

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PUBLIC SAFETY & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17, 2010

Present: Ald. Ciccone (Chairman), Yates, Fuller, Freedman, Harney, Swiston and Shapiro

Absent: Ald. Johnson

City Staff: Chief Matthew Cummings (Newton Police Department), Chief Joseph LaCroix (Newton Fire Department) and Jeff Knight (Superintendent of Wire Division, Newton Fire Department)

REFERRED TO PUBLIC SAFETY & TRANS. AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#79-10 **HIS HONOR THE MAYOR** requesting authorization to appropriate and expend fifty-two thousand six hundred forty-five dollars (\$52,645) from Parking Meter Receipts for the purpose of purchasing an Automatic License Plate Recognition (ALPR) system for three parking control vehicles operated by the Police Department. [03/09/10 @ 7:08 PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 6-0-1 (Ald. Yates abstaining)**

NOTE: Chief Matthew Cummings, Newton Police Department joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Chief Cummings said this appropriation would allow for the purchasing of the Automatic License Plate Recognition (ALPR) system for three parking control vehicles operated by the Newton Police Department. The ALPR system consists of a small exterior mounted camera with an interfacing laptop mounted inside the vehicle. The ALPR reads and stores vehicle information data on parked vehicles as a parking control officer drives down a street. This system will also beep and alert the parking control officer when the vehicle has many parking tickets and will also recognize "tow and hold" vehicles that have overdue parking fines and immediately alert the parking control officer to their presence. The system will eliminate the need for parking control officers to manually record license plates on a note pad. Chelsea, Somerville, Natick, Framingham and the State Police use the ALPR system and are satisfied.

The City expects that the introduction of the ALPR system will result in a significant increase in enforcement and generate additional revenue. Currently, parking control officers operate three vehicles six days a week, ten hours per day, generating approximately \$14,700.00 citations for overtime parking. Each vehicle averages writing seventy nine citations per day. The annual citations that are written represent an average of 21% of these citations. The average notations collected and equal approximately \$307,000.00 in annual ticket revenues. The ALPR will increase the documented material from the seventy nine vehicles per officer, to a maximum capability of two thousand vehicles per hour.

Ald. Fuller asked if two parking control officers would remain in a car, or if this system would allow staff to be reduced. Chief Cummings answered two officers would remain. Ald. Freedman asked if tickets would still have to be manually written. Chief Cummings answered at this time the system does not have the capability of printing tickets. Ald. Yates asked why this system would not be used in City parking lots. Chief Cummings answered a meter number is required to issue a violation. Ald. Swiston asked if approved, when would this system would be implemented. Chief Cummings is hopeful in the next month or two.

Chief Cummings said this system also has the capability of locating stolen and or unregistered vehicles. The parking control officer's will not have this option in their vehicles because of safety reasons. He does not want the officers involved in these types of scenarios. The system installed in the parking control officers vehicles will be used strictly for parking enforcement. Chief Cummings said the City was planning on using "Click It or Ticket" equipment money to purchase this system for three additional vehicles but recently the state eliminated these grant funds. He is hopeful in the future to purchase this equipment for police officer cruisers. Chief Cummings said if this system was installed in a police officer's cruiser the vehicle would be able to locate stolen and or unregistered vehicles.

Ald. Yates asked if the parking control officers will have the ability to report a stolen or unregistered vehicle or if the system would report it automatically. Chief Cummings answered he does not feel comfortable with and does not want parking control officers and or their vehicles being involved in this type of scenario. Ald. Yates continued to express his concerns and is troubled to hear that the parking control officers would not have the ability to transmit stolen or unregistered vehicles to the Police Department. Chief Cummings said if parking control officers were going to be allowed to assist in these types of situations the matter would have to be first approved by the Police Union.

Ald. Shapiro asked Chief Cummings to research the necessary material in order to include traffic control officers to be included in using the system in the cases of unregistered or stolen vehicles for a discussion in the future, perhaps ninety days after implementing the new system. Ald. Fuller said she believes an additional benefit to the system would be to include the option when a traffic control officer could transmit a dangerous situation to the Police Department.

Ald. Freedman moved approval and the Committee voted in favor 6-0-1, Ald. Yates abstaining.

REFERRED TO PUBLIC SAFETY & TRANS. AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#80-10 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend thirty-five thousand six hundred fifteen dollars and twenty cents (\$35,615.20) from Budget Reserve for the purpose of supplementing the Fire Department's budget for costs related to new recruits. [03/09/10 @ 7:08 PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 5-0 (Ald. Harney and Freedman not voting)**

NOTE: Chief Joseph LaCroix, Newton Fire Department joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Chief LaCroix stated this appropriation is necessary to purchase clothing, bunking gear and the necessary equipment for eight new firefighter recruits scheduled to begin on April 19, 2010. Included in the approximate cost of \$4,451.90 for recruits is their clothing, psychological evaluation and required equipment. Chief LaCroix said new recruits are not included in his budget because the numbers of attendees constantly change. He said he originally had five people interested in attending the academy but due to retirements it has been bumped up to eight recruits. Chief LaCroix said the City works off a civil service vacancy list.

Ald. Yates asked how committed is the City to the recruits. Chief LaCroix said he spoke with each recruit explaining the City's financial situation. He said he has not been informed if he will have to cut his firefighters or has he received his final budget figures. He said it is possible there will be layoffs. The recruits will graduate in June 2010 and will be appointed to the Fire Department with the probability or possibility they could be laid off. Once a recruit has graduated, met qualifications, hired on the Newton Fire Department and if they become laid off they are added to the lay off list. The lay off list keeps the individual's name for ten years where they would be the first to be called in when vacancies open in other cities or towns. A Newton resident has preference in the Newton Fire Department. Ald. Shapiro asked if a firefighter chooses another city would we be refunded the approximate cost of \$4,500.00. Chief LaCroix answered no, the firefighters have to leave all purchased equipment behind and Newton firefighters use the equipment for spares.

Ald. Fuller asked how many recruits are hired each year. Chief LaCroix said he cannot predict how many recruits are hired each year, he can only predict when a firefighter is approaching age 65 years then it is mandatory they retire. There are approximately one dozen recruits hired each year.

Ald. Fuller asked Chairman Ciccone to request from the Executive Department on this year's budget a line item be added with the number of new recruits or the number of new recruits anticipated.

Ald. Yates moved approval and the Committee voted in favor 5-0, Ald. Harney and Freedman not voting.

REFERRED TO PUBLIC SAFETY & TRANS. AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#71-10 **HIS HONOR THE MAYOR** requesting authorization to appropriate and expend four hundred thousand dollars (\$400,000) from Free Cash for the purpose of supplementing the Fire Department overtime account. [02/23/10 @ 7:21 PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 6-0 (Ald. Freedman not voting)**

NOTE: Chief Joseph LaCroix, Newton Fire Department once again joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Chief LaCroix reviewed with Committee members the fire overtime account graph from FY00 to the present and firefighters personal leave graph, both are attached to this report.

Chief LaCroix said currently the Fire Department overtime account is in arrears and this amount will clear the deficit and will cover the projected overtime needs between now and the remainder of the fiscal year. The initial appropriation was for \$446,954.00 for FY10, which was depleted the week ending 12/11/09. This amount has been expended and the department is at a deficit of \$278,408.985. Chief LaCroix indicated Newton fought three major fires in January 2009; as a result firefighters were injured. The injuries and eight vacancies both were contributing factors to the overtime account.

Chief LaCroix said eight candidates attended the academy in 2009. The fire academy closed when the state began to cut their budget therefore, the attendees did not graduate until November 2009, who are now firefighters in the City of Newton. Chief LaCroix said there are eight more candidates waiting to attend the academy. When these candidates graduate they will bring the Newton Fire Department to full staff hoping to decrease the overtime account.

Ald. Fuller asked Chairman Ciccone to request from the Executive Department on this year's budget a line item be added with an approximate figure of the fire overtime account.

Ald. Shapiro moved approval and the Committee voted in favor 6-0, Ald. Freedman not voting.

#66-10 ALD. CICCONE requesting information as to why the Fire Department lost two-way radio communication recently at a fire scene and what is being done to prevent this in the future. [02/23/10 @ 2:54 PM]

ACTION: **REFERRED TO POST AUDIT & OVERSIGHT AS AMENDED 6-0 (Ald. Freedman not voting)**

NOTE: Chief Joseph LaCroix, Newton Fire Department and Jeff Knight, Superintendent Wires Division, Newton Fire Department joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Chairman Ciccone clarified this item indicating this incident did not happen at a fire scene.

Chief LaCroix said the incident happened at the communication tower on Waban Hill Road. The tower is responsible for all radio communications for the Newton Police Department, Newton Fire Department, Boston C Med, Boston Fire Department and EMS. Chief LaCroix said for the past twenty years the Fire Department has been looking to upgrade this facility due to its total disrepair. During this incident the generator did exactly what it is suppose to do shutting communication down avoiding fire.

Mr. Knight said after the incident he made an investigation and found that NSTAR was the primary circuit at this location. A false current got into the system; the generator read this false current and the safety controls shut down so that it would not feed a fire if there was one. He agreed with Chief LaCroix that the generator did exactly what it was suppose to. Mr. Knight said the Police Department manually started the communication after the initial surge. It is unfortunate, but the tower is from the WWII era. Mr. Knight said something has to be done to upgrade this tower and the communication system for the City.

Ald. Swiston asked how long two-way communication was down. Mr. Knight answered only the time it took for all departments involved to switch over to their stand-by channels. Chief LaCroix said when radio communication is lost they refer to the old dispatch at Fire Headquarters. Communication was down for approximately 15-20 minutes.

Chief LaCroix said he and Mayor Warren discussed this problem. Mayor Warren suggested to Chief LaCroix to put together a grant proposal. The proposal included a new tower, new building, antennas, etc. at an estimate cost of \$616,000.00. The Executive Department submitted the grant proposal through Homeland Security. Chief LaCroix said the grant request has not been approved but looks favorable. He is hopeful to hear in early April. Ald. Shapiro asked when the last structure analysis was completed on the tower. Mr. Knight said perhaps ten years ago and the report was not favorable.

Ald. Swiston suggested this item be referred to the Post Audit & Oversight Committee in order to follow up on the grant. She said if the grant is not received, she believes another item would be docketed requesting funds for a new tower and believes this history would be helpful if an item is docketed. Ald. Shapiro suggested the language of this item be modified reflecting the incident was not at a fire scene.

Ald. Swiston moved to discharge this item from Committee and refer it to the Post Audit & Oversight Committee to a) follow up with the Fire Department on them receiving a possible grant for a new tower, etc. and b) striking the words "at a fire scene". The Committee voted in favor 6-0, Ald. Freedman not voting.

Chairman Ciccone thanked Chief LaCroix for his efforts requesting this grant.

#48-10 ALD. YATES requesting a report from the Fire Chief as to the safety and security of hoses on all fire engines to prevent an accident like the one in Cambridge.
[02/01/10 @ 9:00 PM]

ACTION: **NO ACTION NECESSARY 5-0 (Ald. Fuller and Freedman not voting)**

NOTE: Chief Joseph LaCroix, Newton Fire Department once again joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Chief LaCroix explained how the accident happened in Cambridge, MA. He said the fire engine hose vibrated out from the matadale causing the hose to drag and wrap around an elder persons legs. This unfortunate accident is still under investigation.

Since this accident, the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) 1901 has changed their apparatus regulations hoping to prevent future accidents. The NFPA now require installing devices on the matadales and hose beds hoping to prevent dropping of the hoses from the truck.

Chief LaCroix said in Newton the hoses are laid into the matadales flush with the fire hose nozzle being kept in the middle of the hose avoiding it to hangover and prevent shifting. The Deputy completes weekly inspections on each engine ensuring the hose beds are properly layed and a daily inspection is also completed on each engine. Chief LaCroix said the newer trucks

are installed with metal covers covering the matadales preventing the hoses to fall with an option to use netting. The older trucks are not required to have the metal cover which cover the matadales. A kit is now in design for the older trucks.

Chief LaCroix said Cambridge does not use matadales or netting. They choose to use a different method of operation the "New York" style allowing the hoses to be left on the edge of the truck.

Ald. Yates moved No Action Necessary and the Committee voted in favor 5-0, Ald. Fuller and Freedman not voting.

At approximately 9:25 pm, Ald. Yates moved for adjournment and the Committee voted in favor 5-0, Ald. Fuller and Freedman not voting.

Respectfully submitted,

Allan Ciccone, Jr. Chairman