



# Finance Committee Report

## City of Newton In City Council

**Monday, December 8, 2025**

**Present:** Councilors Gentile (Chair), Malakie, Greenberg, Bixby, Lipof, Humphrey, Micley and Grossman

**Also present:** Councilors Lucas, Krintzman, and Laredo

**City staff present:** Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux, Comptroller Steve Curley, Senior Analyst Endrit Poreci, Financial Analyst II Trevor Goehring, Commissioner of Public Works Shawna Sullivan, Commissioner of Public Buildings Josh Morse, City Solicitor Ali Giuliani, Human Resources Director Michelle Pizzi O'Brien

All Finance 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/finance-committee>

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link:  
<https://youtu.be/-e3qNwpooCU?si=ER6aqbravazH38Vc>.

**#357-25 Request for acceptance and expenditure of a \$5,000,000 FY2026 MassWorks Grant**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting the acceptance and expenditure of five million dollars (\$5,000,000) from a FY2026 MassWorks Grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development to support the Crafts Street Culvert Replacement project.

**Action:** **Finance Approved 7-0 (Councilor Micley Not Voting)**

**Note:** Commissioner of Public Works Shawna Sullivan presented the item. She explained that the grant is a highly competitive state award and aligns closely with the intent of the MassWorks infrastructure program. These are pre-development and implementation grants for projects such as roadways, streets, bridges, culverts, and other utilities.

She explained that the portion of the culvert at 78 Crafts Street is in poor condition, with several pilings appearing to have breached the culvert floors, deterioration of the concrete walls, and sagging of the culvert.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) has engaged The Engineering Corporation (TEC) to develop and evaluate options for either lining or replacing the portion of the culvert. The work must be coordinated with the 307-unit residential development approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals under a comprehensive permit, making timing coordination especially important.

She noted that the DPW is currently completing design and evaluation work. Once completed, the project will be bid for construction. She added that the grant is expected to cover most, if not all, of the project costs.

A councilor asked whether this project would help the city obtain phosphorus credits. Commissioner Sullivan that it likely would not.

Another councilor asked whether this culvert was considered part of Bullough's Pond downstream area. Commissioner Sullivan replied that it partially was, as it stems off the main culvert and reconnects to it at Jackson Street in front of the new Lincoln Elliott School.

Councilor Grossman motioned to approve, which passed unanimously.

### **Referred to Public Facilities & Finance Committees**

#### **#358-25 Requesting the appropriation of \$2,304,983.75 for Phase 2 of the Pump Station Rehabilitation CIP Project**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting the appropriation of two million three hundred four thousand nine hundred eighty-three dollars and seventy-five cents (\$2,304,983.75) from Acct# 6100-3599 Sewer Fund Surplus - Available for Appropriation to fund Phase 2 of the Pump Station Rehabilitation CIP Project.

**Public Facilities Approved 5-0 (Councilors Kalis and Laredo Not Voting) on 12-03-25**

**Action: Finance Approved 7-0 (Councilor Micley Not Voting)**

**Note:** Commissioner Sullivan presented the item. She explained that this phase includes both construction and construction oversight for essential upgrades to five pump stations, which are critical components of other systems. Many infrastructures are several decades old and require rehabilitation to maintain reliability, reduce operational risk, and ensure long-term performance.

Phase 2 construction covers five locations across the City: Quinobequin Road, Elliot Street, Edgewater Park, Manet Road, and Flowed Meadows. She detailed the repairs to be done at each location.

The request also includes construction oversight by Brown and Caldwell. She detailed their scope, including project administration, field visits, change management, and more. She noted this quality control is essential to ensure the work is completed properly.

She detailed the funding breakdown, with \$1,799,93.75 for construction, \$215,890 for the contingency, and \$290,000 for construction oversight.

She added that the project is a key part of the City's Capital Improvement Plan and its long-term strategy to modernize maintenance conservation network, preventing costly emergency repairs, and maintaining a high level of service to its residents.

Councilor Humphrey motioned to approve, which passed unanimously.

**#360-25      Requesting authorization to transfer \$45,000 for vacation/special leave disbursements**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to transfer forty-five thousand dollars (\$45,000) from Acct# 0110498-579000 - Current Year Budget Reserve for the purpose of vacation/special leave disbursements for two individuals, the Mayor and the COO, retiring from the Executive Office on January 1, 2026.

**Action:      Finance Approved 8-0**

**Note:**      Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux presented the item. She explained that when a new administration comes in, members of the staff who are leaving start to do so a few months before the end of the year, leaving the Mayor's office with savings from attrition. These savings are then used to cover vacation and special leave disbursements from any retiring or resigning members. However, Mayor-Elect Laredo has decided to keep most of the executive office staff for his administration, and as such, the Mayor's office does not benefit from the usual attrition savings.

She noted that this item serves to cover the shortfall for vacation and special leave disbursements for the Mayor and the current Chief Operating Officer.

A councilor asked about vacation accrual and whether the requested funds result from unused 2025 vacation time or 2026 vacation time accrued because both staff members work until noon on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Ms. Lemieux answered that vacation accrual is driven by the H-grade system. Vacation for the next year is given to H-grade employees on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

Another councilor expressed surprise that the Mayor receives one year's worth of vacation, or 3 weeks, because the turnover of office occurs at 11:59 AM on January 1<sup>st</sup> rather than December 31<sup>st</sup>. Ms. Lemieux stated that while this situation is not common, employees generally wait until January to retire to obtain these extra weeks. She added that this practice has been in place for as long as she has worked in the city.

City Solicitor Ali Giuliani explained that vacation time is considered wages under Massachusetts Law, such that an employee is entitled to them if they leave their employment on or after January 1<sup>st</sup>. Human Resources Director Michelle Pizzi O'Brien added that the city's ordinances set vacation time for employees, which indicates that vacation is granted based on time previously served.

Another councilor noted this seemed to be a bad business practice and that moving retirement dates to December 31<sup>st</sup> would save the city money.

Ms. Lemieux clarified that out of the \$45,000 requested, around \$10,000 reflect unused 2026 vacation time for both the Mayor and the COO, while the rest is owed time.

A councilor expressed surprise at the discussion, given the small percentage of the requested funds that would go towards unused 2026 vacation time, and that the item concerns only two employees who are so strongly committed to the city.

A few councilors agreed that the Mayor and the COO were incredibly hardworking. One councilor noted that the concept of the request was bothersome.

The Committee discussed H-grade vacation time with Ms. Lemieux.

Another councilor suggested that the administration encourage their employees to take the vacation time they are entitled to. Ms. Lemieux noted that the city is very strict on employees using their vacation time. She noted that in December 2022, during the pandemic, employees signed vacation utilization agreements with the city stating that any vacation time they had not used needed to be spent by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025. Other than this situation, the administration is strict so that it does not accrue a large liability. She added that if an employee leaves a department, the vacancy is not allowed to be filled until funds for the employee's pay out are accumulated by the department.

Councilor Lipof motioned to approve, which passed unanimously.

**#359-25      Requesting authorization to transfer \$425,000 for funding the settlement of the FY2025 - FY2027 Teamsters Collective Bargaining Agreement**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to transfer a total of four hundred twenty-five thousand dollars (\$425,000) with three hundred twenty-five thousand dollars (\$325,000) from Acct# 0110498-519700 - General Fund-Current Year Wage Reserve and one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) from Acct# 60A10498-579000 - Water Fund FY26 Budget Reserves for the purpose of funding the settlement of the FY2025 - FY2027 Teamsters Collective Bargaining Agreement.

**Action:**      **Finance Approved 8-0**

**Note:**      Ms. Lemieux presented the item. She explained that it requests funding for members of the Teamsters Union in the General Fund as well as those in the Water Fund. She added that the city has enough savings from attrition such that they do not need to request money for other funds. The settlement follows the pattern reached with other unions which have settled from 2025 to 2027. She noted that this money is in the Wage Reserve Fund which sits in the Comptroller's office until the city settles any of these contracts.

Councilor Malakie motioned to approve, which passed unanimously.

**#362-25      Requesting information regarding the Mayor-Elect Laredo's plan to staff the Executive Department**

COUNCILOR GENTILE requesting information on the Mayor-Elect Laredo's plan to staff the Executive Department. The requested information includes but is not limited to:

1) The approved FY26 Executive Department budget which runs through June 30, 2026, has 7 FTE positions and the money necessary to support those 7 positions. In his announcement on 11/18/25 to the community the Mayor-Elect announced his Executive Office Leadership Team which identifies 9 individuals as making up the team.

2) If the Mayor-Elect intends to increase his staff by just under 30% in the middle of the fiscal year, will he defend why this is necessary by submitting a reorganization plan to the City Council for its review and approval?

3) What are the salaries and start dates for those additional 2 positions? Is any other current employee identified in the newsletter in line to receive a salary increase?

4) With the department budgeted for 7 FTE's in FY26 these additional 2 positions will create a shortfall in the Executive Department budget of at least \$100,000 over the second half of the fiscal year. What is the plan to cover this shortfall?

**Action:** Finance Voted No Action Necessary 8-0

**Note:** The Chair presented the item and thanked Mayor-Elect Laredo for attending. He explained that he learned of the additional FTEs via the Mayor's newsletter. He clarified the item was brought on by his belief that it is Newton's financial discipline that results in its financial strength, and this practice should continue.

Mayor-Elect Laredo explained these additional appointments are important for the well-being of city government and are fiscally sound. Before he announced the changes in the executive, he consulted with City Solicitor Giuliani, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Lemieux, and Human Resources Director Pizzi O'Brien to ensure the restructuring was appropriate and legal within the city's charter.

He noted one of the changes would be a request to create a new Arts and Culture department, and he would appropriately engage and collaborate with the new City Council on the matter.

He explained that the city has unfilled positions, some of which have been unfilled for years, and he does not plan to fill them to allow for the new appointments to be funded. He emphasized that he does not wish to increase the city's payroll.

He added that Ms. Lemieux staying on and helping to train the new CFO will be invaluable. He praised the existing Mayor's team and expressed gratitude that they have agreed to stay on for his administration. He noted that doing so also saves recruiting and turnover costs to the city.

He expressed that current Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo is overstretched due to the amount of responsibilities of the role, and as a result, some aspects of the job cannot get done as they should.

He went over the new appointments and their responsibilities.

Current Commissioner of Public Buildings will step up as Chief Operating Officer, overseeing the Planning, Inspectional Services, Public Works, Public Buildings, Police, and Fire departments. He will be able to work with different people and mentor newer leadership in the city.

John Rice will step up as Chief of Community Services, where he will oversee and work with all community-facing groups, including Historic Newton, the Library, Health and Human Services, Parks and Recreation, and more. He will also play a mentoring role to newer leadership, for which his vast experience in the City Council will help.

Dana Hansen will become Chief of Staff, working with City Councilors, School Committee members, the state legislative delegation, and neighboring communities; overseeing the executive office; and collaborating with Human Resources.

He summarized that more leadership in the executive, cluster meetings, mentoring and training of leadership, and succession planning will allow the city to save money over time.

He explained he plans to avoid duplication of efforts and conflicts among departments and invest in Information Technology to automate certain functions in City Hall that are paper-dependent, such as within hiring and purchasing processes.

He detailed which positions will remain unfilled in order to fund the new appointments, including vacancies in Public Buildings, Parks and Recreation, and Planning. He emphasized that he does not wish to use Free Cash, but instead wants to redistribute funds that already sit in payroll accounts.

A councilor praised that Mayor-Elect Laredo has been able to assemble such a high-caliber team of individuals, each of whom she highly respects. She recalled moments of financial stress that the city has gone through, particularly throughout certain Budget seasons and related to the funding of school staffing. She noted that this redistribution of funds may be used as an example of what tradeoffs could also be made in favor of the schools.

Mayor-Elect Laredo noted that when the time comes to discuss budgeting, he will be clear that this is not an expansion of city services, but a repurposing of money in payroll to drive efficiency and collaboration within the city. He added the Council is entitled to hold him accountable to this commitment.

Another councilor expressed support for the repurposing of funds, both legally and financially.

A different councilor expressed concern that the increase in Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) was possible without the Council's approval, as it had been his understanding that approval was required.

City Solicitor Giuliani answered that the city charter contains a provision that allows the Mayor to select individuals and set their salaries and duties as they deem necessary to assist them in performing their

mayoral duties. Such changes are not required to be approved by City Council, unless transfer of funds or supplemental appropriations are needed.

The same councilor asked whether the provision applied to adding positions in departments other than the Mayor's office.

Senior Assistant City Solicitor Andrew Lee responded that the provision applies to changes within the Mayor's office as well as other departments. However, he emphasized that if any new funds or transfers are needed, then Council approval is required. He reminded the Committee that during the annual budget, the Council approves only the total salary amount for each department, rather than individual salaries. He noted that the Mayor would need to obtain Council approval for the creation of his proposed Arts and Culture department.

Ms. Lemieux added that the Council's legal level of control during the annual budget approval is the appropriation schedule. She added that the administration will likely docket an item in January, requesting some transfers to support the new changes.

A councilor asked if Ms. Lemieux could give an overview about these changes. Ms. Lemieux noted that the administration will bring this information to the Council in January. She explained that four positions would be at play.

The same councilor inquired about the estimated salary difference between Mayor Fuller's and Mayor-Elect Laredo's team. Ms. Lemieux answered that the additional two positions would result in about a \$375,000 difference for the year.

In response to a councilor's question, Ms. Lemieux detailed the reorganization that would occur to allow for the new appointments to start in January, including the creation of positions, promotions, and vacancies that will remain. She added that in each department where a new position is added, the FTEs will stay vacant until the administration receives Council approval.

Councilor Grossman motioned to vote No Action Necessary, which passed unanimously.

Ms. Lemieux expressed her pleasure in having worked with retiring Councilor Gentile over the last 44 years. She stated that Councilor Gentile's dedication and love for the city, in addition to his tenacity in accomplishing what is dear to him, is unparalleled. She added that she will miss and has loved working with him.

Councilor Lipof thanked and expressed his utmost respect for members of city staff, including Steve Curley, Andrew Lee, Josh Morse, Maureen Lemieux, Ali Giuliani, and Michelle Pizzi O'Brien. He expressed gratitude to Councilor Gentile and to have been able to work with and learn from him for 24 years.

Councilor Gentile reminded the Committee about a docket item that was referred to next term, about city employee Loretta Busa's injury suffered on the job. He shared that Ms. Busa's condition had unfortunately deteriorated, and she was recently placed in hospice care. He noted that the family has appreciated the Council's support.

He lastly thanked the Committee for their work throughout the last few years. He shared that he has seen great dedication from this group, committed to showing up on time and fully participating. He emphasized the importance of the Finance Committee's task of oversight on how taxpayer money is spent and asked that the current members continue to take this role seriously.

The Committee adjourned at 8:44PM.

**Respectfully submitted,  
Leonard Gentile, Chair of Finance Committee**