



Finance Committee Report

City of Newton **In City Council**

Monday, March 13, 2023

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

Also present: Councilor Lucas

City staff present: Comptroller Steve Curley, Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux, Senior Financial Analyst Perry Rosenfeld, Senior Financial Analyst Connor Roach, Deputy Commissioner of Public Works Shawna Sullivan, Director of Health and Human Services Linda Walsh, Project Manager Bill Ferguson, Former Director of Transportation Planning Nicole Freedman

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link: [Finance Committee March 13, 2023 \(newtv.org\)](https://www.newtv.org/finance-committee-march-13-2023)

#81-23 Acceptance of \$11,939 from National Environmental Health Association
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend the sum of eleven thousand nine hundred thirty-nine dollars (\$11,939) from the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA). The award consists of a four thousand four hundred thirty-nine dollar (\$4,439) base grant and a seven thousand five hundred dollar (\$7,500) training add-on grant. The funds will be used to improve the City's conformance with the US Food and Drug Administration's Retail Program Standards.

Action: **Finance Approved 8-0**

Note: Director of Health & Human Services (HHS) Linda Walsh introduced this item. She explained that this grant funding allows HHS staff to perform inspections in retail food establishments to conform to national standards. Director Walsh added that this funding helps pay for a software called WinWam, which helps standardize training and inspections to reduce food borne illness.

With no questions or comments from the Committee, Councilor Gentile motioned to approve the item, which passed unanimously.

#82-23 **Acceptance of \$100,000 from Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend the sum of one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) in Green Communities Grant funding from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources for LED lighting and controls at Newton South High School and completing insulation, weatherstripping, and installation of heat pumps at Fire Station 1.

Action: **Finance Approved 8-0**

Note: Project Manager Bill Ferguson introduced this item. He explained that this grant will help complete the LED lighting project at Newton South High School (NSHS). In addition, this funding will be used to install cold weather heat pumps in the second floor living quarters of Fire Station 1. Mr. Ferguson explained that the Department of Energy Resources gives additional funding for decarbonization efforts, which includes installing cold weather heat pumps. He added that additional weatherstripping, insulation, thermostats, and control valves will be funded with this grant.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: What kind of insulation do you prefer to use for these types of projects?

A: Mr. Ferguson explained that spray foam insulation will be the best type of insulation for this project.

Q: What made you choose to do this work at Fire Station 1 rather than Fire Station 2, where there have been numerous complaints regarding the heat and air conditioning?

A: Mr. Ferguson stated that there were similar complaints for Fire Station 1, adding that he was not sure when work will be planned for Fire Station 1.

Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux noted that the Mayor has set aside \$500,000 in the budget for fire station repairs, specifically heating and ventilation improvements. She noted that the windows at Fire Station 2 are being replaced, though was unsure about whether heat pumps were planned to be installed.

Q: Could someone ask Fire Chief Greg Gentile to shed light on the work that's expected to be done at Fire Station 2?

A: Mr. Ferguson agreed to get in touch with Fire Chief Gentile and Director of Public Buildings Josh Morse to get specific plans for work at Fire Station 2.

Chair Grossman moved item #83-23 in front of the Committee, as this grant goes hand in hand with the \$33,289 appropriation from the Energy Stabilization Fund.

Mr. Ferguson noted that the Green Communities grant is a competitive grant, and any municipalities that provide any matching funds are more successful. He added that using part of the Energy Stabilization Fund for this work will allow the City to leverage a \$48,000 utility rebate.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: How much money is currently in the Energy Stabilization Fund?

A: Comptroller Steve Curley stated the Energy Stabilization Fund was at \$344,000 to start the year. Since that time, the Council approved 2 appropriations from the fund (Peirce School HVAC - \$65,000 and Library HVAC - \$100,000). These two items totaled \$165,000, and with the City's added \$22,000 in revenue, the balance is now just over \$201,000.

Councilors made the following comments:

It was noted that Mr. Ferguson's efforts are a tremendous asset and boost the City's ability to complete projects.

Councilor Kalis motioned to approve item #82-23, which passed unanimously.

Councilor Kalis motioned to approve item #83-23, which passed unanimously.

#83-23 Appropriate \$33,289 from the Energy Stabilization Fund

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend the sum of thirty three thousand two hundred eighty nine dollars (\$33,289) from the Energy Stabilization Fund to complete the replacement of thermostats and control valves at Fire Station 1.

Action: **Finance Approved 8-0**

Note: Please see note for item #82-23.

Referred to Public Facilities and Finance Committees

#87-23 Authorization for MWRA grant/loan program

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend three million two hundred fifty five thousand dollars (\$3,255,000) in grant funding and authorization to borrow one million eighty five thousand dollars (\$1,085,000) in an interest free loan from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) Sewer Infiltration/Inflow Local Financial Assistance Program Phase 14, 25% loan/75% grant program for a total of four million three hundred and forty thousand dollars (\$4,340,000) for the design and construction of Sewer CIP Project 9.

Public Facilities Approved 7-0 on 03/08/23

Action: **Finance Approved 8-0**

Note: Deputy Commissioner of Public Works Shawna Sullivan presented this item. She was pleased to inform the Committee that the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) is reinstating the 25% loan/75% Grant program, which will fund this project. She explained that this funding will be used for Area 9, which is the Oak Hill Park, Wells Ave, and Nahanton St area. The project consists of sewer main replacement, spot repairs, and the cleaning and lining of the mains in these areas.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: What is the repair status of this area? Is it better or worse than other areas of the City?

A: Deputy Commissioner Sullivan explained that since this is an older area of the City, they expect to be doing mostly main replacements rather than spot repairs.

Q: What is our current water loss percentage?

A: CFO Lemieux stated that she believed the City was sending between 63 and 65% more water back to the MWRA than it had purchased. She continued to explain that she believes that the City is sending roughly 40% more water back to the MWRA, indicating a 20% improvement. She noted that this is largely due to infiltration.

Q: After this project, do we only have Project 11 left to complete?

A: Deputy Commissioner Sullivan explained that Project 11 is the last major project, but the City will continue to do maintenance on the sewer system forever.

Q: Which projects are still outstanding or ongoing?

A: Deputy Commissioner Sullivan explained that Project 7 is in the post-assessment phase, Project 8 is under construction, and Project 9 is in the design phase.

Councilor Kalis motioned to approve the item, which passed unanimously.

#84-23 **Acceptance of \$69,878.60 from MassDEP's Electric Vehicle Incentive Program**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend the sum of sixty nine thousand eight hundred seventy eight dollars and sixty cents (\$69,878.60) in grant funding from MassDEP's Electric Vehicle Incentive Program – Public Access Charging for 5 EV chargers with 10 total ports.

Action: **Finance Approved 7-0-1**

Note: Former Director of Planning Transportation Nicole Freedman presented this item. She explained that this program is to install electric vehicle (EV) chargers at the Pleasant St parking lot (2 chargers), Pearl St parking lot (2 chargers) and the northeast corner of Washington St and Elm St (2 chargers). Ms. Freedman stated that the primary underground work for all 3 sites has been completed, and that this grant covers the cost of installation and the chargers themselves. She later clarified that tonight's vote is to accept the grant, not to approve the use of the parking spaces in the Washington St lot, which falls under the purview of Traffic Council.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: How many parking spaces will each charger service?

A: Ms. Freedman explained that each charger serves 2 stations, meaning each proposed site will serve 4 total parking spots.

Q: Since there is no way to place a meter at any parking spots with chargers, is parking in charger parking spots free?

A: Ms. Freedman explained that Greenspot, the City's EV charger vendor, has a unique system. She elaborated that Greenspot charges customers for the amount of time that their vehicle is plugged in at one rate, and then charges at a much higher rate once the EV's battery is full. She explained that this is to incentivize high turnover in these parking spaces.

Q: Do you have to be charging to park in these spaces? Or can anyone with an EV park there?

A: Ms. Freedman explained that no one that wasn't charging their vehicle would want to park in these spaces due to the massively high rate. She further clarified that any vehicle in that space that was not plugged in would be parking illegally and be subject to a ticket.

Q: Aren't the Pleasant St chargers already installed? Are these going to be additional chargers?

A: Ms. Freedman explained that the City will need to swap out the existing chargers for new ones in order to take advantage of this grant. She added that they were loaned to the City until this grant was approved.

Q: What system will these chargers be using?

A: Ms. Freedman stated that these chargers will be Greenspot chargers, which uses a white labeled version of BTC Units. She added that the chargers used for the City EV fleet are ChargePoint chargers. Ms. Freedman explained that the City uses Greenspot for public parking spaces because they allow for the City to add additional chargers at no cost to the City. She added that Greenspot is responsible for the maintenance on these chargers.

Q: Are there any plans to try to make the charging stations in the City one uniform system?

A: Ms. Freedman explained that there are no current plans to uniform all of the City's chargers. She added that they had looked into doing so in the past, but it was at a time when the City was making a number of difficult financial decisions, and it felt inappropriate to pursue that project.

Q: Do you know anything about Greenspot's track record as far as functionality?

A: Ms. Freedman stated that the City has worked with them since 2018, and they've responded to every maintenance request as far as she could remember.

Q: Does the City get a share of the revenue stream from the electric charging fees?

A: Ms. Freedman confirmed that the City does receive a share in the revenue from charging fees, and agreed to email the Committee with the specific rate.

Q: If Traffic Council does not approve the use of these spaces, are there any other locations where the City could put this money to use?

A: Ms. Freedman explained that due to the nature of the grant, the City is only able to use these funds at these specific sites. She added that due to the high costs of underground work for EV charging stations, she is not optimistic that there will be another cost-effective site in West Newton.

Q: Does the City need any ordinance updates to reflect what fees are being charged for these spaces?

A: Ms. Freedman estimated that since these parking spaces are classified as "Other" and Greenspot is providing a share of the revenue afterwards, these are different from true metered parking spaces and don't require ordinance changes. She added that conversations with law enforcement regarding ticketing for these spaces are ongoing.

Councilors made the following comments:

A Councilor stated that they will be abstaining from voting on this item due to their concerns regarding the impact that these chargers will have on takeout businesses in the Washington St area.

Ms. Freedman added that one of the chargers could be bagged, leaving two unmetered parking spaces for takeout customers to use, until there's proven demand for chargers.

It was noted that the parking spaces are clearly signed that the time limit for charging is three hours.

Councilor Norton motioned to approve the item, which passed 7-0-1, with Councilor Malakie abstaining.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation & Finance Committees

#86-23 Acceptance of \$190,000 from MassDOT's Community Transit Grant Program SFY23

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend the sum of one hundred ninety thousand dollars (\$190,000) in grant funding from MassDOT's Community Transit Grant Program SFY23 for the Newton in Motion (NewMo) Senior Transportation microtransit program.

Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0 on 03/08/23 (Councilors Bowman and Oliver Not Voting)

Action: Finance Approved 8-0

Note: Former Director of Planning Transportation Nicole Freedman introduced this item. She explained that they receive this grant annually and it is specific to the senior portion of NewMo. Ms. Freedman added that this grant is to cover operations costs, which is an exceedingly rare opportunity for a grant of this nature. She also noted that while the City has received this grant every year, this year's grant is for more money than in previous years.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: What is the cost of operations on a yearly basis for the senior portion of NewMo?

A: Ms. Freedman stated that costs are usually between \$450,000 and \$500,000.

Councilors made the following comments:

It was noted that there is a docket item that was heard and held earlier in the term that calls for a discussion with the Planning Department to go over the finances of NewMo. The Finance Committee would like to bring that docket item back soon to hear an updated presentation from the Planning Department on this topic.

Councilor Norton motioned to approve the item, which passed unanimously.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation & Finance Committees

#85-23 Acceptance of \$712,459 from MassDOT Community Connections Program FY23-25

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend the sum of seven hundred twelve thousand four hundred fifty nine dollars (\$712,459) in grant funding from MassDOT's Community Connections Program FY23-25 for the Newton in Motion (NewMo) microtransit program.

Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0 on 03/08/23 (Councilors Bowman and Oliver Not Voting)

Action: Finance Approved 8-0

Note: Former Director of Planning Transportation Nicole Freedman introduced this item. She explained that this grant is for new services rather than operations. Ms. Freedman explained that the new service changes covered by this grant would be additional vehicles, a transition to electric vehicles, and adding select points beyond Newton's borders for all ages to access via NewMo. She named Watertown Square, the Waltham MBTA Commuter Rail Station, the Leo J. Martin Golf Course, and potentially other sites as well. Ms. Freedman stated that these points were selected based on census data that indicates that Waltham and Watertown are the primary areas where people commute from to work in Newton.

Councilors made the following comments:

There was concern expressed regarding the expansion of NewMo and whether the operation will become unsustainable.

Ms. Freedman explained that expansion costs are being kept to a minimum. She added that this grant can be leveraged to purchase new vehicles, which will help meet current demand for NewMo.

It was pointed out that NewMo could be viewed as an investment for public good, like education, made not with the intent to yield profitability, but with the intent to provide a service to the public.

Councilor Noel motioned to approve the item, which passed unanimously.

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, LUCAS, 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.

Programs & Services Held 7-0 on 03/08/23 (Councilor Baker Not Voting)

Action: Finance voted No Action Necessary 8-0

Note: Chair Grossman stated that this item was discussed at the 03-08-23 Programs & Services Committee meeting. The docketers' wishes were to have this item taken up in just one Committee, rather than multiple committees.

With no questions or concerns from the Committee, Councilor Kalis motioned for a vote of no action necessary, which passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:56 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Walker Grossman, Chair