



Finance Committee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Monday, October 24, 2022

Present: Councilors Grossman (Chair), Gentile, Noel, Kalis, Malakie, Oliver, Norton and Humphrey

City staff present: Comptroller Steve Curley, Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux, Deputy Director of Public Works Shawna Sullivan, and Director of Business Operations for Newton Public Schools Amy Mistrot

#435-22 **Appropriate \$60,826.31 for McKinney-Vento Homeless Student Transportation SCHOOL COMMITTEE** requesting that the City Council approve authorizing the Mayor to appropriate the state reimbursement of sixty thousand eight hundred twenty-six dollars and thirty-one cents for McKinney-Vento and Foster Care Transportation funds from the general fund to the School Department.

Action: **Finance Held 8-0**

Note: Amy Mistrot, Director of Business Operations for Newton Public Schools requested that the City Council authorize the mayor to appropriate \$60,826.31 for McKinney-Vento Homeless Student Transportation. She explained that this amount is the portion of the transportation expense that is reimbursed through the state program.

Steve Curley, Comptroller explained that the item should be amended to reflect that the funds will be allocated from certified free cash and not the general fund.

Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer explained that she believes that the transfer of these funds should be requested by the Mayor and not the School Committee.

The Committee discussed holding the item until there can be a clarification on the amount of funds that are being requested and who needs to be the one making this request.

Councilor Humphrey motioned to hold item #435-22 which passed unanimously.

Referred to Public Facilities and Finance Committees

#407-22

Appropriate \$50,000 from Special Permit Fees, Austin Street and Lowell Ave

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend the sum of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) from Acct #5568R401-432017 Special Permit fees, Austin and Lowell, to improve safety for all users by constructing traffic flow changes at two intersections on Lowell Ave, which is consistent with the intent of Special Permit #175-21, Condition 6.

Public Facilities Held 5-0 on 09/21/22

Public Facilities Approved 7-0 on 10/12/22

Action: **Finance Approved 5-1-2 (Councilor Gentile opposed and Councilors Kalis and Malakie abstaining)**

Note: Shawna Sullivan, Deputy Commissioner of Public Works requested special project mitigation funds from a project at 60, 66, and 68 Austin Street for two traffic calming projects on Lowell Ave. The first project is at Austin and Lowell Ave., and includes a bump out and two pedestrian medians, and the second includes bump outs at the intersection of Lowell, Highland, and Hull St.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: How are the sidewalks changing at the intersection of Austin Street and Lowell Avenue?

A: There will be a bump out on the west side of Austin and Lowell on either side, and two medians at each end of the intersection to create a safe pedestrian passage.

Q: How much of this work is being done due to drainage issues?

A: The drainage issue is not included in the funding for this project and will be a separate DPW project. Ms. Sullivan noted that there is a drainage issue on Highland Avenue at the crosswalk that needs to be addressed and doing this project now will prevent the City from having to reopen the street.

Q: Is the priority list for traffic calming projects driven by city employees or the Safe Routes to School working group?

A: The priority list is driven by city employees. The department does always go to Safe Route to School and to the Transportation Advisory Group to inform them about projects and get their input.

Q: Regarding the Hull Street intersection, what was shared with Public Facilities about the safety issues and what are the statistics that justify its placement high on the priority list

A: Ms. Sullivan explained that she didn't have the statistics with her, but the ADA ramps need to be improved and the crosswalks need to be redesigned. There is also a parent drop-off area which

does cause some conflict with traffic which this project will help along with the speeds on Lowell Ave.

Q: Regarding the Hull and Lowell Street Intersection, is this the best way to allocate the \$200,000 that was allocated from last year's traffic calming budget?

A: Ms. Sullivan explained that this is the best use of funds. She noted that the traffic calming priorities can be found on the City's website at the following link: <https://www.newtonma.gov/government/public-works/transportation-division/traffic-improvement-projects/traffic-calming-projects>.

Q: It was noted that at a previous Public Facilities meeting the Committee was given a project budget of \$500,000. Why has this now been reduced to \$250,000?

A: Ms. Sullivan explained that they used the consultant's numbers for the estimate, so it could come in higher than that. But it is estimated around \$250,000 for both. She noted that she would check why a larger number was provided to the Public Facilities Committee.

Q: Can the funds from prior years' traffic calming budgets be used for crossing guards?

A: Ms. Sullivan explained that crossing guards would be funded by the police, not the DPW. The carry over funds are in the transportation budget, so it still would not be applicable to other departments.

Ms. Lemieux explained that funds are always fungible. If the Mayor were to propose to take money out of what we had budgeted for traffic calming and transfer those funds to salaries in the police department to fund crossing guards, that would be theoretically possible.

Q: Will flex posts be used at Hull and Lowell to test the changes to the intersection?

A: Ms. Sullivan explained that there are no flex posts there. But the consultant did do a computer module. She noted that that they will ensure that everyone can make that turn, including school buses. The fire department will also be able to test this turn before the project is complete.

Councilors made the following comments:

A Councilor noted that they will be voting against this item due to the Hull Street and Lowell Avenue intersection. The councilor is in full support of the Austin and Lowell Street intersection but feels that Hull Street intersection is not the highest priority for the City. It was also noted that this project will use the full budgeted amount for traffic calming.

Ms. Sullivan explained that she anticipates that the cost at Lowell-Austin will be approximately \$130,000, and the cost at Lowell-Hull-Highland will be approximately \$120,000. She added that DPW is able to carry over funds each year, which accounts for approximately \$200,000 of the budget. Ms. Sullivan concluded by adding that the Lowell-Hull-Highland project is one of the top ten intersections and was brought to them by Safe Routes to School.

A Councilor believes there are greater priorities in the City, citing that they have never heard any members of the public saying that Hull St is unsafe.

A councilor noted that while they appreciate that there are needs all over the city, this is an area where students walk to Newton North High School and should take priority. The Councilor has gotten numerous complaints about this intersection regarding Newton North students not being seen by cars, low visibility at the intersection, and bike crashes.

Councilor Norton motioned to approve which passed 5-1-2 with Councilor Gentile opposed and Councilors Kalis and Malakie abstaining.

The Committee adjourned at 7:46.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Walker Grossman, Chair