



# Finance Committee Report

## City of Newton In City Council

**Monday, February 8, 2021**

Present: Councilors Grossman (Chair), Malakie, Humphrey, Kalis, Norton and Noel; 1 vacancy

Also Present: Councilor Downs

Absent: Councilor Gentile

City staff present: Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux, Comptroller Sue Dzikowski, and Fire Chief Gino Lucchetti

**#49-21**      **Accept \$36,528.60 in grant funds from Mass State 911 Department Training**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend a grant in the amount of thirty-six thousand five hundred twenty-eight dollars and sixty cents (\$36,528.60) from the Massachusetts State 911 Department Training Program for the purpose of providing training for the Emergency Telecommunications staff who work in the City's Dispatch/Communications Center.

**Action:**      **Finance Approved 6-0**

**Note:**      Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer explained that the City currently has 19 certified emergency dispatchers, 2 new employees and 4 vacancies. This grant will provide training for all positions. These individuals do work out of the Police Headquarters. Ms. Lemieux noted that there are 23 positions in the Police Department's budget and 2 of the positions are covered by grants.

Councilors asked the following question:

Q: Is this mandatory training?

A: Ms. Lemieux explained that she believes it is necessary to keep their certification or to get certified. She was unaware if it is mandatory for the City to have certified dispatchers.

Councilors expressed their support for the training program.

Councilor Kalis motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

**#50-21**      **Accept \$39,976 from the Executive Office of Public Safety's Municipal Road Safety**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend a reimbursable grant in the amount of thirty-nine thousand nine hundred and seventy-six dollars (\$39,976) from the Executive Office of Public Safety's Municipal Road Safety Program for

the purpose of overtime expenditures for Traffic Safety Enforcement and for the purchase of new radar equipment.

**Action:** Finance Approved 6-0

**Note:** Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer explained that the bulk of this grant will go towards overtime to help promote traffic safety. This includes coming up with and putting up signs like “hands free driving” and other public safety campaigns. The City will also use about \$6,000 for new radar equipment.

Councilors asked the following question:

Q: What is the state of overtime in the Police Department for this year?

A: Ms. Lemieux explained that overtime is running high in the Police Department and was unsure if there would be need to come back to the committee for more funds in the future. There has been overtime due to the COVID-19 pandemic and having to isolate police officers and dispatchers. Ms. Lemieux noted that the City does not know yet if these costs will be covered by FEMA or CARES Act.

Councilor Noel motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

### **Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees**

**#53-21** **Appropriate \$139,254 for the purchase of a used ladder truck**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate the sum of one hundred thirty-nine thousand two hundred and fifty-four dollars (\$139,254) from Acct # 7608E210-585030 to a Capital Account for the purpose of purchasing a used ladder truck that will be used as a spare.

**Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0 on 02/03/21**

**Action:** Finance Approved 6-0

**Note:** Fire Chief Gino Lucchetti presented the request to appropriate \$139,254 for the purpose of purchasing a used ladder truck that will be used as a spare. Chief Lucchetti explained the department currently has three ladder trucks that are in use. The 2007 spare is mechanically no longer able to operate and the 1995 spare truck also became a safety issue. For the last couple of months there has been a need to borrow ladder trucks from neighboring communities. Chief Lucchetti explained that it is better for safety reasons for Newton to have their own spare ladder truck. In March 2019 the Department purchased Ladder 2 and they were unable to outfit the truck due to the pandemic. This created extra funds in the capital account. Chief Lucchetti noted that it is more important at this time to have the spare truck than to outfit the new truck. He is currently looking at a 2006 ladder truck in Maryland. The City’s mechanic has been sent to do an inspection on the truck. Chief Lucchetti noted that they first went to the company that the department buys their trucks from and they did not have any ladder trucks on trade. Then they reached out to a broker that specializes in used fire trucks who found the truck in Maryland.

Attached are answers from Chief Lucchetti regarding the public inquiry on the spare ladder truck.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: If this is approved and the ladder truck in Maryland is deemed unsuitable, where are the funds reallocated to?

A: Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer explained that the money will not be moved until the City finds the truck that the department needs. Ms. Lemieux noted that these funds have already been bonded when the City purchased the new ladder truck. The City bonds for the full amount when purchasing a ladder truck so these funds need to be repurposed for a capital item.

Q: In theory, could these funds be used for a capital project in a different department?

A: Ms. Lemieux explained that the funds could be used for a different capital project but Chief Lucchetti has saved these funds by forgoing newer technology to be able to purchase this spare ladder truck.

Q: When will the department buy a new ladder truck?

A: Chief Lucchetti explained that they will not be buying another ladder truck for 5 to 10 years and once that truck is bought the older ladder truck will be brought down to a spare. A ladder truck can be used for 15 years and 20-25 years as a spare.

Councilor Humphrey motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

**#40-21 Reappointment of Allan Cohen to the Board of Assessors**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR reappointing ALLAN S. COHEN, 12 Philmore Road, Newton, as a member of the Board of Assessors for a term to expire on February 1, 2024. (60 Days: 03/20/21)

**Action:** Finance Approved 6-0

**Note:** Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer explained Allan Cohen is the Commercial Assessor for the City of Newton. A letter from Mr. Cohen is attached to the report. The Board of Assessors defends all the applications for abatements or reductions in value. Ms. Lemieux noted that she did not believe the City has lost a residential appeal in 20 or 30 years.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: Are members of the Board of Assessors compensated?

A: Ms. Lemieux explained that the entire Assessing Department is on the operating budget for the City. Additionally, being on the board is a part of Mr. Cohen's job.

Q: Is the Board of Assessors the end of the appeal process?

A: Ms. Lemieux explained that appeals go to the Appellate Tax Court for residential. The City tries to negotiate with the applicants of commercial properties.

Councilor Noel motioned to approve with passed unanimously.

**Chair's Note:** *The following two items were discussed together.*

**#395-20**      **Request for updates on budget and possible reimbursements at Newton Public Schools**  
The President of the Council, on behalf of the City Council, requesting updates to the Finance Committee from the Chief Financial Officer regarding budget expenditures and possible reimbursements related to school reopening at each meeting this fall.

**Action:**      **Finance Held 6-0**

**Chair's Note:** *Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux provided an update on the expenditure of funds for COVID-19 as related to item #239-20.*

**Note:**            Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer explained that they have started weekly surveillance testing for any Newton School Department staff that is teaching in person and would like to be tested. Ms. Lemieux noted that testing and vaccinations are still voluntary. The City also needs to decide if they will be joining the State's testing program and they have also been discussing pool testing. The School Committee continues to discuss the testing process for all. Ms. Lemieux noted that the administration is also in constant contact with the School Department to discuss what is needed to go back to full in-person teaching and learning. This includes having the ability to provide funds to the School Department if needed.

Ms. Lemieux explained that the City thought that the School Department would receive three or four times the previously allocated ESSER funds with a new, upcoming appropriation but instead will only receive approximately \$1.5 million. The administration and Liam Hurley will be going back to the State to make sure this allocation is correct. Ms. Lemieux explained that the City has approximately \$20 million in different grant and relief sources that has been made available to Newton, and approximately 25% of that allocated funding is not yet spoken for. She noted that the rules continue to change for the use of these funds. The administration's priorities in using the remaining funds include more testing and getting the vaccines out. The Senior Center is working to reach out to the older population on the issue of vaccinations. The priorities also include the Grab & Go food program and a focus on how to help restaurants in Newton survive through the pandemic.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: Is there a prospect of doing summer school because of the remote learning?

A: Ms. Lemieux explained that this would be a question for the School Department.

Q: Are there plans to reopen the Gath pool or Crystal Lake?

A: Ms. Lemieux explained that they are meeting with Parks, Recreation and Culture to investigate this question. They have also been discussing how they will work out summer camps. Ms. Lemieux noted that they may have answers by the end of March.

Q: Has there been a discussion on how the City will make Village Centers safe for outdoor dining?

A: Ms. Lemieux explained there is team run by the Planning and Health Departments to figure out what the safest plan will be.

Q: How is the administration thinking about how vaccinations will be distributed?

A: Ms. Lemieux explained that the State is making the decisions at this time.

Councilor Norton motioned to hold item #395-20 which passed unanimously.

The Committee adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Rebecca Walker Grossman, Chair**

Dear Councilors,

Much to say about last night's fantastic meeting featuring Senator Creem and the Police Reform Task Force But first I wish to reflect on the special vote to appropriate \$140,000 to the Fire Department for a 4th ladder.

It appears that the Chief's letter to the mayor provided very little information and the Mayor's letter to the Council basically repeated what the Chief said and the Council approved this funding without any questions.

Here's what I wonder:

1-What are the ages of trucks/ladders 1,2 and 3 and how frequently is a spare brought into service?  
L-1 – 2013, L-2 – 2019, L- 3 – 2009 We use our spares frequently because of repairs, certification checks, and maintenance.

2-How often have we asked for backup from Waltham or Boston and is there a financial or political cost to doing so? It is very infrequent that we have to use outside resources because we have our own spares.

In other words, I think they should have to demonstrate, with facts, the need.

Also,

3-What is the age of the new truck that is proposed for purpose?

We are currently looking at a 2006 ladder

4-What do we know about the shape it's in?

Fire Department mechanic is scheduled to look at the vehicle and give his opinion

5-How long do we expect the new truck to last?

We expect the get 5 to 8 years out of the spare until we purchase a new ladder

6-What is the cost of the new truck?

I am hoping to purchase for \$150,000

7-Is that a reasonable cost?

The cost is very reasonable if it is the shape we expect

In other words, they should have to demonstrate why this particular purchase is a good one.

Also,

8-Why was there \$140,000 left over from the purchase of truck 2? (Why was the original budget request so far off?) When we request the cost of the apparatus, we also include what cost to dress the truck with new state of the art equipment. With lead time on putting equipment cost out to bid and purchasing equipment we were dealing with Covid. Spending was kept to a minimum and we used the equipment from the old ladder that was now a spare.

9-Why wasn't this purchase anticipated in the FY21 budget?

New ladder 2 was put into service in March of 2019, at that time we had 2 working spare ladder trucks.

There was no sign of failure of either truck when converted to spares

10-Is the replacement of this truck projected in the capital forecast? (From a quick, it seems there is a new truck planned for 2023 and a 1.2 million purchase scheduled for 2025 that would make ladder 3 into a spare. There is no mention of what would happen to the truck retired in 2023.)

The used vehicle is not in the capitol budget. Because it could be 5 years before we purchase a new ladder we need the spare. Upon acquiring the new ladder the old ladder 3 would be our newest spare.

11-Are maintenance and operating costs for this truck already budgeted or will there be additional, unplanned costs associated with this purchase?

### Repair and maintenance cost our budgeted annually

In other words, they should have to explain what unforeseen event or management process resulted in the need for an extra appropriation (not that this is necessarily bad).

Most importantly:

12-What other public safety need will not be bought or funded because of the purchase of this truck? In other words, is this the best investment of our public funds? **We have not eliminated any public safety need. The equipment that we would have purchased still meets all safety standards. It is of my opinion that we are in need of a spare ladder to be able to work in a safe manner. Borrowing a ladder truck from other municipalities are not available and that would create a public safety issue.**

I know these questions are really hard to answer! The Fire Department report, like the Police Department report, is buried in the budget section of the Comptroller's space on the City website. Unlike the PD, the Fire Dept doesn't have a public website and other than numbers of incidents (over 10,000 with almost half being EMS) and response times, it's really hard to get a sense of whether we are appropriately staffed/equipped in Fire, too much, or not enough. Theoretically, we can never have too much fire protection, but since funding for the Fire Department reduces the amount available for other public safety needs (like domestic violence), we have to ask.

It might seem a bit strange to ask these questions of a fire chief. Certainly they know best what they need to do their jobs. But the whole point of oversight is to have another bunch of eyes on these critical public safety questions. If the mayor doesn't ask questions before passing on the recommendation and if the City Council doesn't ask questions before approving the funds, it is possible that all these decisions are being made by just one man -- the chief -- and that's really not a good process IMHO.

My covid silver lining has been being able to attend these city meetings and learn more about how our local government works. I have great respect for the incredible amount of work you do on our behalf and (not but) I think we can do even better with more transparency and better oversight practices.

Sincerely,

Nora Lester Murad  
32 Holman Rd, Auburndale

### Newton Fire Apparatus - February 1, 2021 Status

**ENGINES**

| UNIT               | YEAR | DESCRIPTION                          | STATION |
|--------------------|------|--------------------------------------|---------|
| FRONT-LINE         |      |                                      |         |
| Engine 1           | 2016 | E-One Typhoon 1250/750/30B           | 1       |
| Engine 2           | 2020 | E- One Typhoon 1250/75030f           | 2       |
| Engine 3           | 2017 | E-One Typhoon 1250/750/30F           | 3       |
| Engine 4           | 2010 | Pierce Arrow XT 1500/750/25F         | 4       |
| Engine 7           | 2007 | Pierce Arrow XT 1500/750/25F         | 7       |
| Engine 10          | 2012 | E-One Typhoon 1250/750/30f           | 10      |
| SPARE              |      |                                      |         |
| Engine 8           | 2004 | E-One Cyclone II 1250/750 (ex E3)    | 2       |
| Engine 9           | 2000 | E-One Cyclone II 1250/500/40 (ex E1) | 7       |
| Engine 12 (old #2) | 2007 | Pierce Arrow XT 1500/750/25f         | 2       |

**LADDERS**

| UNIT               | YEAR | DESCRIPTION                         | STATION |
|--------------------|------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| FRONT-LINE         |      |                                     |         |
| Ladder 1           | 2013 | E-One Cyclone II 100' RMA           | 2       |
| Ladder 2           | 2019 | E-One Cyclone 100' RMA              | 7       |
| Ladder 3           | 2009 | 2009 Pierce Arrow XT 100' RMA       | 1       |
| SPARE              |      |                                     |         |
| OOS Ladder 4       | 1995 | 75' Quint                           | 10      |
| OOS Tower Ladder 5 | 2007 | Pierce Arrow XT 95' MM Twr (ex TL2) | 1       |

**SPECIAL UNITS**

| UNIT                       | YEAR | DESCRIPTION                                | STATION |
|----------------------------|------|--|---------|
| FRONT-LINE                 |      |  |         |
| Rescue 1                   | 2016 | E-One Cyclone II Heavy Rescue              | 3       |
| OTHER                      |      |  |         |
| Rescue 2                   | 1995 | Pierce Saber Heavy Rescue (from Hopkinton) | 3       |
| Air Supply Unit            | 2014 | Ford F-550/E-One Mobile Cascade            | 4       |
| Special Ops                | 1994 | Ford/Wheeled Coach (ex AMR)                | 2       |
| Emergency Response         | 1985 | Chevy/Hessey Support                       | 3       |
| Paramedic 1 (PM1)          |      | Fallon                                     |         |
| Paramedic 2 (PM2)          |      | Fallon                                     |         |
| Paramedic 3 (PM3)          |      | Fallon                                     |         |
| Paramedic 4 (PM4)          |      | Fallon                                     |         |
| Paramedic 5 (PM5)          |      | Fallon                                     |         |
| EMS Field Supervisor (FS1) |      | Fallon                                     |         |
| Lighting Trailer           |      |  | 4       |





Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

City of Newton, Massachusetts  
Office of the Mayor

40-21

Telephone  
(617) 796-1100  
Fax  
(617) 796-1113  
TDD/TTY  
(617) 796-1089  
Email  
rfuller@newtonma.gov

January 12, 2021

Honorable City Council  
Newton City Hall  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton, MA 02459

To the Honorable City Councilors:

I am pleased to reappoint Allan S. Cohen of 12 Philmore Road, Newton as a member of the Board of Assessors. His term of office shall expire on February 1, 2023 and his appointment is subject to your confirmation.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Warmly,


*Ruthanne Fuller*

Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

RECEIVED  
CITY CLERK  
NEWTON, MA. 02459

2021 JAN 12 PM 4:11

Allan S. Cohen  
12 Philmore Road  
Newton, MA 02458



December 30, 2020

Honorable Ruthanne Fuller, Mayor  
City of Newton  
1000 Commonwealth Ave  
Newton, MA 02459

Dear Mayor Fuller:

My appointment as the Commercial Assessor on the Board of Assessors comes up for renewal in February 2021. Your appointments span three years, and it's remarkable to me that my current appointment is nearing completion. I respectfully request that you name me to the Board for another three-year term.

During the current term, I successfully negotiated over 150 valuation appeals of commercial and investment properties brought by property owners or their tax reps. Each appeal was met with respect for the applicant and resolved with little or no adjustment and relatively very low tax dollars returned by the City. Notably, I successfully negotiated National Grid/Boston Gas Company's pending litigation, saving the City as much as \$350,000 in tax dollars. The gas company sought a new methodology for depreciation which lowered their assessment several millions of dollars per year for the past four years. I settled the entire bundle of appeals for \$26,400, without immense legal fees and statutory interest, and negotiated a new assessment this year for the gas company at \$112,309,900.

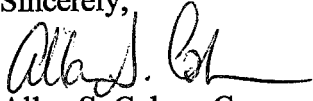
In the past three years, no commercial property appeals cost the City anything more than a nominal reduction in assessment. This is due in large part to my extensive experience as an assessor and appraiser for the City. I hold designations from the Commonwealth's Board of Professional Licensure, Massachusetts Association of Assessing Officers, and Massachusetts Board of Real Estate Appraisers. The latter professional organization inducted me into their Hall of Fame in 2019, an honor I share with a small handful of appraisers, real estate educators, and industry leaders. I am one of only two honorees who hold appraiser and assessor credentials.

Newton's Assessing Department is seen by the State's Department of Revenue, Board of Local Assessments (BLA) – the overseers of all municipal assessing departments, as highly skilled and effective. The annual information we provide is promptly reviewed and accepted, enabling our department to help the City meet its goals each year.

I look forward to continuing to serve the City of Newton for another three years. I respectfully seek your support and re-appointment. Please contact me if you need further information.

Best wishes to you and the City in the New Year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Allan S. Cohen".

Allan S. Cohen, Commercial Assessor

Cc: David Olson, City Clerk