

Appropriations Committee

Chairman Brodeur, Boisselle,
Mortimer, Infurna, Tramontozzi,
Wright, McAteer-Margolis,
Seaboyer, Medeiros, Conn
Absent: Forbes
In attendance: City Auditor/CFO
Patrick Dello Russo

Appropriations called to order by Chairman Brodeur at 7:42 p.m.

Order No. 09-008, Requesting that the City of Melrose, in cooperation with Tri-Cap and other appropriate organizations, develop an action plan for helping residents deal with problems related to the anticipated high cost of heating their homes in the upcoming winter. The administration shall present the plan to the Board of Aldermen on or before October 6, 2008. (AL-1)

Mr. Charles Harak of Tri-Cap comes forward to discuss energy projects and the cost of heating fuel. He says that even with the recent decline in oil prices, oil currently costs \$3.47 per gallon. On average people paid \$2.40 per gallon last year. They are looking at a 50% increase this season. Oil prices are usually higher in the winter months. Because oil cost \$4.00 per gallon in August, dealers didn't buy as much. Nationalgrid is subject to state regulations in what is charged for gas prices but the prediction is an increase of 18% from last year. The good news is that Congress voted \$5.1 billion for fuel assistance programs which is double the amount from last year. Massachusetts will have significantly more in fuel assistance funds than it had three years ago. The state will receive \$80 million more this year for a total of \$163 million. There is an additional \$500 million in federal emergency contingency funds: Massachusetts could get up to a total of \$200 million. The other good news is that Congress added \$200 million to weatherization programs. The place to apply for fuel assistance or the weatherization program is Tri-Cap, based in Malden. Call Marilyn Murphy at 781-322-6284.

Mr. Harak says that senior citizens in particular are reluctant to apply but they are absolutely as eligible as anybody else. He encourages people to apply and it's possible the income eligibility will increase this year. There are utility protections against termination including serious illness, households with infants under 12 months of age, and between November 15 and March 15. Also, if everyone in the household is over age 65, utilities can't be turned off.

Mr. Harak urges the City's Public Safety departments to get the word out about unsafe heating practices such as using kerosene heaters and keeping room heaters away from curtains.

Chairman Brodeur asks if regulatory protections do not apply to oil use. Mr. Harak says no. Chairman Brodeur asks if there is an obstacle of a minimum delivery of oil. Mr. Harak says that because dealer inventories are low, they are more willing to deliver only 100 gallons. Chairman Brodeur asks how much it costs to fill a tank and how much money is needed to get through the winter. Mr. Harak says it takes about 800 gallons, or 3 tanks worth of oil, which will cost about \$3,000 this year. The benefit level of the fuel assistance program will buy between 1¼ and 1½ tanks. Chairman Brodeur asks if Tri-Cap has other sources to refer people to. Mr. Harak says yes.

Alderman Seaboyer says Melrose is one of nine communities that Tri-Cap serves. He asks if there are 250 Melrose households that are served. Mr. Harak says 400 Melrose households are served. Alderman Seaboyer asks how much Tri-Cap will receive of the \$200 million in state funding. Mr. Harak says he believes it is \$4 million.

Alderman Medeiros says Mr. Harak gave them a lot of facts this evening and asks if there is a flyer or handout that he could email to the Chair. Mr. Harak says no one knows yet what this year's dollar benefits are, but the last four weeks of income is considered, not the last 12 months.

Alderman McAteer-Margolis says she thought it was interesting that when she met with Marilyn Murphy she learned that Tri-Cap only looks at income and not dividends. Mr. Harak says 40% of Tri-Cap's clientele are seniors and only income is counted, not assets. People aren't ineligible because they have a house or small nest egg. He says the telephone number to call is 781-322-6284.

Alderman Mortimer says it is an interesting point about looking at the last four weeks of income. He asks if Tri-Cap has ever considered distributing down blankets which are very effective. Mr. Harak says he is not aware that it has; however there is a coat program.

Alderman Boisselle asks if there is any type of paperwork an individual should bring when requesting assistance. Mr. Harak says he's not an expert in that area but yes. He says there are very complicated rules concerning businesses but for individuals it is less complicated. He suggests bringing in what a person thinks he'll need.

Alderman Mortimer motions to place the matter on file, 2nd by Alderman Boisselle. All in favor.

Order No. 08-269, Amending Melrose Revised Ordinances, Chapter 228-15 by adding paragraph C as set forth herein. "c. The water and sewer rates approved by the Board of Aldermen shall be applied only to water consumption and sewer use for the fiscal years in which the rates are established. The rates shall not be retroactively applied to water consumption and sewer use for the preceding fiscal year." (AL-2) (A-2)

Chairman Brodeur says that Mr. Dello Russo and his team are trying to create an alternative way of how water and sewer has been billed in recent years.

Mr. Dello Russo says he appreciates the opportunity to look at this order which redefines the methodology of water and sewer billing. The team has met many times and looked at different scenarios. He believes the City should move in the direction of prorating water and sewer bills for FY2010, effective July 1, 2009. There is a memo from Donna Cardillo, the MUNIS system consultant, which outlines steps to take leading up to the transition. The timeframes will not change in the actual budget preparation. The rate change will take effect July 1 and the Board of Aldermen will have to be mindful of the financial implications so the new rate will reflect the revenue shift. Some consumption will be billed at the old rate and some consumption will be billed at the new rate during the fiscal year. Proration will reflect the actual time of usage. Consumption used at the prior fiscal year will be billed at the old rate and consumption used in the new fiscal year

will be billed at the new rate. He has distributed the billing schedule to the Aldermen.

Chairman Brodeur says there will be another opportunity to discuss this order with the full team.

President Conn says this order was filed quite a while ago. The problem with the current system is that any bill issued after the new fiscal year begins is billed at the new rate. Consumption used two months prior to July 1 is billed at the new rate. The order was filed because fundamentally the billing method is unfair. The order as filed prohibits billing consumption used during the previous fiscal year at the new fiscal year's rate. He asks Mr. Dello Russo if he is correct in saying that there is nothing prohibiting the Board of Aldermen from passing this order; Mr. Dello Russo says he is correct but he would like all implications discussed in advance of passage. President Conn says he doesn't see any reason not to recommend this order from committee to the full board.

Alderman Medeiros says she is focusing on the memo from Donna Cardillo which states that prorating will create a shortfall in revenue for 2010. She takes exception to that; it shouldn't affect the 2010 budget. Mr. Dello Russo says he doesn't think it is meant to sound like that.

President Conn moves to recommend, 2nd by Alderman Medeiros.

Chairman Brodeur says he has done some work tweaking the language. As written it might not permit the City to pro-rate, which is an approximation. This order calls for actual usage. He will have the language to propose at the full board meeting.

On the motion to recommend, All in favor.

Order No. 09-047, Amending Rules and Orders of the Melrose Board of Aldermen; namely, Rule 29A as set forth herein. (AL-2) "The members of the public shall limit their remarks to matters on the agenda for the meeting at which they speak and shall be out of order if said speaker addresses other issues not on the agenda. This Rule may be suspended by unanimous consent of the members."

President Conn says one of his peculiarities is to read the Rules and Orders of the Board of Aldermen and offer amendments. The 1999 order that created public participation had no limitation of time or discussion topic. It has been understood that the board only opened public participation for agenda items but this clarifies the rule.

Alderman Mortimer says this is good to bring the rule into conformity but asks if it would be fair if the first speaker takes up 7 minutes of public participation and the next speaker takes up 3 minutes and there are 10 others in the gallery that are cut off. He understands there is an exemption but it takes a unanimous vote to suspend the rule. Perhaps he will offer a 2/3 vote as a friendly amendment but not at this time.

Alderman Medeiros says that caveat is not in the rules as they stand today. She thinks it is a good addition. It gives the board a mechanism to suspend the rule and allow longer public participation.

Chairman Brodeur says the rules in general allow suspension of the rules by a 2/3 vote.

This makes it tighter for public participation.

Alderman McAteer-Margolis asks if the agendas are posted on the City's website or the City Hall bulletin board prior to meetings. Chairman Brodeur says that all committee agendas are posted but not the full board agendas. Alderman McAteer-Margolis says she is curious in knowing about the 2/3 vote.

President Conn says that in practice the board has always followed this approach. The board has never stifled legitimate public participation but he has no interest in having people drive down to discuss whatever they want whenever they want. The intent is not to prevent people from getting their views before the aldermen.

Alderman Infurna says she agrees with President Conn but she thinks the agendas should be posted on the City's website.

Alderman Medeiros asks if the rules of the board and the Administrative Code are posted on the City's website; Chairman Brodeur says yes.

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

Alderman McAteer-Margolis motions to adjourn, 2nd by Alderman Boisselle. All in favor.

Appropriations adjourns at 8:37 p.m.

Maribeth Harrington
Clerk of Committees