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August 11, 2009

Cohen Responds To Parker's Capital Improvements Request

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Newton, MA--Mayor David B. Cohen responded to Alderman Ken Parker's request to implement badly-needed capital improvements for Newton's school buildings today, saying through a spokesperson that he would like to make the improvements but will hold the necessary funds in reserve until learning whether Governor Deval Patrick will make additional cuts to local aid.

"This is welcome news for Newton taxpayers," said Parker, a candidate for Mayor. "By implementing these capital improvements the City will save money through reduced energy usage and longer life of our physical infrastructure."

"I appreciate Mayor Cohen's flexibility in this matter and his willingness to listen to the group of current elected and officials and candidates for office who have asked him to make these badly needed school repairs a top priority and not forcing them to compete with space needs for a small pool of bonding funds." Parker added, "This has been a team effort and I can't thank enough all of the Newton leaders who co-signed the letter with me. Standing up and being counted does make a difference."

In July Parker sent a letter to Mayor Cohen which was co-signed by more than a dozen elected officials and candidates for public office urging him to implement capital improvements planned by the City and recommended by the Citizen Advisory Group. At the time Mayor Cohen dismissed the request, saying the City would wait for the completion of an environmental study being conducted by an independent firm.

This week, Parker followed-up on his July request by asking the Mayor to use \$2.2 million in back taxes paid to the City by Verizon Communications to fund the capital improvements. The Mayor agreed to this request.

The Mayor's spokesperson, Jeremy Solomon, said, "I think it's fair to say that Mayor Cohen would like to spend funds for capital improvements to our public buildings. However, he is concerned about the possibility he's hearing that Governor Patrick may make additional 9c cuts to the FY'09 budget."

Newton School Committee Member Geoff Epstein said, "These capital improvements are critically important. They will extend the life of Newton's school buildings, save money over the long-term and most importantly improve the learning environment for Newton's students."