



# Programs & Services Committee Budget Report

## City of Newton In City Council

**Wednesday, May 3, 2023**

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

Also Present: Councilors Downs, Lipof, Danberg, Crossley, Laredo, and Leary

City staff present: Carol Moore, City Clerk/Clerk of the Council; Perry Rosenfield, FP&A Manager; Connor Roach, Senior Financial Analyst; Lisa Dady, Director of Historic Newton; Jill Mercurio, Library Director; Nicole Banks, Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture; Marc Welch, Deputy Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture; Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; and Jaclyn Norton, Committee Clerk

*Please Note: Budget materials can be found on the City's website at the following link:*  
<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/comptroller/budget>

### **DEPARTMENT BUDGET & CIP DISCUSSIONS:**

City Clerk

Historic Newton

Library

Parks, Recreation and Culture

**#1-23**      **Submittal of the FY 2024 to FY 2028 Capital Improvement Plan**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting the Fiscal Years 2024 to 2028 Capital Improvement Plan pursuant to section 5-3 of the Newton City Charter.

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

**#1-23(3)**      **Submittal of the FY24 Municipal/School Operating Budget**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting in accordance with Section 5-1 of the City of Newton Charter the FY24 Municipal/School Operating Budget, passage of which shall be concurrent with the FY24-FY28 Capital Improvement Program (#213-22).  
**EFFECTIVE DATE OF SUBMISSION 05/01/23; LAST DATE TO PASS THE BUDGET 06/15/23**

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

**#1-23(4)**      **Submittal of the FY24 – FY28 Supplemental Capital Improvement Plan**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting the FY24 – FY28 Supplemental Capital Improvement Plan.

## City Clerk

**Note:** Carol Moore, City Clerk/Clerk of the Council, joined the Committee and noted the work the department has done to overcome staffing shortages along with administering three successful elections. The FY24 goals for the City Clerk Department are to continue filling open positions with helpful and knowledgeable people and utilizing technology to assist with the workload. A 4.6% increase over the FY23 budget is proposed primarily focusing on increases to election worker compensation, voting supplies, and general supply costs. Ms. Moore outlined that a request for an online code management system had been recently docketed. This project will take roughly a year to be fully in place and training will be provided to staff and Councilors.

The budget for the archives section of the department is largely unchanged with one shredding event planned for the FY24 fiscal year. For the city census, the department added versions in multiple languages to increase access and the Department will look at additional ways to reach all residents. The City Clerk portion of the Department's budget remains largely unchanged with the department experiencing a slight increase in births and a decrease in dog licenses.

The election section of the Department experienced significant changes resulting from additional processes administered by the Department. Ms. Moore stated that she is reviewing workloads with staff to see if additional staff would be needed for the Department. Regarding vote by mail, the City Clerk's office will be sending out applications to all registered voters in municipal election years along with an application provided when an individual registers to vote. The Department has also submitted a request for new voting tabulators and has received one bid. Ms. Moore affirmed that she expects the tabulators to be operational for the 2023 Preliminary Election. The Department has also acquired a database for election worker management which will help reduce paper and streamline internal processes.

Multiple Councilors expressed appreciation for the work of the Clerk's office and the increased levels of service provided by the Department.

## Q&A

**Q:** How does the Department plan to reduce staff turnover?

**A:** When Ms. Moore joined the Department there were three open positions and the Department has had numerous other openings within the office since that time. Four of the people that have been hired are currently still employed within the office. She stated that she is looking into additional ways to alleviate burnout amongst staff within the Department.

**Q:** Does the Department experience burnout due to public records requests or increased work from the Votes Act?

A: Regarding public records requests Ms. Moore stated that all the requests are sent to her and that she will send them to a staff member within the department if she is unable to fulfill the request herself. Ms. Moore is currently gathering data on if the Votes Act has increased the workload for staff as the 2023 Municipal Election will be the first municipal election under the Act.

Q: Do Neighborhood Area Council elections cause any logistical issues for the Department?

A: Neighborhood Area Council elections coincide with municipal elections and have begun to pose logistical issues for the Department regarding vote by mail and hiring enough election workers. Ms. Moore stated that John Doyle, Election Supervisor is currently working with the Neighborhood Area Councils to find a solution to these logistical issues. A Councilor also asked about engagement for them, and Ms. Moore stated that in the last election, only one Area Council elected a sufficient number of people to fill all seats.

Q: What is the status of Recodification?

A: Ms. Moore stated that she is currently halfway finished with this process. She also described how the anticipated code management software will aid in this process in the future.

The Committee took a straw vote to accept the City Clerk Department's proposed Budget of \$2,320,707, as well as the Supplemental CIP and the CIP, which passed unanimously.

## Historic Newton

**Note:** Lisa Dady, Director of Historic Newton, noted that the Department has accomplished many things in the most recent fiscal year. These include meeting goals of seeing all 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in Newton Public Schools, continued outreach to the senior population, receiving a grant to produce a documentary about education reform in Massachusetts, and increasing access to information throughout the City. The documentary is possible through a grant from Mass Humanities and will highlight many of the education reforms that have origins in Newton. Access to materials is being increased through not only having more exhibits on diverse populations but installing informational signs around the City and working with Parks, Recreation and Culture to place QR codes with public art to help people dig deeper if they choose to. The budget for this department is comprised of money from the City and the Newton Historical Society. The City portion of the budget is reflected in the straw vote and accounts for 45 percent of the total budget for the Department. Director Dady noted that the Department has received \$200,000 in ARPA funding to update exhibits and is anticipating \$77,000 in CPA funding to renovate the basement of Jackson Homestead.

## Q&A

Q: How large is the total budget for the department, not just that supplied by the City?

A: Director Dady explained that the Department will receive about \$420,000 - \$430,000 in FY24 from the Newton Historic Society.

Q: How is the program which provides a historic plaque for your home promoted and does it generate revenue?

A: This program is promoted primarily through word of mouth and the research is done by volunteers with a staff coordinator. Director Dady regarding revenue for the program described that this program generates little revenue due to the plaque costing half of the participation cost.

Q: Are walking tours staffed or self-led?

A: Director Dady stated that these tours are staffed either by a staff member or an invited expert.

Q: How has the utility line item remained unchanged?

A: Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer, explained that the City is looking at a new electricity contract and is basing the numbers on historic use.

Q: How have the renovations to the Durant-Kenrick House been serving the Department?

A: Director Dady explained that the facility has been serving the Department and City very well with other departments holding meetings there. She did note that they are beginning to see some areas of improvement for the house and are working with the Newton Historical Society on these improvements.

The Committee took a straw vote to accept the Museum Department's proposed Budget of \$323,853 as well as the Supplemental CIP and the CIP, which passed unanimously.

## Library

**Note:** Jill Mercurio, Library Director, noted she was joined by multiple Library Trustees and stated that the Library has had a remarkable year. This is marked by visitation increasing by 31%, 1.6 million items borrowed with 32% of checkouts being digital items, upgrading AV equipment, and the addition of technology to ease internal processes and improve patron experience. The Library also completed renovations to the children's room which has received positive feedback along with children's programming increasing by 118%. Regarding staff, Director Mercurio noted that the Department had experienced several staff retiring which enabled the Department to restructure and rewrite job descriptions, so they better fit the duties of each position. The Library will also be bringing

back increased programming during High School finals since before COVID and will continue targeted outreach in the upcoming fiscal year. In FY23 the Library issued 3,000 library cards and will go fine free in 2024. Director Mercurio also detailed the growing popularity of the library of things, which allows people to borrow a wide range of items that can assist them in life.

## Q&A

Q: What has caused the changes in part-time staffing costs and the increase in full-time salary costs?

A: The changes in part-time staffing costs are attributed to the number better reflecting how the library has been allocating part-time hours. Director Mercurio also stated that the increases to full-time salaries were due to union contract changes and a reevaluation that was done of all positions within this Department.

Q: Could the Department explain the increase to the pest management line item?

A: The increase in this line item was due to some rodents being seen on the green space around the library and allowing the Department to handle any issue should it arise.

Q: What has been the impact of the fine-free pilot at the Library?

A: Over the last few years revenue generated from fines has reduced due to auto renewals and digital loans. When the Library began this pilot Director Mercurio stated that an increase in lost items being returned was experienced. She attributed this to people feeling more comfortable bringing items back knowing that they would not be penalized. She further added that 92% of items are returned on time.

Q: Is the Library providing a safe space for LGBTQIA+ youth?

A: It was described by Director Mercurio that there is vibrant LGBTQIA+ programming at the Library and that the Library tries to provide a safe comfortable space for all individuals.

Q: Has the Library been contacted about banning books?

A: The Library has received very few challenges against books in its collection. Director Mercurio stated that staff are still trained on how to respond and affirmed that the Library is not looking to take books off of the shelf.

The Committee took a straw vote to accept the Library Department's proposed Budget of \$6,389,766 as well as the Supplemental CIP and the CIP, which passed unanimously.

## Parks, Recreation and Culture

**Note:** Nicole Banks, Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture, clarified that the 10% increase is the result of a transfer of budgets from DPW (Department of Public Works) The effective increase to the Department's budget is 4% from FY23. The Parks, Recreation and Culture is comprised of six divisions which include, Administration, Arts and Culture, Recreation and Community Programs, Parks and Open Space, Public Grounds Maintenance and Beautification, and Urban Forestry. The Administration division includes 3 staff members and oversees all expenditure projects, onboarding of seasonal staff, and event permitting. Commissioner Banks outlined the variety of programming that is conducted by the Recreation, and Community Programs Division which seeks to bring people together, develop and nurture kids, and help adults and seniors remain active through its programming. The Urban Forestry Division conducts all planting, pruning, and sapling care for street and public trees. Marc Welch, Deputy Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture has been conducting outreach in the community to highlight the importance of trees. The Parks and Open Space Division manages the planning, designing, coordinating with groups, steering, and organizing of projects and is comprised of a two-person team. Commissioner Banks highlighted several projects completed by this team. This team also oversees the adopt-a-space program and Commissioner Banks outlined the 5-year athletic field plan trajectory (attached). To accomplish these projects the Department relies on a variety of funding sources for projects including some not administered by the City such as friends groups, and sports partnerships. Commissioner Banks outlined all funding sources in the attached presentation.

The Maintenance Division is funded primarily through budget funds and focuses on investments in the maintenance of fields, playgrounds, parks, courts, and trees. Over the past few years, the Department has seen increases in the field maintenance budget which has enabled the City to get some fields to a premier maintenance level. A list of these fields can be found in the attached presentation. The Department is also servicing over 100 Courts intending to resurface them every 10 years. Technology has been incorporated into the work of the Maintenance Division recently through the addition of a field marking robot. This will simplify processes and allow for flexibility by the Department being able to move the markers more easily for a grass field if needed.

Commissioner Banks outlined the following outcomes for the Department:

1. Expand on Quality Recreation Programs
2. Expand Recreation Opportunities in Parks, Public Grounds, and Facilities
3. Enhance, Park, Playground and Public Spaces to Improve Quality and Aesthetics
4. Build on Award-Winning Programs for Older Residents and People with Disabilities
5. Improve arts and Culture throughout the City by Supporting and Creating a Wide Variety of Programming
6. Continue Work Towards a Sustainable Community Tree Population

Councilors expressed support for the work that the Department has done to improve facilities and continuing programming.

### Q&A

Q: What does the amount transferred from the Public Works budget to the Parks, Recreation and Culture budget entail?

A: Commissioner Banks detailed that this transfer would cover the costs for the Big Belly waste receptacle lease, dog poop management, and two staff positions which were all previously under the Public Works Department.

Q: Is the Department looking at an increase to off-leash dog parks?

A: The Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department is looking into sites for an off-leash dog park on the north side of the City.

Q: Will \$300,000 be enough funding for field maintenance?

A: Mr. Yeo stated that this amount could not be increased due to the budget override not passing. The Department will fund field maintenance through the \$300,000 and fees generated from community groups using the fields.

Q: Could the Department speak to the tree service line item not changing from the previous year and how this will affect the number of trees planted?

A: Deputy Commissioner Welch outlined that this line item primarily covers the tree services that the City has contracted to an outside vendor. Under the current contract, the City has two more years at its current rate. Tree planting is covered under the ground maintenance supplies line item and any decrease in the number of trees planted will not be known until the City purchases replacement trees.

Q: How much revenue is generated from athletic field use in FY23 and how much is expected for FY24?

A: Perry Rosenfield, FP&A Manager, stated that an exact number is not present in the budget with Commissioner Banks noting that the Department has many revolving funds that these fees are deposited to. Later in the discussion, Commissioner Banks outlined that funds stay in the revolving account until used and that these funds are routinely used for the Department to be more flexible in programming.

Q: Is money set aside for the maintenance of Nahanton Park Community Gardens?

A: Commissioner Banks noted that the previous fees paid are used for maintenance with the City being able to make more plots available. The beehives located here are managed by Parks, Recreation and Culture and the Department is working to develop policies for them.

Q: How will Albemarle serve as a second field for Newton North High School and still serve community recreation groups?

A: Commissioner Banks described that the Albemarle Field will receive improvements to lighting which will increase playing time and that the Department can work with other groups to relocate them to other fields within the City.

Q: What is the status of the Newton Centre Amphitheater?

A: The City is currently working on the feasibility study for this project and Commissioner Banks noted the various locations for the concert series last year.

The Committee took a straw vote to accept the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department's proposed Budget of \$8,411,339, as well as the Supplemental CIP and the CIP, which passed unanimously.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Josh Krintzman, Chair**