



Public Facilities Committee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Present: Councilors Albright (Chair), Getz, Kelley, Gentile, Leary, Laredo, Danberg, and Kalis

Also Present: Councilors Farrell, Malakie, Lobovits, Lucas, and Oliver

City Staff: Deputy Commissioner of Public Works Shawna Sullivan and Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo

All Public Facilities agendas and reports, both past and present, can be found at the following link:
<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/city-clerk/city-council/council-standing-committees/public-facilities-committee>

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link: [Public Facilities Committee - December 18, 2024](#)

#502-24 Appointment of Shawna Sullivan as Commissioner of the Department of Public Works

HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing SHAWNA SULLIVAN as COMMISSIONER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS pursuant to Sec. 3-3 of the City Charter.
(30 Days: 01/09/2025)

Action: **Public Facilities Approved 8-0**

Note: Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo and Deputy Commissioner of Public Works Shawna Sullivan joined the committee to discuss this item. Mr. Yeo provided an overview of Ms. Sullivan's 28 years with the City and Ms. Sullivan shared her background as well as some ideas she has for the future.

A councilor asked Ms. Sullivan what the most unexpected aspect of the Deputy Commissioner role was and as she looks ahead, what does she want to change about the Department of Public Works. Ms. Sullivan answered that she started in the role in 2019, and the COVID-19 pandemic started six months later so she learned a lot about emergency management through that. Ms. Sullivan also answered that she would look into restructuring some positions to create a path for more career advancement.

A councilor asked about the snow and ice program improvements so far and any further improvements. Ms. Sullivan noted that this year they will be implementing radios in all vehicles and an app for drivers to improve communication and efficiency.

A councilor asked Ms. Sullivan if she was to look back five years into her tenure as Commissioner, what would she want to say she has accomplished. Ms. Sullivan said she hoped to have completed as many roads, sidewalks, and ADA ramps as possible and that she built a strong responsive team. The same councilor asked about how she fosters career growth within the Department and Ms. Sullivan answered that they are constantly training and trying to promote from within when possible. She shared thoughts on who she would like to fill her position if confirmed as Commissioner by the Council.

A councilor asked how many women serve as Department Heads in Public Works across the state and Ms. Sullivan answered that there are not many; Brookline, Needham, and some towns on Cape Cod are a few. The same councilor asked if she thought there was a role for commercial businesses to help the City meet phosphorus capture goals. Ms. Sullivan answered that she thought there was but that the EPA is still determining standards. The councilor also encouraged engagement in the Newton Corner Circle MASDOT project and questioned if the project had actually fixed the problem. Ms. Sullivan noted that they should wait to determine that until the second traffic signal is installed.

Councilors shared concerns over a lack of community engagement in DPW projects they have heard from residents, specifically around the Newton Highlands Village Enhancement Project and the Bullough's Pond Dam Project. Ms. Sullivan acknowledged that the work is ongoing and she plans to meet with businesses for the Newton Highlands project.

A councilor asked for more information about AI scanning software and Ms. Sullivan answered that they are piloting technology that is placed on a windshield and as the vehicle is driven around, it scans the road for potential problems.

Councilors shared many positive comments in support of this appointment. Some councilors also expressed support for the expansion of the Black Earth composting program.

Councilor Gentile motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

#448-24 Request for discussion on text clarification in the City of Newton Ordinances regarding sidewalks

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting discussion and approval of text clarifications necessary for City Ordinance Section 29-157 through 29-166, ARTICLE VI.

REQUIRED REMOVAL AND REPLACEMENT OF BUILDING SEWER, WATER SERVICE PIPES AND SIDEWALKS which clarifies the requirement to install sidewalks in locations that did not previously have a sidewalk.

Action: **Public Facilities Approved 7-0-1 (Councilor Gentile Abstained)**

Note: Deputy Commissioner of Public Works Shawna Sullivan joined the committee to discuss this item. These changes are to clarify the ordinance language that requires the

installation of a sidewalk in locations that have not previously had a sidewalk. This requirement applies to any building addition over 50% or a new development.

A councilor asked if the sidewalk must be concrete, and Ms. Sullivan confirmed that it does unless there are trees along the frontage and then they allow an asphalt sidewalk.

A councilor asked to confirm if this was the current policy and Ms. Sullivan confirmed that it was but there was no language in the ordinance to back that up so this item will fix that. Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo stated that this request for language came from the Law Department to make the policy clearer.

A councilor asked if the contractor was still responsible for the cost and Ms. Sullivan confirmed that was correct. A councilor asked if they could do this as a betterment and Ms. Sullivan answered no.

Councilors noted concerns that this is an added cost to already high construction costs currently and passing this cost along to residents and contractors.

A councilor encouraged this would be important information to share with residents and contractors when they first apply for permits through the Inspectional Services Department and Ms. Sullivan confirmed that this policy is on the website, NewGov, where people go to apply for the permits.

A councilor asked if there is a preexisting sidewalk, are people still responsible for installing a new sidewalk and Ms. Sullivan answered that DPW conducts an inspection with a checklist of criteria and if it passes that, then the requirement is waived. The councilor asked if the sidewalk is asphalt but in good condition, do they have to replace it, and Ms. Sullivan said yes.

A councilor asked if DPW could review the ordinance to see if any other clarifications were needed and Ms. Sullivan said she would ask the Law Department to review it.

Councilor Laredo motioned to approve which passed 7-0 with Councilor Gentile abstaining.

The Committee adjourned at 7:50PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Albright, Chair

#448-24

APWA Accreditation Program

The APWA Accreditation Program provides an opportunity for agencies to earn an accreditation after completion of an evaluation and review process. The evaluation and best practice review process serves to provide a means of formally verifying and recognizing public works agencies for compliance with the recommended practices set forth in the *Public Works Management Practices Manual*.

It is a voluntary, self-motivated approach to objectively evaluate, verify and recognize compliance with the recommended management practices.

Benefits of APWA Accreditation

- Established agency-wide culture of continuous improvement
- Improved operational performance
- Team building and staff development
- Succession planning/institutional knowledge retention
- Central location for documentation and SOPs
- Increased efficiencies/reduced duplication and wasted resources
- Improved communication
- Justification for budget requests
- Lowering of insurance premiums
- Reduced liability

