

April 6, 2006

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

The Committee on Finance convened on April 6, 2006, with Chairman William White presiding and Committee Members Aldermen Maryann Heuston, Denise Provost, Dennis Sullivan and Robert Trane also present and voting. Also present were Aldermen Thomas Taylor and Sean O'Donovan, Mayor Joe Curtatone, Michael Lambert from the Mayor's Office, James Halloran and Kevin O'Donovan from IT, Director of Communications Tom Champion, James Kostaras from SPCD, Finance Director Ed Bean, Personnel Director Richard Tranfaglia, Superintendent of Schools Tony Pierantozzi, Project Manager Gerry Boyle, DPW Finance Director Ginger Barrett, Stephen Mackey from the Chamber of Commerce and John Correira.

Connect-CTY

Mr. Champion explained the Connect-CTY service system to the committee, explaining that it is basically an enhanced reverse 911 system that would be utilized by the city and the School Department to notify residents of emergency and/or special events. In addition to delivering a recorded message, the system also has the capability to conduct surveys. Each resident file would have up to 3 phone numbers and 2 email addresses programmed into it. Part of the system would utilize a GIS system to isolate a subset of the population for notification of specific matters, e.g., emergency and public safety issues peculiar to a specific area, neighborhood meetings or to notify a specific group of students of an event pertaining to their class. Individuals could opt out of all of the notification criteria, with the exception of emergency and public safety notifications. The yearly cost for the system is approximately \$88,500 for the city side and \$20,367 for the school side. The vendor would update the database at regular intervals and maintain the integrity of the system at no extra cost to the city. Additionally, there is a provision in the contract that allows for termination of the contract at any time, without cause. Superintendent Pierantozzi said that about 10% of municipalities and 55% of schools systems are using this technology. He noted that the voice being heard by the recipients would be recognizable as belonging to someone that they know, such as the school principal. He envisions the system being used as an outreach tool by the School Department to notify students and parents of college nights and other important events. He also noted that the system is capable of sending multiple messages in different languages, based on the subset selected. Approximately 99.5% of households have phones, making this technology a useful communication tool. Alderman Provost expressed her concern that phone calls aren't more likely to reach parents than letters sent home with students would and she questioned the effectiveness of the system given that not every household has an answering machine. Superintendent Pierantozzi responded that he doesn't yet know if this system would replace or augment the current paper notifications.

Chairman White asked how this expense would impact the hiring of additional police and fire personnel and asked for information regarding the “hit rate” and how the system communicates with answering machines. He further stated that he does not see the urgency for implementing this system now and expressed his desire that it be submitted as part of FY-07 budget process. Mayor Curtatone told the members that this system is far superior to other services with regard to speed and clarity and noted that it is substantially less expensive than other so called reverse 911 systems. He suggested that the city should move forward on this matter now, rather than waiting, and he assured the members that the expense would have no impact on police, fire or teaching positions.

Alderman Provost’s motion **that a representative from NTI appear before the committee to respond to questions concerning the Connect-CTY system** was unanimously approved.

Metromedia Energy

In another matter, Ms. Barrett explained the reason for the DPW’s request to pay an outstanding bill to Metromedia Energy, saying that the city wasn’t billed in timely fashion by Metromedia. After an examining the department’s charges, it was determined that the charge is, in fact, accurate and should be paid.

Environmental Programs Manager

Mr. Tranfaglia spoke about the position of Environmental Programs Manager and explained the duties of the position, saying that the manager would be more involved in policy development and working with the community. The position would be funded for 5 years by Waste Management at a cost of \$40,000 per year, with the funds going into the city’s general fund. After some discussion on this matter, Mr. Bean pointed out that this particular request is a flawed Board order that needs to be withdrawn and resubmitted.

Alderman Heuston’s motion **that Mr. Deshpane, from the DPW, appear at the next Finance meeting to discuss the Environmental Programs Manager position to determine if there is redundancy with respect to this position**, was unanimously approved.

Alderman Trane’s motion **that the Director of Personnel provide a copy of the job description for the position held by Mr. Deshpane be provided to the committee**, was unanimously approved

Alderman Provost’s motion **that the Administration provide information on the interplay of the Environmental Programs Manager position with the similar position within the School Department**, was unanimously approved.

Powderhouse School

Mr. Boyle informed the members that the cost estimate and schematic design have been completed and that the estimate is approximately \$14 million. That amount is approximately \$7.5 million more than the budgeted amount of \$6.5 million. The evaluation process is ongoing and it is possible that outside consultants might be brought in to assist with this matter. Information is still being collected at this time and as soon as it is analyzed, a preliminary report will be forthcoming to the BOA, hopefully within the next 30 days.

The committee discussed matters before it and took action on the following 3 items:

180453: Communication from Mayor - Requesting an appropriation of \$26,654 from the Unreserved Fund Balance (Free Cash) to the Finance Budget & Grants Mgmt. Salaries account, for the position of Budget Manager.

RECOMMENDATION: Should be Placed on File

VOTE: Unanimous, 5 - 0 in favor

180614: Communication from Mayor - Requesting approval for the DPW to pay a prior year invoice of \$24,765.64 from Metromedia Energy.

RECOMMENDATION: Should be Approved

VOTE: Unanimous, 5 - 0 in favor

180746: Communication from Mayor - Requesting the acceptance of a \$35,000 grant from Waste Management, to help fund an Environmental Programs Manager position.

RECOMMENDATION: Should be Placed on File

VOTE: Unanimous, 5 - 0 in favor

Alderman William A. White, Jr., Chairman
Committee on Finance

COMMITTEE REPORT

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6, 2006

In Board of Aldermen

Clerk