

Appropriations Committee

Chairman Mortimer, Infurna,
Brodeur, Tramontozzi, Wright,
McAteer-Margolis, Seaboyer,
Medeiros, Conn, Boisselle
Absent: Forbes
In attendance: Human Resources
Director Marianne Long; Mayor
Dolan, Chief Assessor Don Dragt

Appropriations called to order by Chairman Mortimer at 7:55 p.m. Order No. 09-106, TRANSFER Amount: \$2,750.00 From: A/C #019122-543102 – Workers Comp Benefits To: A/C #011522-543000 – Human Resources – Physical Exams

Human Resources Director Marianne Long says additional funds are needed for "fit for duty" physical exams for prospective fighters and DPW employees; funds are available in the Worker's Comp line.

Alderman Medeiros moves to recommend, 2nd by Tramontozzi. All in favor.

Chairman Mortimer says that since no one is present to address Order No. 09-108 he will proceed to Order No. 09-109.

Alderman Tramontozzi motions to suspend the rules to hear from Mayor Dolan and Mr. Dragt, 2nd by Alderman McAteer-Margolis. All in favor.

Mayor Dolan says both Orders 09-109 and 09-110 are initiatives by his Administration after having discussions with the Aldermen in assisting low-income residents and senior citizens during this economic crisis. He says he has found that a number of people benefit from the discounted trash fee and he wants to expand the number of citizens that receive 50% off and further expand the number of married couples finding difficulty affording it with two incomes. The only document required is a W2 form, making the process as accommodating as possible.

Mr. Dragt says in order to qualify for the tax deferral program a resident must be 65 years old, a resident of Massachusetts for 10 years and a resident of Melrose for 5 years. It is an income-based program which allows assets. The maximum annual income for eligibility has been \$20,000 and the interest charged for deferral has been 8%. This proposal would allow \$40,000 annual income and lower the interest rate to 4.5% simple interest. These changes will make it available to more people.

Mayor Dolan says that Jack Beckley believes this will help a lot of people. A person doesn't have to defer all tax; deferral of just a few months could be helpful. This is an option to obtaining a reverse mortgage.

Alderman Brodeur motions to join the orders for discussion purposes, 2nd by Alderman McAteer-Margolis. All in favor.

Order No. 09-109, Amending Melrose Revised Ordinances, Chapter 198-3, Paragraph F, Trash Tipping Fee, Item (3) Discount as set forth herein.

Order No. 09-110, Requesting that the Honorable Board of Aldermen accept the local option to increase the income limit in Mass. General Laws, Chapter 59, Section 5, Clause 41A, Senior Citizen Tax Deferral to \$40,000.00. Further, request that the interest on the deferral be reduced from 8% to 4.5% (simple interest).

Alderman Brodeur says he thinks it is a very good idea for the Board of Aldermen to execute it authority under the state law on the deferral piece; reverse mortgages can be a very expensive option. He asks if it is only open to senior citizens who own their own homes. Mr. Dragt says they must have owned it for 5 years. Alderman Brodeur asks if ownership is determined by the name on the deed; Mr. Dragt says yes.

Alderman Brodeur asks if people need to supply a copy of their W2 form in addition to the application for the trash fee discount. Mayor Dolan says yes. Alderman Brodeur asks if he has any sense of how many people will take advantage of the discount; Mayor Dolan believes it will be several hundred. Alderman Brodeur says the City bills quarterly; if he loses his job in May, the fiscal crisis on his family is right then. Mayor Dolan says people should call Mike Lindstrom in his office should that occur.

Alderman Seaboyer asks if this would take effect immediately or after the next budget is passed. Mayor Dolan says it would take effect immediately upon signing, but it will not be retroactive.

Alderman Wright says he believes the tax deferral would be effective next fiscal year by statute. Mr. Dragt says he is not prepared to answer that; however, his deadline is March 31. Alderman Wright says he believes it has to be in effect at the beginning of the fiscal year and any unpaid tax will accrue interest. Mr. Dragt says the City will have a lien on the property which will be paid off after the sale of the property. Alderman Wright asks if anyone has taken advantage of the program with the current numbers. Mr. Dragt says there are only 7. Alderman Wright asks if he has a sense of how many would be eligible and take advantage of the program with the new numbers. Mr. Dragt says there has been a rash of telephone calls; he thinks there will be an increase.

Alderman Medeiros says this is a tough economic time for many people and it's important for the City to look for good ways to ease the burden. She says Mayor Dolan thinks several hundred households will take advantage of the reduced trash fee and asks him if the budget can absorb that lost revenue. Mayor Dolan says he thinks service can be sustained; it's not in the City's best interest to have residents having to make tough choices between heat and trash.

Alderman Conn asks if there is any way to do an economic analysis to see how many people would be eligible for the tax deferral program; he is asking because taxes could be deferred for 10 or more years and there could be a significant impact on the tax base. Mr. Dragt says he will do his best to do an analysis.

Alderman Medeiros moves to recommend the joined orders, 2nd by Alderman Infurna. All in favor.

Order No. 09-108, Acceptance of parcel of land shown as Area B on a plan entitled "Plan of Land Showing Areas A & B 36 Swains Pond Avenue Condominium, Melrose, Mass prepared for Rivers Construction Inc. by Otte & Dwyer, Inc dated August 18, 2008"

and recorded as Plan #730 of 2008 as set forth in the Quitclaim Deed attached. This conveyance of land to the City of Melrose shall be under the care and custody of the Conservation commission, for conservation purposes.

Alderman Conn says is interested in hearing from whoever put this forward before the next meeting. He would like to know the property assessment pre-and post-development and the amount of taxes paid on the land.

Alderman Medeiros says she would like to know about the environmental history of this land. She believes it is located near an old dumping site. She would like to know if the City would incur a burden if it is found to be contaminated and the City has accepted it as conservation land.

Alderman Brodeur motions to hold the order in Committee, 2nd by Alderman McAteer-Margolis. All in favor.

Order No. 09-098, Special Act of the General Court Be it ordered by the Melrose Board of Aldermen that the General Court is hereby petitioned to pass a Special Act of the General Court authorizing the Traffic Commission in the City of Melrose to establish safety zones in said City as set forth herein. (A-3)

As the maker of the order, Alderman Wright says this matter came before the committee at a previous meeting at which valid concerns were raised. One concern was the possibility of certain major streets becoming 20 mph zones, but that is not his intention. He will ask that the order be amended to reflect the changes made to the Act that is before them and to further amend Section 1 to read "within the collective street system and local street system" and Section 2 to read "classifies local roadway or collective roadway". He says he has had a number of telephone calls over the years concerning the speed of traffic on neighborhood streets. This may be one way to address the problem since it gives police a tool to enforce traffic and speed. Driving 30 mph is too fast on some neighborhood streets and this gives the Traffic Commission the ability to slow traffic down. He would like to see this supported by the Board of Aldermen before sending it on to the Mayor and then to the State Legislature.

Alderman Wright moves to amend by substitution, 2nd by Alderman Infurna. All in favor.

Alderman Conn says the last time this matter was discussed there was mention of a potential act in the General Court that would make this order unnecessary. Alderman Wright says he has spoken with Representative Clark's office; the bill failed in the Ways and Means Committee last year. The intention of the maker is to file it again but it's hard to predict what will happen this legislative year with the new Speaker of the House. Alderman Conn asks if setting up a Safety Zone by local option would be possible if the new bill passes. Alderman Wright says it is his understanding that the bill would implement Urban Residential Areas with speed limits reduced to 25 mph.

Alderman Tramontozzi says he has reservations about this order because he thinks the majority of roadways in Melrose would fall under this proposal's criterion. He doesn't think it is reasonable to reduce the speed limit or to put a blanket safety zone around the City. The issue of speed and traffic is enforcement; he doesn't think there is a need to establish this Safety Zone.

Alderman Medeiros says she has thought about this since the last meeting and thinks this proposal does better to limit sections of the City to areas adjacent to parks and elderly housing. Senior citizens are slower to cross the street and they don't hear as well as younger folks, and slowing traffic isn't a bad idea. She would like to see a delineation of 300 feet within these areas.

Alderman Infurna thanks Alderman Wright for his work on this proposal. As a member of the Traffic Commission she has some history with the issue. She says the Traffic Commission is very fortunate to have Sergeant Goc, who addresses people's concerns and studies these situations, attend the meetings. This would be a useful tool for the Traffic Commission. She says to Alderman Tramontozzi that there must be just cause and substantial evidence to reduce the speed limit in any location within the City. The Traffic Commission does not freely authorize signage.

Alderman McAteer-Margolis says she concurs with Aldermen Infurna and Wright. This proposal gives the Traffic Commission a better tool to reduce speed on certain streets without having to petition the state and this way the Aldermen would be working with constituents. She says she supports the motion.

Alderman Wright says the City has advisory 20 mph speed limit signs but this proposal would make them enforceable.

Alderman Tramontozzi says he appreciates it may not be the intent to make this Safety Zone city-wide but it could open the floodgate to concerned citizens. He thinks there are other regulations on the books to enforce speed limits.

Alderman Wright motions to further amend Section 1 by inserting "85" after the word "chapter", 2nd by Alderman Infurna. All in favor.

Alderman Wright moves to recommend as amended, 2nd by Alderman Infurna. 3 opposed (Conn, Brodeur, Tramontozzi). Motion carries.

Alderman Brodeur motions to adjourn, 2nd by Alderman Seaboyer. All in favor.

Appropriations adjourns at 8:55 p.m.

Maribeth Harrington
Clerk of Committees