



Leading the Charge to Ensure City Government Works for You

Like many families and business owners across Newton, city officials are facing tough financial choices. The Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) has warned of structural deficits necessitating the need to generate new revenue or reduce spending, or both to address these issues. It will also require us to strike the right balance between providing excellent city services, while living within our means.

Our city is at a critical budgetary juncture. Spending is outpacing revenue growth. Local aid has been reduced. Some areas of the budget have been underfunded, such as maintenance and retirement health benefits. This all means that business as usual no longer is a viable option.

Despite the City's grim financial outlook, I believe our budget situation is solvable. I know we have the ability to overcome the financial challenges before us, and emerge a better, more vibrant city because of it.

Now more than ever Newton needs the experience of a strong leader like me to manage the City through these uncertain financial times. As a State Representative for the past 10 ½ years and an Alderman for eight years before that, I have a strong record of accomplishment. I have demonstrated I can solve problems for our city. Additionally, I have demonstrated successes during a long career in the health care industry prior to my involvement in government. As the director of mental health services and as a manager in a behavioral health managed care organization, I was responsible for managing resources, while ensuring quality services were delivered to consumers. I will bring this experience to the mayor's office ensuring city government works for the citizens of Newton.

I have made doing more with less money a theme of my campaign, recognizing the urgency and need to get our financial house in order. It will start with modernizing our budget process and revamping our capital planning process. By addressing and improving upon these two important functions of government, we will restore public confidence in City Hall.

Modernize Our Budget Process: It's all about the customer

The CAG concluded Newton suffers from poor financial management, which has contributed to structural deficits in our operating and capital planning budgets.ⁱ We therefore face a significant challenge. In order to improve the management of the City, we will need to reevaluate priorities and to reorganize our budget process. The budget process is too centered on maintaining services, rather than improving services, and this must change. Yet, Newton currently lacks the data to assess performance, and consequently, there's no incentive to change the way business is done. Most importantly, we must shift government's focus, so customers are put first. I frequently hear from constituents who tell me city officials are either slow to respond to their requests or do not respond at all, which is just unacceptable.

Although there has been conversation about improving various aspects of our financial management process, no one has pulled together all of the components required to truly modernize our financial management process until now. Each of the following initiatives is a separate component that when implemented together will complement and enhance our financial management process, and thus allow city officials to deliver services in a more cost-effective, efficient way.

As mayor, I will take the following actions to improve financial management and to make government more customer-focused:

- **Create a Strategic Plan.** The CAG lists management, specifically performance management, as one of Newton's four deficits or shortfalls that needs to be addressed.ⁱⁱ For the past several years, our budget and resource management processes have been on auto-pilot. Money has been allocated fairly consistently for services and programs city officials perceive to be in line with preferences and priorities of citizens without stopping to reevaluate them. This is partly why building maintenance is underfunded and parks are under-maintained – these areas of the budget have been treated as cash reserves, instead of the priority they should be. To address this issue, I will create a strategic plan for Newton pulling together elements from the Newton Comprehensive Plan, department-specific plans on the municipal side, and Vision 2020 the strategic plan adopted by the School Committee. Included in this document, will be a clear vision for Newton that is reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed every two years to ensure it best reflects priorities of the community given city finances at that time. The goals and objectives contained in the plan will be integrated with the budget to guide decision-making. By creating a strategic planning document, we will ensure every dollar is spent on areas defined as priorities by our community.

- **Put Customers First.** Citizens deserve a city government that is responsive to their needs and works for them. It's a simple concept, but one that sometimes gets lost in the governing process. This must change. Our citizens should be a resource for helping government work better and more efficiently. A Balsler Administration will make citizens a priority! It starts with providing leadership and commitment at the top with the mayor serving as an example of the highest level of customer service that will be expected from all city employees. One way I will look to enhance communication with citizens is by creating a 311 citizen call center providing an easy way for citizens to report a problem or quickly find information. In addition, I will look for opportunities to improve our online capabilities and make more services accessible on the web. For example, the City of Baltimore created a CitiTrack Service Request System, which is an online information system to compliment the 311 citizen call center and provide another means for citizens to communicate directly with government.ⁱⁱⁱ I will enhance our online capabilities with savings identified from improved financial management.
- **Adopt Performance-Based Budgeting.** Line-item budgeting is a process of the past. In today's difficult economic times, it's not financially feasible to increase the budget each year to account for normal inflationary increases without knowing whether the money spent is producing the outcomes we want. Furthermore, a line-item budget is based on organizational units or line-item expenses; whereas a performance-based budget is based on service performance with each program having its own budget, which enables policymakers to better track spending over time.^{iv} By adopting a performance-based budget process, we will be able to link spending directly to policies and programs with specific outcomes that are aligned with goals we determine are important. This change to our budget process will allow policymakers and department heads to adjust spending to ensure we achieve the maximum benefit possible for each dollar we spend.
- **Measure for Results: A review of best practices.** Although performance-based management is a new concept for Newton, it's not for other cities across the country. We should use the work of other cities as best practices to guide us in creating a system of our own. For example, Phoenix is considered a national leader in this area, preparing monthly performance reports on services, such as filling potholes and addressing citizen complaints.^v Phoenix officials also conduct regular focus groups with citizens to ensure citizens remain the primary focus of city government. Indianapolis is another city that prepares monthly performance reports, which are presented to the Mayor and senior staff for regular review.^{vi} The information helps identify weak areas of performance, duplicative and/or

ineffective programs and wasteful spending – information that is, in turn, used to hold staff and their departments accountable. Rather than evaluate past performance to make decisions about the future, city officials in Charlotte rely on a measurement system, known as a Balanced Scorecard, to determine how to improve service delivery in the future. The entire system is based on using current baseline data to measure improvement.^{vii} These are just a sample of other cities' performance-based measurement systems I will review to help inspire the creation of a system of our own that is right for Newton.

- **Establish a Technology-Based Monitoring System: Stat.** After we develop a system for how we will measure results, we need a way to monitor and track this information, so it can be incorporated with our budget process. Government officials throughout the country have looked to technology as a means of easily gathering information on resource management. For example, CompStat is the technology used to monitor and manage resources by the New York City Police Department (NYPD). Using sophisticated mapping software, the NYPD can precisely target crime patterns and emerging trends, allowing law enforcement to deploy resources more effectively.^{viii} CitiStat, a grand reproduction of CompStat, uses technology to track and manage resource use across the entire city government of Baltimore.^{ix} It is the first technology of its kind to provide city officials real-time access to resource management information.^x In fact, since its implementation, numerous states and cities have developed the technology for their own use, including Philadelphia and Buffalo. The City of Somerville has also designed a similar system (e.g., SomerStat) that successfully uses technology to monitor and track performance of how city officials manage resources. Since Somerstat's inception in 2004, millions of dollars in efficiency savings has been identified.^{xi} For example, the acquisition of license plate reader systems for two patrol cars provided Somerville patrolmen the ability to more easily identify traffic and parking violators and issue penalties faster, resulting in increased fees of \$25,500 annually.^{xii} I am committed to implementing a system for measuring results here in Newton, and believe the savings that can be achieved will more than off-set its costs.

Revamp the Capital Planning Process: A comprehensive master plan

If we learned anything from the Newton North project, it's that the capital planning process needs to be revamped. I believe a successful capital planning process should be a tool for effectively allocating resources in line with the City's vision. Since Newton

lacks a long-term vision for capital investment, our capital planning process is inadequate for properly allocating resources.

More discussion needs to happen earlier in the planning process between the School Committee, Board of Aldermen, the Public Buildings Commissioner, and the Mayor when submissions for capital improvement are made about financing, so as to prioritize projects and establish a realistic budget. Simply including an estimate for repair can no longer be enough to warrant a project receiving the go ahead for a feasibility study, because as we now know, an estimate can very quickly become obsolete, especially as needs change and problems arise.

The CAG has warned city officials of the deficit in the capital planning budget that will be made worse by the cost of North. Based on this information alone, it would be irresponsible for us to pursue other large-scale construction projects until we first get a handle on our finances. And this all goes back to having a long-term vision for capital planning, which must come first. We can only fix our capital planning process with a comprehensive master plan for capital investment taking into consideration our needs over time, accounting for population change, and factoring in our spending ability.

As mayor, I intend to rebuild public confidence in City Hall by eliminating a reactive capital planning process that limits information from being shared, vetted, and debated openly with citizens. While I believe members of the School Committee and Newton Schools Long-Range Facilities Committee acted in good faith in preparing long-range utilization plans, this work will be less valuable unless it's integrated with priorities of the City's entire stock of facilities. That is why; I will consolidate school and municipal maintenance to create a master capital investment plan allowing us to better control cost and prioritize our needs.

I will also work with the Board of Aldermen to retool our capital planning process, so it's aligned with priorities determined by city officials with input from the community and includes present financial realities. In addition, I will ensure information is regularly shared between the executive office and the Board of Aldermen in order to foster improved communication and support board members in making well-informed decisions about capital investments. Newton will have a rational, common-sense capital planning process for responsibly addressing our municipal maintenance needs only after making these important changes.

Restore Confidence in City Hall

For too long, decisions have been made with little input from the public, and as a result, citizens are less trustful of City Hall. As mayor, I will bring a fresh look and new approach to how our city is managed. City government will be more open and transparent when I am mayor. I will seek and solicit public input on ways to do things better, and make sure we explore all reasonable alternatives to our toughest challenges before solutions are determined. In addition, I will make it a priority of mine to ensure that all potential efficiencies are achieved.

The road ahead will not be an easy one. But, I am certain with the necessary changes, we can move our city forward again. As mayor, I will be committed to preserving the good quality of life we have come to expect as citizens of Newton.

Conclusion

As a behavioral scientist, I recognize the value of data collection. Data provides me and others in my profession the ability to make well-informed judgments leading to sound decisions. Officials in other cities have recognized the critical role data collection plays in the decision-making process of managing resources and have benefited because of it. As mayor, I will implement a modern budget process to improve financial management and revamp our capital planning process to guide city officials in making decisions on how best to solve our problems, and thus ensure government works for citizens.

As a manager in the health care industry, an Alderman, and a State Representative, I have demonstrated my ability to bring new approaches to solve tough problems. It's this same leadership approach I will apply to Newton's most challenging issues. I am the one candidate with the right experience, strong record, and proven results to get the job done.

ⁱ Newton's Citizen Advisory Group report lays out tough choices for the City, April 15, 2009, www.wickedlocal.com/newton/archive/x711738656/Newtons-Citizen-Advisory-Group-report-lays-out-tough-choices-for-city

ⁱⁱ Citizen Advisory Group, Final Report, April 14, 2009, <http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/CitizenAdvisoryGroup/reports/2009/04-14-09CAGFinalReport.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Baltimore City 311 Online: https://baltimore.customerservicerequest.org/web_intake_balt/Controller

^{iv} Description of Performance Based Budgeting, Concord City Government, California: www.ci.concord.ca.us/CITYGOV/finance/pbb.htm

^v Managing for Results a Proposal for the City of Portland, December 2002, www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=5748

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} A Balanced Approach to Implementing the Balanced Scorecard, <http://www.ci.hillsborough.nc.us/documents/BalancedScoreCardSOGArticle.pdf>

^{viii} New York's Gospel of Policing by Data Spreads Across U.S., New York Times, April 28, 2004: www.nytimes.com/2004/04/28/nyregion/28NYPD.html

^{ix} Baltimore's CitiStat: www.ci.baltimore.md.us/government/citistat/

^x Ibid.

^{xi} Overview of SomerStat, 311, and the Program-Based Budget, www.somervillema.gov/CoS_Content/documents/2006-10-12_SomerStatOverview.pdf

^{xii} SomerStat Accomplishments, January 2, 2009, received by email from SomerStat Staff, July 8, 2009