



## Programs & Services Committee Report

### City of Newton In City Council

**Wednesday, May 19, 2021**

**Present:** Councilors Krintzman (Chair), Ryan, Albright, Humphrey, Wright, Baker, and Greenberg  
**Absent:** Councilor Noel

**City Staff:** Nadia Khan, Acting City clerk/Assistant Clerk of the Council; Chris Sullivan, Acting City Clerk/Assistant City Clerk for Vital Records; Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development; Nathan Giacalone, Committee Clerk

**#170-21      Recommendation to approve 2021 Preliminary Election date**

THE NEWTON ELECTION COMMISSIONERS recommending the City Council approve the date for a 2021 Preliminary Election, if needed.

**Action:**      Programs & Services Approved 7-0 for September 14, 2021

**Notes:**      Mr. Sullivan and Ms. Khan joined the Committee for discussion on the item. Mr. Sullivan introduced the item, saying that on May 12, the Election Commission met and discussed three potential dates for a preliminary election if needed, along with the pros and cons associated with each date. The three possible dates brought up were Tuesday, August 31, Tuesday, September 14, and Thursday, September 16. Mr. Sullivan said that the consensus was that August 31 would not be a good idea. This is because being late in the summer, many residents would likely be on vacation, as would many of the staff needed to run the election. Without an official City Clerk or assistant clerk for elections in place, it would also be difficult to manage. Mr. Sullivan added that the August date would shorten the signature collection period by at least two weeks.

Tuesday, September 14 was discussed as the preferred date. Mr. Sullivan said that mid-September is standard for Newton residents for preliminary elections, and with schools open it will provide easier access for use of schools as polling locations. The expectation is that September 14 would lead to increased turnout. Boston will be holding its own preliminary election on this date, serving as free advertising for Newton.

Thursday, September 16 would have similar benefits to using the 14<sup>th</sup>, except for being two days later. Unfortunately, September 16 is NOT on a Tuesday, which is customarily the day on which elections are held.

**Discussion:**

**Q:** Is the city constrained in the dates it can schedule the preliminary election for due to absentee and overseas ballots?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Has there been any news from the state about what mail-in voting will look like for this year's elections?

**A:** Nothing as of right now, but we continue to monitor for updates. Currently this election will probably look like those pre-COVID.

**Q:** If September 14 is chosen, will the August signature deadline remain the same?

**A:** Signature timeframes are set by law and the deadlines will not be shifted into August. Preparation is harder when dates are pushed together.

**C:** Thursday elections are as bad as August ones. September 14 seems like the best option.

Councilor Albright motioned approval with a date set for September 14, 2021 which carried 7-0.

**#199-21**      **Request for a discussion on an application for American Rescue Plan Funding**  
COUNCILORS LAREDO, KRINTZMAN, NORTON, AND GREENBERG requesting a discussion with the Administration regarding how Newton can apply for and use American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds from the Commonwealth in order to provide further assistance to Newton's most financially vulnerable residents.

**Action:**      Programs & Services Held 7-0

**Notes:**      Councilor Krintzman introduced the item, saying that tonight's discussion would focus on how ARP funds would be used for housing assistance. Mr. Heath joined the Committee for discussion on this item as well. He said that money was coming through the state to help with rental assistance and that he felt there would be enough to help all communities in Massachusetts based on the numbers available currently. Newton, being part of a catchment area, would be served through the Metro Boston agency which will serve those households in a difficult housing situation. Mr. Heath said that the Mayor alluded to other financial assistance in her budget needs by calling for a community needs assessment to determine where the greatest needs in the community are and how best to address them.

**Discussion:**

**Q:** Is there a sense of the City Council's role in these processes moving forward?

**A:** Not exactly, but there is a good relationship between the Planning Department and the Council and Planning will continue to share information and give input.

**Q:** Is this money separate from the \$63 million that Newton is getting?

**A:** Yes, the state is getting a sizeable amount of money to spend at large and communities like Newton would be part of the undertaking. There would not be a special allocation directed to Newton, but Newton residents would be eligible recipients. The program guidelines for some of

the money covers up to 12 months of rental arrearage and an extra three months if funding is allowed and need is demonstrated. It could be used for residents at 100 percent AMI versus the City's eligibility criteria of 70 percent. Eligibility has expanded to 80 percent of area median income.

**Q:** Will an item be docketed to address rental assistance?

**A:** This is a good question, Planning still needs to check with organizations but currently, it seems that there will be money available to serve Newton households. There were concerns that an application crush would prevent or delay Newton households getting served, but if there is a good understanding from housing agencies that funds are available, there is no clear reason why the program would be supported.

**C:** Are we planning for the program expiration so that we can contact people who will be affected?

**A:** Yes-The expiration for most people is June, with other groups following in July and August.

**Q:** The mayor's speech mentioned targeted community needs assessment. Would this approach work backward to see what needs the funding could cover, or would it put the comprehensive study of needs first?

**A:** The expectation would be to undertake a needs assessment to serve Newton for years to come. It is unknown currently how much of Newton's funding will be set aside to help, but the study will provide a plan to work from on how to direct the funds.

Josephine McNeil was invited to speak on the item. She said that Newton has a unique opportunity to help its most vulnerable residents and about 200 have already benefitted from the emergency rental assistance program. Now unless things have changed these people still have outstanding rent due. With the state of emergency coming to an end and legal challenges to the eviction moratorium, more people are at risk for homelessness. Ms. McNeil said that if Newton can help these people access emergency rental assistance it can help get them to a position where they no longer owe anything. Counseling could also help get them into more secure housing situations. Ms. McNeil urged the city to reach out to the Governor, requesting a specific amount of money for the emergency rental assistance program. She continued that based on the mayor's newsletter, populations of color have been disproportionately impacted by COVID. There is a needs assessment based on American Rescue Plan which includes a priority for a state to show it has provided its funds to those most impacted. Ms. McNeil said that Newton does not need to wait months for a needs assessment and already knows who needs financial help.

**C:** These have been interesting points raised. Are you saying that the City knows these peoples' needs enough already that it does not need to wait for the assessment?

**A:** The City would still need to meet individually with people, but it will not need an assessment program that takes so long.

**Q:** How long would this assessment take?

**A:** Planning would be collaborating with Health & Human Services, so there is no exact timeline currently. Direct information such as employment training has been provided to those already

receiving assistance. The Department is targeting individuals for continuing assistance, but more work remains to be done.

**C:** It is good to cast a wider net, but has a two-pronged approach been considered? There is currently a docket item asking for discussion on supportive services to Newton's most needy citizens and this discussion sounds similar to that.

**A:** The Planning Department has collected information regarding this docket item and is ready whenever the Committee is to initiate the conversation.

**Q:** How much of the new aid money coming through the state is available for rental assistance?

**A:** This amount is in the hundreds of millions.

**C:** The Council needs to make sure that there is enough funding available to cover the 240 people who will drop off the system in June.

**Q:** What role does the Council have in respect to the rest of this money?

**A:** The Mayor plans to meet in small groups to get input and figure out the plan forward.

**C:** It is a little confusing with all of the different pots of money being used with the addition of general aid and other grants.

**C:** There should be a rolling allotment of funds as there is already a group of about 240 residents who the City already knows are in need and does not need an assessment for. Waiting for a needs assessment could allow them to fall into homelessness.

**C:** Is the aid money being distributed through the state and not directly through the city?

**A:** The state will set up some programs and Newton could also set up its own, however Newton lacks a specialized agency to be the natural recipient of these funds so one would have to be created.

**Q:** Is the City helping people at 60 percent AMI for rental assistance?

**A:** Currently the City is serving those around 60 percent and below. Newton has the capacity to go up to 80 percent, but the Council has set 65 percent as the priority.

**Q:** Who runs the City's programs for rental and utilities assistance? How much of the money was used for our residents?

**A:** The City only helps with the Rental Assistance Program and that was initially funded through the CDBG and CPA. It used to be run through the Planning Department, but now the agency MetroWest handles the program administration. Boston, as a large entity, got a special allotment of funding on its own, as did some Massachusetts counties. The City will continue to study how far these funds will go.

It was said that this item could be held for further discussion that could include additional information from the administration.

Councilor Ryan motioned to Hold which carried 7-0.

The meeting adjourned at 7:47pm.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Josh Krintzman, Chair**