



Programs & Services Committee Budget Report

City of Newton In City Council

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

Present: Councilors Noel (Vice Chair), Humphrey, Krintzman (Chair), Baker, Greenberg, Albright, and Ryan

Absent: Councilor Wright

City Staff: Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; Alissa Ocasio Giuliani, City Solicitor; Perry Rosenfield, Senior Financial Analyst; Joe Mulvey, Chief Information Officer; Linda Walsh, Commissioner of Health & Human Services; Jayne Colino, Director of Senior Services; Ruth Hoshino, Director of School Health Services; Josh Handverger, Senior Financial Analyst; Nicole Banks, Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture; Carol Stapleton, Rec Program Manager; Greg Ansaldi, Deputy Director of Information Technology; Meghan Kennedy, Director of Social Services; Norine Stilton, Senior Services Executive Administrator; Shin-Yi Lao, Public Health Manager; Nathan Giacalone, Committee Clerk

DEPARTMENT BUDGET & CIP DISCUSSIONS:

City Solicitor

Senior Services

Health & Human Services

Information Technology

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.

City Solicitor

Note: Alissa Ocasio-Giuliani, City Solicitor, presented the proposed budget for the City Solicitor/Law Department. She stated that it has been another busy year for the department, notably including the pandemic, firearm legislation, and the vaccination policy. This was a success for the Law Department as an agreement was reached with the unions in collaboration with Human Resources (HR) to support employees seeking exemptions. The Department also continues to handle the claims made with the City. Looking ahead, Solicitor Giuliani stated that the Law Department will be increasing its collaboration with the Planning Department on village center zoning, the MBTA Communities Act, and the Climate Action Plan. She also added that Law is hopeful that it will be presenting the ADA Transition Plan before the Council by the winter.

Solicitor Giuliani then discussed the staffing changes taking place within the Law Department. Attorneys Pucci and O'Keefe have both moved onto new opportunities and Atty. Lawlor will be retiring. A new litigation attorney will be brought on in June and another vacancy will need to be filled as well. She also stated that Jonah Temple has been elevated to the Deputy City Solicitor position. Cuts have been made to the budget where possible while still ensuring that the Law Department can continue to meet its contractual obligations and goals. Solicitor Giuliani later added that Law has begun planning for recodification.

Q&A

Q: Is there any way to persuade Atty. Lawlor to postpone her retirement or remain in contact because of her institutional knowledge?

A: Solicitor Giuliani answered that she has already been able to persuade Atty. Lawlor to stay longer than her initial planned retirement. She confirmed that she has been talking about a formal continued collaboration with the Law Department after she leaves but that staff is also working to ensure an easy transition once she retires. A new attorney has joined the department and is learning from Atty. Lawlor in the meantime.

Q: Legal claims over internal conflicts have risen in the last few years, what are the long-term strategies to prevent the City from needing to make these settlements?

A: Solicitor Giuliani emphasized that risk management is part of the Law Department's role and that it tries to be proactive and avoid these large settlements. For the long-term, Law is working with HR on policy changes to promote healthy and welcoming workplaces.

C: It is worrying that in addition to these extreme cases with certain employees some Councilors have said that they do not feel they are treated well by staff.

A: Solicitor Giuliani responded that this is an area of improvement which involves working directly with department heads to identify situations where intervention is necessary. This will help catch these issues early.

Q: The Law Department budget did not increase much, is this from staff turnover savings?

A: Solicitor Giuliani answered that this was part of it as the new employees start at a lower pay scale.

Q: Why have claims and public records requests increased?

A: Solicitor Giuliani answered that this increase is largely from the Engineering Department. Recently, they have begun requesting these materials through the standard system, accounting for most of the increase.

Q: Are workplace complaints sent directly to Human Resources then the Law Department as in other workplaces

A: Solicitor Giuliani confirmed this, stating that department heads are advised to bring these complaints to Human Resources, who then contact Law.

Q: Is the Law Department able to leverage intern time?

A: Solicitor Giuliani answered that the Law Department recruits its interns through a law consortium, but it did not have as many during COVID as the remote experience was not seen as rewarding. These numbers have begun returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Q: Where does the settlement budget of \$100,000 appear?

A: Solicitor Giuliani answered that the settlements are drawn out from the involved department. She continued that the Law Department works closely with Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux on arraiging the larger settlements. It was also clarified that Newton is self-insured for these cases.

Q: Can you give more details on the claim process?

A: Solicitor Giuliani answered that the majority of these are for vehicle damages due to potholes and fences damaged by snowplowing. The Law Department works closely with Parks, Recreation and Culture to address fence claims.

The Committee took a straw vote to approve the City Solicitor/Law Department's proposed budget of \$2,034,550, along with the Supplemental CIP and the CIP, which passed 7-0.

Senior Services

Note: Jayne Colino, Director of Senior Services presented the proposed budget for Senior Services. She was joined by Council on Aging members Joan Belle Isle, Julie Norstrand, Naomi Krasner, and Sue Rasala. She stated that it has been another year of flexibility and creativity as the department continues to reinvent itself. Some of these methods include developing more predictable procedures to help the community access its services, such as using a tent for outdoor activities and offering a large combination of both in-person and virtual programming. In order to accommodate residents' concerns, the Hyde Community Center has also been used for its large space. Director Colino described how Senior Services' role in food access has declined. In part this is because the CDBG funding which made this possible was specific for COVID and is no longer available. Senior Services is also transitioning into more vaccine distribution by providing both the actual vaccine and information about it with support from the

Holtzman Medical Group. NewMo remains in a state of transition and expansion as well since it is now a city-wide service with record-breaking utilization. It now offers senior citizens the ability to schedule rides up to five days in advance for medical appointments.

Director Colino also described the latest status of NewCAL as the project continues. Now, the design is focusing on smaller features while the details of the interim site plan are negotiated. Director Colino then discussed the addition of a deputy director position to the department. The hiring process is planned to begin partway through the next fiscal year and be filled by its end. This reflects the growth of the department and the need to have the appropriate personnel as NewCAL progresses to meet the needs of Newton's increasing senior population. Director Colino later added that the department received a grant from the Massachusetts Association of Council on Aging and Senior Center Directors for some tablets that it can purchase on a regional basis and the resulting tablet-lending program has been a success.

Q&A

Q: Has Senior Services been tracking the uptick in senior depression and suicide?

A: Director Colino answered that Senior Services does not track suicide data specifically, but Health & Human Services (HHS) is aware of this. She stated that the department uses a case management system to track the services it provides. There has been an increase in anxiety with more mental health referrals and there will be a program on loneliness in the summer.

Q: As Senior Services is providing more referrals for loneliness and depression, is it doing anything in-house?

A: Director Colino answered that Emily Kuhl is a caseworker who also organizes support groups for caregivers, bereavement, and those dealing with COVID. The participation in the COVID groups has been declining, which is a positive sign.

Q: If the department will be hiring a new assistant director, is Senior Services looking for a candidate who like NewCAL will be servicing more generations than just the senior population?

A: Director Colino answered that her vision for this position is that it will be somebody on site overseeing the day to day operations from an administrative and operational point of view. She stated that the ideal candidate will have management and operational skills and the ability to perform outside of the building and broaden the department's reach.

Q: Is there a part-time employee no longer with the department?

A: Director Colino explained that the employee is still with the department and the only thing that changed was how the salary was reported. This is a split position, with half of the funding coming from the City and the other half from a state grant.

Q: Does Senior Services serve a racially diverse constituency?

A: Director Colino acknowledged the need to enact more outreach on this area. One tool to aid with this is a new translation service as well as improved funding for the outreach coordinator. These measures will help ensure a broad community input.

Q: Does Senior Services keep demographic data of those who participate with it?

A: Director Colino answered that this is done to the extent that seniors provide this data. She added that thanks in part to NewMo, Senior Services is well represented across Newton. There is also a newsletter sent out to all residents aged 60 and over, with the option of receiving a digital version as well (this in turn helps Senior Services save on postage).

Q: What is the status of the friendly visiting program? Is anybody turned away?

A: Director Colino answered that it is increasing both in usage and participating volunteers. Currently, Senior Services can manage about 40 matches in order to decrease isolation and she is hopeful that with the new census data, the formula grant will be increased. While some residents may need to wait longer for the department to acquire the appropriate resources (such as language translation), nobody is turned away. She also clarified that volunteers are not placed with those suffering from progressive dementia.

Q: Is NewMo funded through the Senior Services budget?

A: Director Colino answered that while Senior Services contributes a small share, most of the funding comes from grants through Transportation Planning. Chief Operations Officer Jonathan Yeo clarified that all city funding for NewMo goes through Senior Services and that the grants from Transportation Planning are used to supplement this funding.

Q: Are the NewMo cars under a subcontractor or does the City manage them?

A: Director Colino responded that NewMo is the city's brand but it contracts with Via.

Q: Why do several NewMo vehicles have out of state plates?

A: Director Colino answered that the vehicles are rented through Avis, allowing the City to easily replace cars when they require service. She added that the department can educate the public more on this role, especially as NewMo has expanded to cover more residents. Director Colino also stated that there is no problem recruiting drivers who are all thoroughly vetted.

The Committee took a straw vote to approve the Senior Services Department proposed budget of \$870,529, along with the Supplemental CIP and the CIP, which passed 6-0 (Councilor Krintzman not voting).

Health & Human Services

Note: Linda Walsh, Commissioner of Health & Human Services presented the proposed budget for HHS. She was joined by Director of Social Services Megan Kennedy, Director of School Health Services Ruth Hoshino, and Shin-Yi Lao who was recently elevated to Director of Public Health Services. Commissioner Walsh stated that HHS is still heavily involved with COVID-19, but she emphasized that the disease is receding. HHS will continue to educate the public on how to manage it as COVID shifts to

an endemic stage. She stated that the department has long been considering how to support mental health after the crisis has passed due to its wide impact. Department staff will be providing mental health programming to the community in response. Commissioner Walsh stated that while Social Services is now fully staffed, Environmental Health is not, and HHS is working to fill all vacancies throughout the department.

Q&A

Q: Why has the funding for counseling in mental health services decreased?

A: Commissioner Walsh answered that this represents contracts with Riverside Community Care and other services and emphasized that these services did not decrease. Senior Financial Analyst Perry Rosenfield clarified that this a result of HCA items being moved into other accounts and that services are not decreasing.

Q: How many racially underserved people does HHS serve? Is there a construct to reach out?

A: Commissioner Walsh answered that the data for this is not great but that there are attempts to reach out to underserved populations. In recent hires, HHS has emphasized recruitment of a bilingual person of color who would have the ability to directly interact with the community. Mr. Yeo added that the Mayor has recently announced a project entitled "Supporting Residents Facing Hardship" which will focus on underserved communities, more details will be forthcoming. The Community Needs Assessment was another tool in this effort. Ms. Kennedy added that outreach to the underserved is a critical part of the department's work.

Q: Is HHS going to directly manage the \$2 million in funding being directed to the problem?

A: Commissioner Walsh answered that HHS is partnering with the Donahue Institute on this a project manager will assist with this.

Q: With the impact that isolation from COVID has had on the youth, are there enough resources to support them and is how is HHS hearing from the schools on this issue? Marginalized populations such as LGBTQ youth are particularly at risk.

A: Commissioner Walsh answered that HHS hears this in monthly EMS reports for 911 calls and in the interdisciplinary meetings with schools and police. The department actively develops a response to these problems. Ms. Hoshino added that mental health issues are being discussed with the school nurse staff and chief among these is anxiety. Many students present to school nurses with complaints and staff assesses to determine what the factors are before referring to the mental health counselors. More students are reporting feelings of anxiety and depression. Ms. Kennedy added that Youth Services Assistant Director Meghan Murtagh has been working with her to develop programming on suicide prevention and other mental health crisis response. There will also be a position from Riverside Emergency Services to respond to student concerns and if necessary, divert them to the appropriate resource over the emergency room. There are also near-daily conversations between HHS and mental health services within the schools. Mr. Yeo stated that this emergency position is under the HCA position of the budget. Commissioner Walsh added that this is a new position developed in response to anticipation of the increased demand.

Q: What if any guidance is HHS offering on COVID tracking?

A: Commissioner Walsh answered that much of the recent spike is due to omicron which is highly contagious. She emphasized the importance of testing and that the overall trend still appears positive.

The Committee took a straw vote to approve the HHS proposed budget of \$5,244,009, along with the Supplemental CIP and the CIP, which passed 6-0 (Councilor Krintzman not voting).

Information Technology

Note: Joe Mulvey, Chief Information Technology Officer presented the proposed budget for the Information Technology Department (IT). He stated that the budget has remained consistent with previous years. The department has accomplished its recent goals which include the financial system, the conversion of Munis, and assisting ISD with implementing Open Gov. There will also be another phase of wrapping up different types of permitting and licensing and updating the storage network. IT lost some staff members who chose not to comply with the vaccination policy, but Mr. Mulvey stated that the expectation is to be fully staffed within the next few weeks. Additionally, he added that IT staff did not find working from home to be a hindrance to the job.

Mr. Mulvey then discussed IT's focus on information security. This involves frequently sending out phishing tests to employees. There is also penetration testing which means that a company is hired to simulate a hack into the network to identify which areas need to be improved. Mr. Mulvey stated that IT has been approved by Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) which constantly probes the network and sends weekly summaries of recommendations to the department. IT also has a good relationship with the Department of Homeland Security which constantly provides updates on foreign threats to be blocked in the geographic firewalls. Senior Web Developer Rufen Liao has also taken up the challenge of creating a docket tracking system which, after significant progress, should be released soon after some final testing.

Q&A

Q: Is there long-term concern over switching more content to Amazon web services?

A: Mr. Mulvey answered that nothing stored on the cloud is anything that would be threatening if released. The applications being migrated to Amazon are web-based such as the coyote tracker or FAR calculator. It also allows the City to upload Zoom videos. Mr. Mulvey added that Amazon likely offers better security than the City and he noted that data will not be saved on the cloud.

Q: Does the City have the capacity to host all Zoom recordings?

A: Mr. Mulvey answered that it does and that it has a year subscription which provides a discount. Through this subscription, the City has 50 licenses capable of hosting 500 user meetings along with unlimited storage.

Q: How are residents able to view these videos?

A: Mr. Mulvey answered that there can be better communication with the public about this, including making the links to the videos more readily accessible.

Q: Does IT do the internal wiring, or does it outsource this?

A: Mr. Mulvey answered that the department does smaller jobs on its own but brings in outside professionals for larger ones. He added that IT is currently talking to contractors for an upcoming job with the police department.

Q: Do these projects use union workers?

A: Mr. Mulvey answered that he was not certain but stated that if they go out to bid this would be part of the RFP.

Q: The IT budget took a little cut; will you be able to do your work?

A: Mr. Mulvey answered that it would and emphasized that the department is in good shape and remains able to fill all requests.

Q: There have been complaints about new website, will we be looking into a better one?

A: Mr. Mulvey answered yes but clarified that only a few companies specialize in municipal websites and stated that it will take at least a year to review all options and shift to a new website.

Q: Can you clarify the budget decrease?

A: Mr. Mulvey answered that IT has been short-staffed the last few years. As new employees have been brought on, they began at a lower salary, accounting for the decline.

The Committee took a straw vote to approve the IT proposed budget of \$2,239,957, along with the Supplemental CIP and the CIP which passed 7-0.

The meeting adjourned at 9:42pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Noel, Vice Chair