



Programs & Services Committee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

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

Also Present: Councilors Grossman, Malakie, Downs, Lipof, Lucas, Oliver, Markiewicz, Laredo, Leary, and Danberg

City Staff: Amanda Berman, Director of Housing and Community Development; Jennifer Wilson, Assistant City Solicitor; John Lojek, Commissioner of Inspectional Services, Deb Finamore, Administrative Assistant, Ron Mendes, Treasurer/Collector; Jonah Temple, Deputy City Solicitor; Linda Walsh, Commissioner of Health and Human Services; John Carmichael, Chief of Police; Meghan Kennedy, Director of Social Services; Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; and Jaclyn Norton, Committee Clerk

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link: [Joint Programs and Services and Public Safety and Transportation Committees March 8, 2023 \(newtv.org\)](https://www.newtv.org/2023/03/08/joint-programs-and-services-and-public-safety-and-transportation-committees-march-8-2023)

#48-23 Appointment of Ruth Goldman to the Urban Tree Commission
HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing Ruth Goldman, 117 Cypress Street, #2, Newton as a member of the Urban Tree Commission for a term of office to expire on March 6, 2026. (60 Days: 04/07/2023)

Action: Programs & Services Approved 8-0

Note: The Chair read the item into the record and introduced Ruth Goldman. Ms. Goldman described her passion for sustainability and her previous professional experience in urban environmental sustainability. She also noted the health benefits experienced by those who live near greenspace. A Councilor not on the Committee expressed concerns regarding her appointment. Multiple Councilors expressed support for this appointment and voted 8-0 on a motion to approve from Councilor Noel.

Chair's Note: The following item was a joint discussion with the Public Safety & Transportation Committee

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Programs & Services Committees

#108-22 Requesting report as to the implementation of the leaf-blower landscaper registration and enforcement

COUNCILORS BAKER, GREENBERG, HUMPHREY, NOEL, ALBRIGHT, AND WRIGHT

requesting a report from the Executive Department, including the Chief of Police and the Commissioner of Inspectional Services, as to the implementation of the leaf-blower landscaper registration and enforcement ordinance amendments effective Labor Day 2021.

Public Safety & Transportation Held 7-0 on 03/08/2023

Action: Programs & Services Held 8-0

Note: The Programs & Services and Public Safety & Transportation Committees met jointly to discuss #108-22. The Chair read the item into the record and introduced Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; John Lojek, Commissioner of Inspectional Services; and Jonah Temple, Deputy City Solicitor.

Commissioner Lojek noted that violators who have received a warning will no longer receive a warning in future registration years. They would immediately be subjected to a fine of three hundred dollars (\$300.00). The Inspectional Services Department has also been working to send a mailing out to all licensed landscapers, unlicensed landscapers who received a ticket, and homeowners who were assessed a fine. This mailing will include an explanation of the ordinance and an updated brochure. Registration for the 2023 registration year will open on March 15th and will be integrated into the NewGov system. Later in the discussion Deb Finamore, Administrative Assistant, noted that links for registration and filing complaints will be posted on the Inspectional Services Department webpage. The Inspectional Services Department also plans to have all complaints recorded in NewGov.

For enforcement, the Inspectional Services Department has one person who works on a part-time basis. Commissioner Lojek noted that this individual works to maximize the effectiveness of his patrol. The enforcement officer conducts these patrols in a City vehicle. The Department has seen this program be very effective due to a positive change in landscaper compliance with goals of increasing the effectiveness in future years.

In the 2022 registration year, a total of sixty-five thousand four hundred dollars (\$65,400.00) in fines were assessed. When looking at the unpaid fines the Inspectional Services and Law Departments identified the largest offenders with sixteen (16) companies owing a combined fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) in unpaid fines. Jonah Temple, Deputy City Solicitor stated that the Law Department has sent out last-chance demand letters to these offenders and at the time of the meeting has received five thousand dollars (\$5,000) of these unpaid fines. For those who do not pay these fines, criminal complaints will be filed by the City in Newton District Court. Landscapers with unpaid fines will be prohibited from registering once 2023 registration opens, according to Commissioner Lojek. In response to a Councilor's question, Mr. Yeo noted that the

administration will also work with the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department to recommend that no landscapers with unpaid fines are contracted by the City.

Multiple Councilors requested that they be supplied with the excel version of the attached spreadsheet. Mr. Yeo confirmed that this can be provided along with Ms. Finamore stating that she can also provide a summary of the data in response to a Councilor's request. The unknown entries in this spreadsheet result from calls received by the police department where the officer arrived on-site after the landscaper had left the premises. A Councilor asked if a photograph or video taken and submitted contributed to the landscaper receiving an offense. Commissioner Lojek stated that photographs and video taken would not contribute to an offense with Mr. Yeo reaffirming that residents should not confront landscapers if they witness an offense. A docketing Councilor also sought clarification on who would be assessed fines if the landscaper is not registered and if complaints are confidential. Commissioner Lojek noted that the property owner would be assessed the fine in that instance and all complaints are confidential with a court order needed to reveal identifying information.

The Programs & Services Committee voted 8-0 on a motion to hold from Councilor Ryan. The Public Safety & Transportation Committee voted 7-0 on a motion to hold from Councilor Lipof.

#567-22 Discussion item and possible ordinance amendment regarding processes that could prevent abandoned or condemned properties

COUNCILORS OLIVER, WRIGHT, AND LAREDO requesting a comprehensive discussion and possible ordinance amendment regarding properties in the city that for various reasons are abandoned or condemned. We will expect to explore legal and financial City policies and other topics that impact potential prevention of city-funded demolition projects.

Action: Programs & Services Held 8-0

Note: The Chair introduced Councilor Oliver who was the docketing Councilor to present the rationale for docketing this item. He noted a previous discussion before the Finance Committee regarding a property in severe disrepair and that this item looks to prevent similar cases.

Multiple Councilors expressed a desire for the attending departments to state how city departments would coordinate regarding potential intervention. Commissioner Lojek noted that the Inspectional Services Department enforces the existing dilapidated building ordinance and that they are now working with the Treasury Department. This coordination entails that the Inspectional Services Department is provided with a list of properties that are behind on paying taxes for a code enforcement officer to inspect the property. Linda Walsh, Commissioner of Health and Human Services stated that her department tries to reach out to the owner once they become aware of a property that is either abandoned or condemned. She also affirmed that in reaching out Health and Human Services works closely with the Law Department. When asked by a Councilor how they could notify Inspectional Services of a particular property that appears to be in disrepair, Commissioner Lojek stated that a request for code enforcement can be

submitted.

He also detailed that a group called the Joint Code Enforcement Taskforce will begin meeting again. This group would be comprised of Inspectional Services, Health and Human Services, Engineering, Planning, Fire, and Police Departments and will work to ensure each department's role is clear when it comes to code enforcement. Multiple Councilors expressed support for this taskforce reconvening.

Committee members voted 8-0 on a motion to hold from Councilor Ryan.

Referred to Programs & Services and Finance Committees

#59-23 Requesting a discussion regarding Newton's Economic Stability/Mobility Initiative

COUNCILORS LAREDO, NORTON, MALAKIE, BAKER, GENTILE, KRINTZMAN, WRIGHT, OLIVER, AND GROSSMAN requesting a discussion with the Administration regarding Newton's Economic Stability/Mobility Initiative – A Partnership with EMPATH, including the amount of ARPA funds being used for the program; how much of this money will be paid to EMPATH and whether EMPATH is contributing any of its own funds to this program; additional city resources that will be used, directly or indirectly, for this program; the expectations for this program beyond the initial two year period and what will be the source of any additional funds for the program; and who in the city will be reviewing and evaluating the success of this program.

Action: **Programs & Services Held 7-0 (Councilor Baker Not Voting)**

Note: The Chair read the item into the record and introduced Councilor Laredo who was the docketing Councilor; Amanda Berman, Director of Housing and Community Development; Commissioner Walsh; and Meghan Kennedy, Director of Social Services. Commissioner Walsh introduced Ashley Winning, Vice President of Research and Evaluation, and Michelle Blundell, Senior Director of Communications. Both of these individuals are staff with EMPATH. Initial funding for this program was allocated from funding received by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and did not require Council approval. The docketing Councilor stated that the goals for this item are to understand staffing for the Economic Stability/Mobility Initiative, how the program will measure success, and understand what funding might look like after the initial two-year period.

Ms. Berman noted that this program was developed as a result of advocacy from members of the Newton Housing Partnership and the results of a Community Needs Assessment that was conducted. The Mayor brought together multiple departments and Christina Citino from the UMass Donahue Institute to serve as a consultant eventually convening an advisory committee. This advisory committee served as the evaluation committee for the proposals with the Mayor ultimately moving forward with offering the contract to EMPATH. Proposals can be found on the

City's website [here](#). No expectations currently exist for receiving additional funding after the initial two-year period and the program would be sunset. The City and EMPATH are planning to work with Ms. Citino again to develop performance metrics for the program.

Ms. Winning described that the program is currently hiring a program director along with mentors. For a family to be eligible the following conditions must be met; at or below 50% AMI, at least one child or pregnant, and a desire to increase your income. She noted that a focus will be on people of color and homeless populations along with EMPATH planning to do outreach to recruit the fifty (50) families that this program is budgeted to serve.

When asked by a Councilor how many families in Newton qualify for this program, Commissioner Walsh noted that an exact number is not known and that not all who qualify would want to join this program. Another Councilor sought clarification on how the City might be identifying families who could succeed in this program. Multiple Councilors expressed support for looking into continuing this program past the initial two-year period and requested that an update be provided to the Committee before the end of the term.

Councilors voted 7-0 (Councilor Baker Not Voting) on a motion to hold from Councilor Ryan. The meeting adjourned at 9:50pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Josh Krintzman, Chair