

## **Continuing to Make Newton a Better Place**

*by Leslie Burg, Alderman at Large, Ward 3      Op-ed, Newton TAB, Oct. 17, 2007*

I have lived in Newton for 37 years and raised my family here. In 2005, I first ran for public office. As a first-term Alderman at Large, I learned how our city works, and developed relationships with department heads, my board colleagues, and active citizens across the city.

I am seeking a second term so I can continue to work for our community, using my newly gained knowledge and experience to help solve the difficult challenges we face.

Priorities and initiatives for my second term:

### Needham Street Corridor

I am presently working on an amendment to our zoning ordinance that would make mixed-use development possible along the Needham Street corridor, as recommended by the Draft Comprehensive Plan. The impact studies are almost complete, and our Planning Director and I will docket the amendment shortly. Over time, if we proceed thoughtfully and plan carefully, Needham Street can become a pedestrian-friendly, vibrant part of our city. Such development will also generate significant revenue for Newton.

### Traffic and Transportation

Traffic congestion and parking are major concerns in our community. Our society was built around the automobile, so deconstructing the culture of the car is not a short-term undertaking. Providing good alternatives to those who wish to leave their cars at home will reduce traffic and contribute to thriving commercial centers in our city. I will explore the establishment of an efficient, intra-city transit system sufficiently convenient to attract riders who would otherwise drive.

### Smart Growth Planning

Mixed-use development near public transit is based on a “smart growth” principle that facilitates travel from home to work using accessible public transportation. Extending the Green Line into Needham, as recently suggested, supports such development. This requires State and MBTA involvement. I will be meeting with Representative Kay Khan and others to discuss this initiative.

### Streamlining our Permitting Process

We need to streamline our permitting process, which is cumbersome, expensive, and time-consuming, and actively discourages commercial development. We need

appropriate commercial development to generate revenue for Newton and give residential property owners tax relief. A first step may be to simplify the special permit process for certain signs. I am currently helping a resident with a special permit for a free-standing sign for her small business. I will explore this initiative with our new Chief Planner and new Code Enforcement Officer.

### Moving Forward...

We need to begin a conversation about the kind of city we want Newton to be. We have a large projected deficit that must be addressed, and infrastructure and municipal building needs that must be funded. The Blue Ribbon Commission's report on Newton's finances makes some very good recommendations for cost savings and revenue enhancement. The efficiencies it suggests can potentially save millions of dollars. Our community must discuss these recommendations, including the use of general and debt exclusion overrides, as a way to place Newton on a sustainable financial path.

Newton needs a long-range strategic plan to properly identify and prioritize our capital requirements. This should form the basis for a repair schedule targeting ailing buildings and infrastructure, and should also include planned maintenance. I support a docket item requiring the Mayor to develop such a plan for the city. Until we know where we are, it is impossible to plan intelligently for our future.

To keep Newton a vibrant place to live, we must protect our diversity. To do that, we must make Newton more affordable. We must plan for growth that protects the individual character of our neighborhoods, while encouraging mixed-use development in our village centers and along appropriate commercial corridors. This vision for Newton is embodied in our Comprehensive Plan, which I strongly support.

I am an independent, strategic thinker. My collaborative skills help me work well with colleagues, my analytical skills, to craft effective solutions. These will be invaluable as we wrestle with the choices we must make.

During this term, perhaps the most satisfying part of my job has been helping many of you resolve your concerns and navigate City Hall more easily.

I ask for your vote so I can continue to work to make Newton a better place for us all.