



## **Public Safety & Transportation Committee Budget Report**

### **City of Newton** **In City Council**

**Thursday, May 5, 2022**

Present: Councilors Downs (Chair), Lipof, Malakie, Bowman, Oliver, Markiewicz and Lucas

Absent: Councilor Grossman

Also Present: Councilors Kalis, Baker, Albright, Leary, Humphrey and Norton

City staff present: Assistant Chief Greg Gentile, Newton Fire Department; Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer and Perry Rosenfield, Senior Financial Analyst

Others Present: NewTV

#### **DEPARTMENT BUDGET & CIP DISCUSSION:**

##### **Fire Department**

#### **Referred to Finance and Appropriate Committees**

**#213-22**

##### **Submittal of the FY23 to FY27 Capital Improvement Plan**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting the Fiscal Years 2023 to 2027 Capital Improvement Plan pursuant to section 5-3 of the Newton City Charter.

#### **Referred to Finance and Appropriate Committees**

**#213-22(2)**

##### **Submittal of the FY23 Municipal/School Operating Budget**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting in accordance with Section 5-1 of the City of Newton Charter the FY23 Municipal/School Operating Budget, passage of which shall be concurrent with the FY23-FY27 Capital Improvement Program (#213-22).

**EFFECTIVE DATE OF SUBMISSION 04/19/22; LAST DATE TO PASS THE BUDGET 06/03/22**

#### **Referred to Finance and Appropriate Committees**

**#213-22(3)**

##### **Submittal of the FY23 – FY27 Supplemental Capital Improvement Plan**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting the FY23 – FY27 Supplemental Capital Improvement Plan.

## Fire Department

**Note:** Assistant Chief Greg Gentile, Newton Fire Department; Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; Perry Rosenfield, Senior Financial Analyst and Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer joined the Committee to discuss the Fire Department Budget.

The Chair noted Newton's pride in the department, which is one of the few Class 1 fire departments in the state. The designation is a team effort, as water pressure at fire hydrants is a key metric, as well as NFD training. At \$27m, the NFD is the second largest budget on the City side, after Public Works. She noted that we are in the midst of a search for a new Chief, and acknowledged the work of the previous two chiefs, and how they have broadened the NFD's concept of public safety from mere response times to include health and medical, prevention of harm and street safety.

Assistant Chief Gentile stated that Chief Luchetti's three years were challenging, but agreed that he left the department in better shape. In 2019, the department did the highest number of runs ever -- over 10,000 runs. In 2020, due to COVID, that number dropped. But by 2021, we are running close to 2019. In 2022, we expect to exceed the run totals that we had in in 2019.

### Vacancies

The department has seven vacancies, which we constantly are working to fill. The department has a minimum staffing level, which means vacancies are covered by overtime. We have five cadets hired and set to enter the Fire Academy in Springfield at the end of May. This is a change in our procedure, we've consistently sent our cadets to Bridgewater. We've decided to try Springfield to try to decrease the time it takes to get these cadets into the academy. There are some challenges with Springfield due to the length of the ride and housing availability. We will continue to investigate housing. We don't think the hotel prices will work so the candidates will stay in Springfield fire houses. We are hopeful this is helpful to the department.

### Tech Rescue Training

We have 12 members in a tech rescue training program through a grant. This will bring 12 firefighters up to the level of a Rescue Technician. A few years ago, we brought 24 members to the Rescue Technician level. We are also in parallel trying to get as many members as we can to be not quite to the technician level, but what we call the awareness level of tech rescue, which is important, if you have a technical rescue.

Last year we were also able to give 95% of our workforce a respect in the workplace training course. This year, we will continue that same pace, but we're really focusing on supervisors, the next step that is important. It's a similar course, but it is really geared towards the people that are in charge.

### NewGov Software

The department has the NewGov permitting. the Fire Prevention Bureau has been working diligently to get up and running. Assistant Chief Gentile stated that he receives weekly updates on the new software. There have been challenges, but we believe that it's really going to have a significant impact

on the way fire prevention operates. We the equipment. This is really a big step and probably most exciting for the Fire Prevention Bureau. The department anticipates that late June, early July that they will be close to fully operational with at least their permitting process. Plan reviews will take a little bit longer.

#### New Engine Seven

A committee was formed to decide on a replacement for Engine 7. We have formed a committee to give a fresh look at the process, and to meet with four manufacturers. In the past, we had chosen a manufacturer and there's some benefits to choosing and sticking with one manufacturer. We have met with two of the four manufacturers. We would like to speed this up, because we're being told that the lead times have increased. We're trying to keep those frontline pieces National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) compliant, which is part of our Class 1 Rating. Engine 7 will allow the department to keep all front-line equipment within the 15-year age National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard.

#### Simulcast Radio

The city has issued a request for proposals (RFP) for simulcast radio. We were hoping to get bids back soon. Simulcast radio provides better coverage for more areas. Currently, there is one transmitter. If you look at a topography map of Newton, there's quite a few hills and valleys. Simulcast radio will network and mesh a grid over the City, so that signal can get to the low areas. It can also get inside buildings. Some of our buildings, including schools, have poor radio reception.

#### FIRE DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL & STAFFING:

The Fire Department employs 199 full time employees and 1 part time employee.

#### FIRE DEPARTMENT FY2022 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- The department maintained its Class 1 Fire rating through extensive training and updated software.
- The department worked throughout the ongoing COVID pandemic and has made significant changes to policies and procedures not only to protect first responders from exposure, but also to protect residents. Firefighters practice social distancing, wear face covering while working in the stations and in public spaces, and decontaminate the six fire stations daily. Fire apparatus are decontaminated after each call. More than 80% of the department has been vaccinated and the department is continuing to vaccinate firefighters. All members of the department are doing their part to keep residents protected.
- The department continues to replace bunker gear that is approaching its shelf life. All firefighters are issued two sets of gear.
- Three new recruits were trained at the Mass Fire Academy to a Firefighter level 1&2 certification and are now in the Suppression Force. The department offered six conditional letters of employment with the recruits who entered the Mass Fire Academy in May of 2022.

**Outcome 1, Prevent Fires** – The department will continue to streamline and modernize services by collaborating with consultants and other staff to provide a seamless online system for requesting building, fire alarm, hot work, and other permits. Currently, the system is paper-based and dependent on manual entry. Constituents must apply for plan reviews and permits in person with hard copies of necessary documents and bring them to other departments for approval. The new City-wide permitting system will enhance the permitting process by allowing applicants the convenience of submitting applications, necessary documentation and payments anytime from anywhere, not bound by business hours, allowing for seamless data sharing and workflows across departments. This will help reduce processing time, significantly reduce the need for manual entry by staff, enhance efficiency and productivity, allow for collaboration among multiple permit reviews simultaneously, reduce the amount of paper used and the storage space needed for records and integrate inspections into the workflow, creating greater accountability, responsibility and transparency.

**Outcome 2, Upgrade and improve fire radio frequencies** – The department is working towards continuing much needed upgrades to radio communications via a simulcast system for incoming and outgoing radio messaging. Like a cell phone, there can be “dead” zones for fire radios. It is critical that emergency radio communications work everywhere and always. Upgrading radio technology, we can leverage different antennas to create a massive network, ensuring that there are no “dead” zones, and if there are calls happening simultaneously on the police and fire frequencies that interference will not occur.

**Outcome 3, Train our members** – The Training Division will continue to deliver the most advanced training to personnel, keeping members prepared to meet the needs of the community. Two of the priorities this year will be to focus on Tech Rescue. Fourteen members of the department will take a 4-week introduction to the Tech Rescue course. Subjects will include rope rescue, confined space, trench, and extrication rescue, and elevator emergency operations. The Training Division will continue both a “back to basics” program, technical rescue training and will improve curriculum to maintain a “Class 1” Fire Department. The department will build not only on technical rescue skills but will maintain basic skills (forcible, respectful entry, search, rescue and fire suppression). The department will continue training on respect in the workplace.

In 2018, the department switched bunker gear manufacturers to ensure new gear was free of [PFAS](#) (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances—known carcinogens and endocrine disrupters). The old bunker gear manufacturer could not guarantee PFAS-free gear. Every member has been issued a new set of turnout gear with our new manufacturer. We do not have any of the old [AFFE](#) (Aqueous Film-Forming Foam, used for chemical fires and heavily contaminated with PFAS) foam, all the new foam is free of known carcinogens.

#### FIRE DEPARTMENT BUDGET FY2023

The following are significant line item changes to expenses in the budget.

Fire Administration - \$29,289 increase

Fire Rescue - \$895,452 increase including \$250,000 for injured on duty  
Fire Station Maintenance - \$23,000 decrease

#### SUPPLEMENTAL CIP

Priority #41 - \$800,000 for emergency communications (radio system infrastructure) to be shared with the Police Department.

Priority #52 - \$700,000 for new pumper truck (Engine 7)

#### GRANT, GIFT & REVOLVING FUND

Federal Assistance to Firefighters Grant \$200,000

State Regional HAZMAT Response Grant Program \$50,000

Fire Department Damage Recovery Revolving \$30,000

Fire Department Gifts \$2,000

### **Q&A**

Q.: You have the same number of full time employees (FTE) in the upcoming years, is that correct?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered he believes that is correct.

Q.: Referring to the full time salary line, fire administration line 511001, in the personnel sections of the budget, line the increase from year 2022 to 2023 is approximately 10% from \$700,000 to \$780,000. Can you explain that?

A: Mr. Yeo answered personnel line-item increases are sometimes dependent on exactly who the staff are in that department, what union they are in, and collective bargaining agreement changes. Ms. Lemieux made various assumptions about changeover in staff. There are no changes to FTEs and regarding collective bargaining agreements, there is nothing new since they were largely resolved last year. The budget is built person by person. Each group will have different assumptions based on who is in there. Assistant Chief Gentile added that we have a large group of younger firefighters who are eligible for steps who may step up quickly or in the next few years. Mr. Rosenfield added that specifically for administration, there were several years of [AFSCME](#) Union contractual increases. The union contracts are on the Human Resources website. Mr. Yeo added that the fire administration subject to collective bargaining got caught up this year (on back pay). Chair Downs suggested referring to page 22 of the Mayor's Budget Analysis for the status of all city union contracts. Mr. Yeo suggested talking with Ms. Lemieux.

Q.: Regarding the seven vacancies, are those firefighters or are those administration staff?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered firefighters. They were either firefighter retirees, or they were promotions.

Q: Regarding the 95% training in the respect in the workforce, is the 5% remaining on medical leave?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered that is correct. Some folks are out with some long term illness or injury that did not receive the training. When they return to work, they will complete the training, as well as new recruits.

Q.: Where is the supervisory training located in the budget book? How many people will this train?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered that there is a \$60,000 training budget, prioritizing certain trainings, depending on what we feel is the most important and training for supervisors is at the top of the list and will get priority. The \$60,000 will allow the department to train 5 Deputies and 12 Captains, that is the minimum level which the training will be geared towards. Lieutenants will need different training. I would agree that we could have done a better job of explaining this in the budget.

Q.: The overtime account has declined. Are there concerns that this may increase?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered that the department is trying to fill vacancies as quickly as possible. The department is starting the hiring process for six additional vacancies that we foresee. This is important because of the length of time it takes to get individuals into the training. We also hope fewer staff will have to take time due to COVID. There is also a decrease in the number of long-term injured members. At one time, it was as high 15 people, now it is approximately 6.

Q: Are there many senior firefighters?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered no, the World War II and Vietnam Veterans have retired. The department does not foresee a large group of retirees soon. The department is young.

Q: How can I compare the growth in compensation for both fire, police and others, relative to other departments, and most especially public schools. I think this is a particularly sensitive topic, especially when our constituents are looking at these numbers and saying, you know, why is the Fire Department budget going up by 3.71% and the Police Department budget is going up by 5.84%, most of which is personnel, which is in line or more than the school budget. We hear how the school budget is not sustainable. I'd want to be able to answer maybe there's a very good reason. How do those budgets line up? Please provide a comparison sheet to better understand the budget.

A: Mr. Yeo answered that Ms. Lemieux put a comparison sheet together. In the City budget, several the contracts have been settled years after they came to an end. Those funds are set aside in a wage reserve, and once the contracts settle, years of back pay then hit into a single year's budget, looking like a large jump. With the Fire AFSCME contract and the police budget, that was years of a contract of backpay hitting in one year. The school department doesn't have that problem and that has not been an issue, the contracts have largely been settled on time or within the year so there's not years of back pay in the school budget. If you look at the contracts across the City, that they're largely the same, in terms of increases. There are some differences, there are different step rates for different unions. It is complicated. Ms. Lemieux added that the mayor allocated a 3.5% increase to the public schools, which certainly demonstrates how important schools are for the city. City Departments only

have a total of a 3% increase. I just want to make sure everybody understands that the City Departments in total are going up by half a percent less than what we allocated to the schools.

Q: I have reviewed the past five years, and despite page 22, the budget document is not user friendly. What Mr. Yeo said, confirms that there have been clear statements about the teacher's contract being unsustainable for our budget.

A: Mr. Yeo answered not from the mayor's office.

Q. Mayor Fuller said that contract wasn't fair, she's said that the contract is unsustainable. The amount is unsustainable.

A: Mr. Yeo answered that the budget of the department is unsustainable, not the contract. A very big difference. We manage the City budget to be sustainable, and that is what the Mayor's team and Ms. Lemieux have done. The budget is up 3.0% on the city side of the budget. The school department has a \$9 million increase a 3.5% increase plus millions of dollars in ARPA.

Q: Is 75% of the department under 30-35 years old?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered that's a fair estimate.

Q: How many Class 1 Fire Departments are in the Country?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered that there are four in the State.

Q: Other departments have been asked at the beginning of the budget process if they could find savings. Has this happened in the Fire Department?

A: Mr. Yeo answered that Ms. Lemieux always asks each department yearly to review their budget, line by line looking for savings throughout the department. Ms. Lemieux added that in the Fire Department we have gone quite far on some lines. Most recently, we reduced a vehicle removing \$60,000 from the budget. The NFD has minimum manning levels. Where there are vacancies for sick/vacation leave, we never end up saving that money; we pay overtime to fill these positions. Other than staffing, we've pushed hard on some of our different line items. Things like protective gear, training, communication supplies, public safety supplies, etc. we have made sure that we haven't lowered those figures. As I'm always pushing a different department to reduce their budgets there are also different line items, particularly in police and fire, where we know that we need to maintain certain levels. Ms. Lemieux stated that what's driving a good portion of the increase in this budget, or what makes it be more than 2.75, or 3%, is overtime. We will be requesting additional money for overtime this year. Increased costs in the department are the change in the statutes when it comes to the cancer presumption. This year's budget in Fire Rescue, we added money. We typically do not budget for out for injured on duty pay. This year, we put \$250,000 on that line item because the

statutes have changed, we know that we will be incurring significant costs on that line item. We would have added funds if they were available.

Q: It appears the department is heavy on men, with two women. What are the obstacles to hiring women and people of color? Of the new recruits going to the academy, are they all men?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered that working towards diversity is something that we are talking about with Human Resources. The department needs to take steps towards and work towards increasing diversity, including women and people of color. The department needs to have those candidates available through the civil service process to interview and hire them. I would agree. All men are going to the academy.

Q: How is the department doing on hiring people of color?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered out of the 199, I believe we have seven African American, eight Latinx, one Asian American and two female firefighters.

Q: What can be done to improve hiring of people of color, women, etc.?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered that we must increase the number of women and people of color in the candidate pool and taking the civil service exam. We have begun these conversations with Human Resources on how to make the candidate pool more diverse. Civil Service provides the test. If we ask for example, five people civil service provides a list of who we can interview. Assistant Chief Gentile has not interviewed a woman, they're just not on the list, they are not taking the civil service test.

Q: Would you create a short document which would explain this budget a little bit better for people? It's important that this be a public document.

A: Ms. Lemieux answered yes, we will certainly be more than happy to do anything that helps all understand exactly where the increases are. There are some sections that are perhaps more important than others, when we write our analysis calling out some of the things where you have the questions. The fire budget only increased by what you would normally expect except for the fact that we added the \$250,000 for cancer presumption. Mr. Yeo added that to learn what union affiliation different groups have, it is under the Personnel tab of the budget. There's a column of business grade, and you can see whether they're union or non-union, and then what unit or what union they're in.

Q. The City's overall budget has gone from 462 million to 480 million. Is it that the budget includes pension payoffs and other items taking out money that could be directed to operations?

A: Ms. Lemieux answered that is exactly what the issue is. We've increased pensions by 9.6%. I don't recall if the debt service went up by more than two and a half percent. To be honest, I never look at percentages. We focus on every single line item in this budget, and I never measured percentages,



because I don't think we'd be making good decisions if we were doing that. The school budget is different, because we must give them a bottom-line number. We know what we must pay for pensions and insurance for retirees, we know what our debt service is, we decide what the appropriation will be for the schools and remaining is what goes to the municipal departments. This year, we had 3%.

Q: Ms. Lemieux mentioned that she would docket an item for the Fire Department overtime expense. Is that more than the amount that is listed for regular overtime in the budget?

A: Ms. Lemieux answered yes, she will be requesting money for Fiscal year 22 from free cash in addition to what is in the budget.

Q: Assistant Chief Gentile is hopeful the overtime account will decline significantly due to fewer personnel being injured on duty, sick, or away from the job. Is the City seeing that same trend or has this been reviewed?

A: Ms. Lemieux answered that we are certainly trying to work our way through that. If we start to see it happen, that will be a good thing.

Q: Why is the department down one part-time employee?

A: Ms. Lemieux answered that was former Chief Proia's position working part time during COVID.

Q: Please explain what piece C-two is?

A: Assistant Chief Gentile answered that C-two is the shift commander who oversees the Deputy Chief and one firefighter on C-two which oversees the City, going to anything that they deem significant we assign them to.

Q: How is it that you're estimating that you're going to use \$10,000 less in electricity in 2023?

A: Ms. Lemieux answered that we use run rates when calculating electricity. If you look at the actuals for 2021, we were at 217 when we were still using a little bit more electricity at station 3, as everyone was getting used to the station, our electricity contract is the same contract that we've had since then. She hopes that 2022 will come in right around that number and that is why we budgeted that amount for FY23.

Q: Due to the high cost of gasoline, is the department considering electric vehicles?

A: Ms. Lemieux answered that the City purchases 200,000 gallons of gasoline a year, and 100,000 gallons of diesel. Our prices increased by 43%. We went back to Fiscal 2019, which was the last full year of true operations prior to COVID and reviewed all departments comparing what our price per gallon was, for that year, with the number of gallons that everyone buys, and have put those numbers in this year's budget. The electric vehicles are part of a very small portion of what the cost is for fuel in the department.

## Comments

We value education in this city tremendously over 60% of our budget. Roads, Fire and Police Department are important keeping us safe responding to the needs that we have in our lives. These are just as important as educating our children. I would not steal from one budget to make another whole, saying that one is more valued than another.

The School Department budget is not sufficient to meet the program and support our children. I want to understand why the budget is increasing for Fire Department. I feel like the public schools have been the only ones who've been put on the chopping block for cost reductions.

We settled two lawsuits, almost \$2 million. Is this reflected in a reduction in expenses of the department? If we had that \$2 million, we could afford to fund our schools. Based on the settlements, Outcome #3, Train our members, there should be more information. In the future, please provide the type of detail received from the Police Department.

I support what every single department needs, and not to the detriment of another. Each department needs to look at what they're doing, making sure they can balance the budget. These are all important factors when supporting our community.

The cost of living increase is shared across all departments. The settlement of the teacher's budget was not exceptionally rich, as has been implied in some quarters.

Unfortunately, we are restricted by revenue caps, especially on property taxes. Funding does come at the expense of one or another department making you choose where you're going to be dividing up money. On the other hand, some departments, have basically flat or 0% budget rises in a year, or sometimes they even fall being gone to essentially to restrict the rise of the City budget, so that these departments can grow by more than the amount that our revenue is rising proportionally.

It's important for Councilors to have an opportunity to ask critical and difficult questions across the board for all budgets. Budgets reflect our values.

## Suggestions

It would be beneficial to discuss how we might get the department and the equipment without the undue expense of fancy trucks.

After reviewing Outcome 1, Prevent Fires, unlike the statement on pages 1 and 2. Outcome 1, doesn't reflect public safety in the larger sense of prevention of injuries from fires, deaths from fires, deaths from medical emergencies and crashes. It would be beneficial to include this view.

I would like a deeper discussion of gear and how to protect firefighters from known carcinogens and health hazards.

It is great to hear that the department is looking at four manufactures for the new engine. Please consider the engine's size and maneuverability for the streets we have and ensure that they are fuel efficient.

I know we use mostly diesel for the larger equipment, it would be great to look for electric vehicles to save on gas and provide better climate performance in this department.

Committee members commended Assistant Chief Gentile and his department for his continued excellence. They then thanked the Fire Department for their excellent continued work.

The Committee took a straw vote to accept the Fire Department Budget of \$27,567,637, a 3.71% increase from FY22, along with the Supplemental CIP and the CIP, which passed unanimously.

The Committee adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Andreae Downs, Chair**