

Below is the weekly report for the week ending today, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

### **City Manager's Highlights**

1. As we move closer to January when the state legislature will go back into session, we have seen an uptick in pre-filed bills and are working to review and provide initial thoughts on the bills to our lobbyist. We are also investigating legislation tracking software options to see if there is a tool available that will make it easier for Council and the public to quickly review bills that impact Newark along with the official position Council has taken on each bill. We hope to make a decision on whether or not to move forward with a new vendor or remain with the existing spreadsheet process soon. Here are two bills that we reviewed this week which will have an impact on Newark's finances:
  - a. HB 249 – DNREC Fees: <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail?LegislationId=140748>
    - i. This bill as written creates two significant new fees (at least \$25000/year, potentially \$100,000/year for the water system and another large fee on the sewer side). Staff recommend that Council oppose these new fees.
  - b. HB 266 – Changes to Police Pension Calculations: <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail?LegislationId=140807>
    - i. This bill would add wages from forced overtime into the annual wage calculation for fire and police officers. Staff provided comments on implementation related issues to the bill's sponsor, Representative Romer. Staff recommend that Council not oppose this bill.
2. We have been made aware that Vanguard sold the portion of their business that includes management of government pensions and other post-employment benefits (OPEB) funds, so unless we take quick action our investments will be unmanaged on March 1st, 2024. The City will need to make a decision on whether to seek another custodian to replace Vanguard's responsibilities, a process that will take months to complete. Or, to move to a passively managed portfolio (based on a benchmark), and have our funds managed by our investment advisor. The passive strategy would save the City about \$150,000 in fees and would follow the benchmark that has outperformed Vanguard in the recent past. If we do nothing, the funds will remain with Vanguard, but will not be actively managed. We have contact members of the pension committee to hold a meeting where we will discuss this issue and prepare a recommendation for Council consideration. Here is a link to the Mercer press release: [Mercer to acquire Vanguard's US Outsourced Chief Investment Officer business](#)
3. On December 15<sup>th</sup>, Newark PD will host the annual Presents with Police event on East Main Street at Academy Street in partnership with the Newark PAL and Newark Parks and Recreation. The Presents with Police Program works with area schools and community groups to identify families who could use additional assistance this holiday Season. Sgt. Santa and other Newark PD officers will be on hand to distribute toys to those families who have been identified as needing assistance this season.

### Items for Newsletters:

1. **Free Water for a Year initiative:** We have selected our second winner! There are 2 more chances to win \$1000 worth of free water for anyone who completes a survey before June 2024. Newark Water customers are encouraged to complete the online survey at this link: <https://newarkde.gov/lead> to enter a sweepstakes for free water for a year, up to \$1000 value! The data collected will help complete a required inventory of service lines and reduce operating costs for the water utility. Please share with your newsletters and mailing lists.
2. **City newsletter:** To sign up for the City's email newsletter, [click here](#).
3. **Yard Waste Collection – Winter Schedule:** City-wide Yard Waste Collection will be available by appointment only until March 2024. Residents may call Public Works to schedule a yard waste collection during this period. Pickups will be scheduled for Wednesdays during weeks without a City Holiday.
4. **Fall Leaf Collection:** Fall leaf collection is drawing to an end. **Residents can expect 2 more pickups before the program closes at the end of December.** 'Leaving' the leaves on the grass and mulching them with the lawn mower is also a great option that provides nutrients for your lawn. Residents can also compost leaves. Crews will make a final sweep of the City in late December/early January to collect any remaining leaves and sweep the gutters with the street sweeper.
5. **Winter/Spring Recreation Programs:** Registration will begin on January 2 for residents and January 5 for non-residents; The Winter/Spring Activity guide will be available for viewing beginning December 27 at [WWW.NEWARKDE.GOV/PLAY](http://WWW.NEWARKDE.GOV/PLAY)

### Facilities and Purchasing

1. The City Hall parking lot contractor continued work this week, installing the parking lot lighting fixtures and striping the lot.

### Public Works

1. Snowplow Crew Training: Field staff and Public Works Management participated in a full day snowplow training and team building exercise. The training serves as a refresher for seasoned staff and allows them to assist newer drivers with tools and tips for a successful snow and ice control process. Team building reminds all of us that we are a part of a team with a common goal of delivering the best service for our residents and visitors.

## **Police**

1. On December 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, Animal Control Officer Donna Vickers assisted with the Brandywine Valley SPCA's Mega Adoption Event. After 35 years of service, ACO Vickers continues to serve our community and provide the best animal services possible.
2. On December 14<sup>th</sup>, Chief Farrall attended the Newark Morning Rotary Club monthly meeting as their guest speaker. Chief Farrall provided an overview of the accomplishments and challenges facing the police department as well as highlighting several upcoming initiatives. He also spoke on the importance of service to the community and thanked the organization for their commitment to the Newark community.

## **Parks and Recreation**

1. Playground safety surface is being installed throughout parks where needed.
2. The City's Tree contractor removed blockages along the Christina Valley Stream Conservation Area and several park areas.
3. The Parks Superintendent worked on the afforestation plan with JMT and DelDOT as part the Elkton Road project mitigation.
4. Prepared materials and met with bus trip leaders for NYC trip that was held on Saturday. Two full buses of participants enjoyed the trip and sunny weather.

## **Finance**

1. IT Applications Manager Montgomery, PUB Manager Prado and IT Specialist Nichols attended the annual Harris Conference. This educational conference helps staff increase their knowledge of our utility billing applications, helps us leverage best practices, and helps influence Harris with future solution offerings.
2. Accounting staff are working with customers on paying their 2023-2024 tax bills which were due 10/1. There were 778 delinquent notices mailed out over three weeks ago totaling \$1.2M in taxes, penalty, and interest. In addition, there were 30 new tax bills totaling \$57,526 due primarily to construction activity. This is a normal amount of outstanding tax bills after the
3. We are still working towards implementing a new customer service portal for our utility customers called SilverBlaze. We have three critical issues holding us up from our SilverBlaze implementation. The City and the vendor are testing the fixes for these issues throughout the remainder of this month. We are expecting to go live by the end of January 2024.
4. Staff have been working with Banc of America over the last two weeks on preparing for the first reimbursement from our master equipment lease. There are 38 total pieces of equipment in

total covered by this application. The amount of reimbursement we are seeking will be \$1.5M when we settle on December 28.