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To: Councilor Rebecca Walker Grossman, Chair Finance Committee

Cc: Mayor Ruthanne Fuller  
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All City Council Members  
Nadia Khan, Acting Clerk of the Council  
Susan Djikowski, Comptroller

From: Maureen Lemieux, C.F.O.

Date: June 17, 2021

Subject: Responses to FY2022 Budget Resolutions

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Please accept this communication as the Administration's response to the FY2022 budget resolutions submitted by the Honorable City Council on June 16, 2021.

**Budget Resolution #5 - School Department**

**Resolution regarding bus fee reduction/elimination**

*Submitted by Councilors Noel, Bowman, Krintzman, Kalis, Humphrey, Laredo, Greenberg, Leary, Grossman, Ryan, Lipof, Markiewicz, Wright, Danberg*

That the sense of the Council is that Newton's school bus pass fees should be eliminated or significantly reduced to promote equity, advance our climate action goals, and reduce congestion in Newton.

**Administration Response:**

The School Committee sets all school fees and the FY2022 Budget assumes receiving bus fee revenue of approximately \$500,000. The revenue directly offsets the cost of the use of yellow buses, the total cost of which is \$3.64 million in FY2022. Without this revenue, NPS faces an immediate budget gap of \$500,000 forcing reductions in other areas either within the Newton Public Schools or in municipal services. As a reminder, all Kindergarten – 5<sup>th</sup> grade students and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students that reside more than 2.0 miles from their school do not pay the bus fee.

NPS has a strong tradition of being extremely generous to any family facing financial hardships and accepting all financial waivers and will continue to do so. The bus fee revenue derived is approximately 13% of the NPS direct yellow bus costs and the \$350 fee equates to \$1.94 per day for transportation to and from school. NPS transportation fees are in line with those of many other school districts.

In addition, NPS and the City continue to make walking and biking to school safer and easier so students and families have an alternative to driving, whether in an automobile or a bus.

### **Budget Resolution #8 - Parks & Recreation and Culture**

#### **Resolution regarding improvement of the city's athletic fields**

*Proposed by Councilors Oliver, Laredo, Norton, Lipof, Wright*

Requesting increased funding to improve Newton's multi-purpose athletic fields. Newton should immediately adopt and fund the plan already provided by Newton's athletic groups which includes details for maintaining, modernizing as well as managing permitting fees to establish a more self-sustaining maintenance budget.

#### **Administration Response:**

The City's athletic fields are so important to so many of us and a high priority for the Fuller Administration.

Prior to Mayor Fuller taking office, the City dedicated only \$30,000 specifically to the maintenance of Athletic Fields; the Administration has significantly increased the funding and the FY2022 Budget for Athletic Fields is \$250,000, the highest in the City's history (up from \$75,000 last fiscal year). As is the case with so many areas, the City had underfunded maintenance of athletic fields but the Fuller Administration is committed to continuing to build this budget to reflect the investment our fields and the many people who enjoy them deserve.

To determine the extent of the needs, lay out priorities and determine a realistic schedule of investments (from both an operational and funding perspective), the Parks, Recreation and Culture staff are in the process of creating a master plan for the City's athletic fields.

Over the past year, the Parks, Recreation & Culture Department began this important work on the master plan. There have been regular meetings with key stakeholders, including representatives from local youth sport groups, field users, our maintenance team, and the school athletics department. People have shared their ideas publicly with each other and made suggestions to improve our playing fields and expand field availability.

The fruit of this work is a 3 to 5-year fields improvement plan (see draft presented to Commission subcommittee [here](#)). You will see that we have a lot of work to do. We look forward to sharing it next month, in July 2021, with our proposal before the Community Preservation Commission for an initial \$400,000 in funding for design and engineering work. The first batch of projects are projected at this early stage to cost \$4.7 million to construct. We will continue to expand the plan for additional years, building to a 10-year master plan.

The goal of the 3 to 5-year plan is to bring new fields online, improve existing fields, and expand field amenities such as light systems to better provide for the needs of the community. The CPC request will include funds to hire a design/engineering firm to design the field layouts to maximize use of space and to engineer quality playing surfaces.

A number of questions were raised by Councilors about the Albemarle lights and light poles. The original plan was to use Green Communities Grant funds to replace the light fixtures with more efficient LED bulbs. Unfortunately, the state did not fund that project due to limited payback estimates. (the state did fund the replacement of light fixtures at the Newton South tennis courts and fieldhouse.) The City moved forward by conducting a structural integrity assessment by an engineering firm. The engineering firm found that many of the light poles were at end of life and

recommended full system replacement. As soon as the \$400,000 is available, the engineering firm will determine where to put the new light poles by re-examining the layout of the fields in the northern half of Albemarle Park. We will be assessing how the layout of the existing fields may be improved to eliminate overlapping sport areas. Currently, the fields are unable to be used concurrently. Additionally, the placement of the light poles will be optimized (which isn't the case for either of the currently illuminated sport fields currently). We hope to install the Albemarle lights with better angles to improve photometrics, including light intensity and uniformity. These changes can provide a much-improved experience for field users so we permanently improve the athletic fields for many decades. We look forward to providing updates on the Albemarle lights to the City Council as the analysis and the decision-making proceeds. We know the lights needs to be upgraded as quickly as possible.

In addition to the increase in the Athletic Fields line item in the FY2022 Budget, we have increased the major property maintenance account (technically called Public Property R-M which includes contracted mowing) by \$125,000, from \$575,000 to \$700,000. These increased investments result in a combined \$300,000 in additional funds for field maintenance. These funds will allow us to immediately improve the playing conditions with increased maintenance, including fertilization, aeration, seeding and irrigation as well as pest management/ weed control.

Furthermore, the CIP includes two additional athletic fields improvement projects with lights at both Newton North High School (new lights) and Forte Park (replacing lights).

### **Budget Resolution #10 - Public Works**

#### **Resolution to create civilian flagger program under Public Works**

*Proposed by Councilors Leary*

Resolved that the City of Newton would be better served with the flexibility to engage a civilian construction detail flagger program under the Department of Public Works and that the necessary negotiations should be made to enable this change. Further resolved: that the crossing guard program could be strengthened by integrating it into a civilian detail flagger program.

#### **Administration Response:**

The Fuller Administration is deeply interested in having safe and effective flaggers available in the City. Massachusetts was the last state in the country to allow civilian flaggers and this law has now been in place since 2008. The City must bargain the issue with the police unions. The City was "awarded" language from the Joint Labor Management Committee (JLMC) in the 2019 settlement with the Newton Police Superior Officers' Association to utilize supplemental detail personnel, but still must bargain with the Newton Patrol Association for the use of non-sworn personnel for details that cannot be filled by police officers.

It is not the expectation of the Administration that this work will be transferred to the Department of Public Works; if the City moves forward with supplemental non-sworn personnel, we expect to do so through the supervision of the Newton Police Department.

### **Budget Resolution #11 - Public Works**

#### **Resolution to fund Sustainable Materials Management position**

*Proposed by Councilors Leary*

During the Covid crisis a part time position was cut in the Sustainable Materials Management (SMM) budget, and it has not been restored in the current budget. The City has seen a 17% increase in the recently negotiated hauling contract. The increase in costs is certain to continue with both

hauling and disposal contracts. Funding this position will better enable the Director of SMM and the Waste Diversion Coordinator to focus on policies and programs to increase waste diversion and reduce costs to the City. In addition, the SMM program has an important role in helping to expand and develop Statewide EPR programs, which can help shift costs from municipalities resulting in significant savings.

**Administration Response:**

The Administration is committed to sustainable materials management and its core concepts of reducing, reusing and recycling.

The Administration works very closely with all department heads to determine the resources necessary to enable our managers to achieve the desired goals and outcomes for their respective departments, especially during the budget process. At this time, the Commissioner of the Department of Public Works does not believe additional staffing is necessary in the Sustainable Materials Division.

**Budget Resolution #12 - Parks, Recreation and Culture**

**Resolution for addition investment in tree maintenance**

*Proposed by Councilor Norton, Malakie*

Requesting additional \$250,000 to Parks, Recreation and Culture for investment in tree planting and maintenance to avoid loss of tree canopy while City Shade Tree Master Plan is drafted.

**Administration Response:**

The Administration is committed to Newton's urban trees – their health & maintenance and continuing to add to the canopy.

The City has dedicated unprecedented resources to the City's trees and tree canopy over the past decade. The Forestry Services budget has grown from \$577,000 in FY2012 to just over \$1.8 million in the FY2022 Budget. In that same timeframe, the City has established an in-house forestry crew that now employs eight full-time members of staff, in addition to our Tree Warden. This year alone, the Administration increased the Forestry budget by an additional \$300,000 (adding back \$200,000 in funds reduced during the FY21 pandemic-era budget and adding \$100,000 more).

An important initiative in FY2022 is the development of a City Shade Tree Master Plan that will thoughtfully determine our short and long-term goals, where to invest our time and resources, how to get the work done, as well as the level of investment and the time frame (operationally and financially) for supporting our tree canopy.

During FY2022, the Forestry Services team is focusing new tree plantings in areas with the most limited canopy cover and heat island effects due to impervious surfaces. The October 2020 [Capital Investment Plan](#) (see pages 163-165 for the maps) prioritized FY2022 plantings in the northern sections of West Newton/Auburndale. With the increased funding (not known back in October), Forestry may also be able to begin tree planting in the FY2023 prioritized zones of northern Nonantum/Newtonville. Watering of young trees, removal/pruning of unhealthy trees and limbs, stump grinding and emergency tree response will also remain a high priority for Forestry operations during FY2022.