cannot provide a percentage rate because newer firefighters are not expected to drive. Approximately 60-70 of firefighters drive. Senior firefighters do all the

driving to emergency calls as they are more experienced. The newer firefighters drive in non-emergency situations to practice. Larger vehicles are used in training.

- Do the newer firefighters drive in non-emergency calls even if not professionally trained? Chief Lucchetti answered that the majority of the drivers are professionally trained in-house daily. This grant would allow the department to have outside professional training.

Suggestions:

- Passing bicyclists and mounting curbs are both important skills and should be addressed during training.
- Please provide the newer firefighters with a vehicle checklist and what they should learn in the training process. Chief Lucchetti said that it is important for the newer firefighters to drive daily in order for them to get used to the size, width, length and weight of vehicles. Safety is the number one priority.

Without further discussion, Councilor Ciccone made a motion to approve this item. Committee members agreed 6-0.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#382-20 **Authorization to enter a contract for Emergency Ambulance Services**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to enter into a contract for Emergency Ambulance Services for up to five years.

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0**

Note: Chief Lucchetti and Ms. Lemieux joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Ms. Lemieux stated that this request is to authorize the City to enter into a contract with a term up to five years. It is the City's intent to enter into a three-year agreement with the option to extend for two additional one-year terms. The City's contract expires on December 31, 2020.

A selection committee has been formed with EMS people, Councilor Ciccone, Mr. Yeo and Chief Lucchetti. A Request for Proposal (RFP) was put out several months ago, the City has received four proposals the Committee is interviewing these different agencies and the selection Committee will determine which agency is best for the City.

This item does not request the City Council approve what is in the contract or who the City awards the contract to. The item requests the City Council to approve this item in order to enter into as much as a five-year contract. It is best for the City to have this type of contract and the ability to spend five years with a vendor. The City in three years may determine that they may change companies.

Committee members questions and comments:

Questions:

- Will the Executive Department return to this Committee with a chosen candidate? Ms. Lemieux answered no, the decision will be made administratively. City Council will have no involvement in determining the company. If the City wanted a contract with only up to three-years this request would not be before this Committee. The reason we are here is because anytime the City wants to go beyond a three-year contract the City requires City Council's approval. When a contract is in the City's best interest, the City enters into a five-year contract, particularly when vendors have to buy significant amount of equipment that is when the City enters into five-year contracts.
- Is the current contract three years? Ms. Lemieux answered no, the current contract was the same arrangement, three years with two one-year options. The City chose to go out to bid at the end of three years.
- Will there be an opportunity after the contract is signed to review the differences in services, or is it about cost? Ms. Lemieux answered up until now, the City has not paid ambulance service providers. It is clearly about response times, services and contracting. Chief Lucchetti said that the committee will interview the four companies to determine their resources, stability, backup resources and the strength of company.
- How have the operations and interactions between emergency service personnel and the Fire Department been during the pandemic? Chief Lucchetti stated that the department made initial moves at the beginning of the pandemic to practice more social distancing, exposure and cross contamination. Isolation protocols were put in place to keep all safe. The department's resources are strong, and the shelves are stocked. The firefighters have a good relationship with the current EMS employees. As of today, no firefighter has tested positive for Covid-19.
- Do you know what the chosen company will charge those without health insurance? Chief Lucchetti answered no, because the department does not do the billing. The department reviews what the company charges people with Medicare or Medicaid. There are caps on the fees they are allowed to charge. The department reviews the company to ensure that they are not overcharging, providing great care and that appropriate medical equipment is available.
- Do you know if uninsured people are charged the same rate as an insured person? Chief Lucchetti answered that he did not know.

Comments:

- Please find out if uninsured are charged the same rate as an insured person. Ms. Lemieux answered that she will ask Mr. Yeo to inquire. Chief Lucchetti added that there is a charge for each itemized item provided. The insurance is requested after transporting a patient. The rate is the same whether you have insurance or do not except that there are caps on what can be

charged. He then said that he will ask the companies if uninsured people pay the same amount as insured people.

- Committee members thanked Chief Lucchetti on keeping everyone safe during a challenging time. They offered their assistance to Chief Lucchetti and the Fire Department. Chief Lucchetti thanked Committee members and appreciates the assistance offered.

Without further discussion, Councilor Bowman made a motion to approve this item. Committee members agreed 6-0.

Vice-Chair's Note: The Committee briefly discussed the recent fire on Fairfield Street in Newtonville, MA with Chief Lucchetti.

Note: Chief Lucchetti stated that a home was under renovations when the fire began. The homeowner was doing some work earlier in the day. The home broke out in flames that evening from the basement to the attic through the pipe chase (plumbing wall). The fire was on three floors and the firefighters knocked out the fire in approximately 15-20 minutes. Damage was minimal and the fire is under investigation. The fire appears to be accidental.

Two firefighters fell halfway through a floor, one firefighter sustained minor injuries, and both were transported to the hospital. No residents were in the building. The firefighters did a good job.

Vice-Chair's Note: Topics and scheduling of future docket items.

Note: Vice-Chair Downs stated that in January 2020, pre-pandemic, the Committee briefly discussed topics and scheduling of future docket items to be scheduled for discussion. Vice-Chair Downs said that she anticipates in the fall she will check in with how things are proceeding and totally understands that some things are now impossible due to the pandemic.

Vice-Chair Downs is hopeful that in October, Jason Sobel, Director of Transportation, DPW will update this Committee about the changes around schools to facilitate walking and biking because of pandemic-related limits on bus capacity and the capacity of the roads around schools for private vehicles.

At approximately 7:50 p.m., Councilor Markiewicz made a motion to adjourn. Committee members agreed 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Andreae Downs, Vice-Chair