

Neighbors,

Allow me to state the obvious. The current state of negotiations between the Newton Teachers Association and the School Committee that is keeping Newton students out of school is unacceptable and must be resolved now. For that to happen the School Committee needs to increase the compensation package they have offered to date. As evidence that the city has the money to make an increased offer let me remind you of certain financial information already acknowledged and shared and a piece of additional information regarding the financial good health of the city.

- Earlier in the fiscal year it was certified that the city had \$28 Million in free cash and \$26 Million in Overlay Surplus. A couple of fancy names but cash is cash and in this case \$54 Million for the Mayor and City Council to spend in the best interests of Newton residents.
- Earlier this year the Mayor did propose putting the \$26 Million in overlay surplus into a stabilization fund and proposed giving 70%, \$19 Million, to the schools over 8 years. That \$19 Million could be put into a wage reserve account now to help pay for a new 4-year deal.
- As for new news, our financial situation has only improved since the start of this fiscal year. As of 12/31/23 the city has received \$6.99 Million in interest income. We are on pace to receive a little less than \$14 Million in interest income over the entire fiscal year which ends 6/30/24. The FY 2024 budget estimated interest income of \$2.5 Million for the entire year. We will have a surplus of \$11.5 Million in interest income that will drop to free cash on 6/30/24. This \$11.5 Million is in addition to the \$54 Million I described earlier. Additionally:
- The Mayor's refusal to come to the negotiating table is a mistake. Her direct involvement in the talks is clearly important to the Newton Teachers Association and many parents. She should reconsider her decision and start attending the negotiating sessions today.

To this point I have been silent on these negotiations because as a former School Committee Member/Chairman I understand it is the responsibility of the School Committee to negotiate their contracts. However, you can only stay in your lane for so long before it is time to speak out. My 8 years on the School Committee where I worked with my colleagues to negotiate 3 different contracts along with 34 years on the Board of Alderman/City Council including over 20 years on the Finance Committee tell me that time is now.

During the course of writing this message I have received updated information on the negotiations. If the information is correct, I suggest the following:

1. The Newton Teachers Association reduced their proposed COLA increase from 18% over 4 years to 14%. A 4% reduction is a significant reduction. The School

Committee offer currently stands at 11.25% over 4 years. Each side should continue to compromise and make one more move to the middle to get this contract settled.

2. The city cannot afford to give an increase of 18% over 4 years to any group of employees in the city. There are many other unions waiting to negotiate COLA increases and we need to be fair to everyone. If the Newton Teachers Association wishes to provide a larger increase to units C & D, an admirable desire to help those employees making less, it needs to come from those in Units A & B many of whom are scheduled for step increases in addition to their COLA increase.
3. Four year deals cover just that, 4 years. Any proposal that extends beyond the 4th year should be withdrawn.

Please get this deal done now and get our students back in school no later than Wednesday.

Lenny Gentile
City Councilor
Ward 4