

Friday, Dec. 1, 2023

Mayor's Newton Update

Storm Prep Has Begun

We had a storm preparation meeting yesterday with our City staff (DPW, Parks, Rec & Culture (including Trees), Police, Fire, Public Buildings, HHS, IT) and school colleagues Superintendent Anna Nolin, Liam Hurley and Dave Stickney before the first flake has fallen.



Newton's two road salt sheds on Craft and Eliot

Streets are filled with 6,000 tons of road maintenance salt (and they'll likely be refilled if we get a lot of ice and snow), the brine is ready to pretreat roads before the snow and ice hits, and approximately 180 pieces of City and contracted equipment are ready to roll when needed to clear approximately 380 miles of roads, 43 buildings, school and municipal parking lots, 90 miles of sidewalks near schools and municipal buildings, in village centers and around Green Line and commuter rail stations, and 22 bridges.



While School custodial staff take good care of the inside of our school buildings, it's crews from the Department of Public Works, Parks, Recreation and Culture, and contractors who are responsible for keeping the outside of our schools clear.

Newtonians also are responsible for keeping sidewalks in front of their homes clear. When a storm hits, Newton's snow shoveling ordinance requires all of us to clear the sidewalk in front of our property within a day or, more specifically, within 24 hours once the snow stops falling. (Businesses also have to clear their sidewalks and in a shorter period of time, 12 hours once the snow stops falling.) Please remember that we cannot put snow from our driveways or sidewalks on the street.

We've worked hard to improve snow removal operations and response time. Unfortunately, as winter approaches, we continue to see our contractors face an ongoing shortage of and difficulty in recruiting plow drivers and we anticipate the driver shortage could impact the time it takes us to clear streets, sidewalks, and school and municipal parking lots.

We are actively working to recruit drivers and contractors. Interested? Reach out to Newton's Director of Streets Bernie McDonald at 617-796-1494 or via e-mail at

berniemcdonald@newtonma.gov.

Winter Overnight Parking Ban Began Today

The citywide Overnight Winter Parking Ban at 2:00 a.m. this morning, Friday, Dec. 1 and extends through March 31. During these four months, parking on City streets is prohibited from 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. (The City Council discussed the Ban recently and chose to keep it in place.)

Are you looking for a place to park your vehicles from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. from Dec. 1 through March 31? Free Municipal Parking Lot stickers are available to residents from the Newton Police Department. You need a valid driver's license and vehicle registration. (Proof of residency is also required if your car is not registered in Newton.) Parking permits are given out on a first-come first-serve basis. Get more information [here](#), and the application for a Municipal Lot Parking sticker is [here](#). Click [here](#) for map locations of municipal parking lots.

Please know that if we have to declare a Snow Emergency, the municipal parking lots become unavailable (since we need to plow them). For most nights in the winter, though, they are an option.

City Council Continuing to Deliberate on Village Center Zoning

The City Council is still working its way through Village Center Overlay District rezoning. On Wednesday they voted on several more City Councilor proposed amendments. In addition, they voted to narrow substantially the number of villages included in the rezoning, eliminating Newton Upper Falls and Lower Falls, Four Corners, Newton Corner, Nonantum and Thompsonville. They are still considering Auburndale.

Councilors will continue the discussion at their meeting on Monday, Dec. 4. (Watch in person at the Council Chambers on the second floor of City Hall, or virtually on Zoom, (click [here](#) for the Zoom link), or on NewTV's Government Channel (Comcast 9, RCN 13, 614 HD, Verizon33) or NewTV's Youtube channel [here](#)).

They have scheduled another meeting for Thursday, Dec. 14 if necessary to complete their review of amendments and take a final vote.

City Councilors have until Dec. 31 to pass a zoning plan that complies with the MBTA Communities Law adopted by the State Legislature in 2021 to address the state's housing shortage. Read more [here](#) about the law.

Recount in Ward 6

The vote for the Ward 6 City Council ward only seat is being recounted tomorrow, Saturday, Dec. 2 at 9:00 a.m. at the Newton Free Library, Druker Auditorium, 330

Homer St. Based on the unofficial results, Lisa Gordon received 1,287 votes, 23 short of Martha Bixby who received 1,310. Gordon and Bixby both ran for the open seat on the City Council when incumbent Ward 6 Ward Councilor Brenda Noel did not seek re-election. The public is welcome to observe the recount. Once certified (probably tomorrow), results will be posted at newtonma.gov.



Good News on Newton Power Choice Prices

Unless you have chosen to “opt out,” your electricity energy supply comes from Newton Power Choice and our prices will be lower than Eversource’s for the first six months of 2024.



Eversource just announced its Basic Service electricity prices for January 1, 2024 to July 1, 2024. (As always, Eversource’s Basic Service prices change every six months and are for electricity only and not for other associated charges, such as distribution and transmission.)

Eversource’s Basic Service (24% Green) price for residential customers for the next six months is 17.25 cents/kWh.

The prices under the new Newton Power Choice contract that goes into effect in January 2024 (and will remain in place for two years) are:

Standard (95% Green): 17.18 cents/kWh

100% Green: 17.36 cents/kWh

Basic (24% Green): 14.36 cents/kWh

In other words, both Newton Power Choice Basic (with only the State minimum requirement of renewables, which is 24% in 2024 and 27% in 2025) and Newton Power Choice Standard (with 95% renewables, and which is the electricity supply you get automatically, if you take no action) cost less than Eversource Basic Service.

These savings relative to Eversource Basic Service cannot be guaranteed long term, because Eversource’s prices change every six months for residential customers and the changes are not predictable.

Newton Power Choice will continue to offer customers choices in addition to the Standard level: (1) to opt up to 100% renewables under Newton Power Choice 100% Green, (2) to opt down to the amount of renewables mandated by the State under Newton Power Choice Basic, or (3) to choose Eversource Basic Service. There is never a fee associated with exercising any of these choices. You can exercise these options by calling 833-272-9592 or going to newtonpowerchoice.com.

Please take note that no action is required of current Newton Power Choice customers. We will be enrolled in the same option under the new contract as they have been under the old contract.

[More on Municipal Aggregation and Saving Money on Your Electricity Bill](#)

Newton Power Choice is a municipal aggregation program under State law, which allows Newton to choose the electricity supplier for electricity customers within its borders, rather than having the local utility – Eversource, in the case of Newton – buy the electricity. The program provides for a standard or default percentage of renewable power, which is the amount of renewable power specified in the City's contract for electricity customers who do not opt out of the program. This "opt-out" aspect of the program is a required part of all municipal aggregation programs, as a matter of State law.

With Newton Power Choice, Eversource continues to deliver the electricity; customers continue to contact Eversource if their power goes out; and Eversource continues to bill customers. The difference is that Newton now selects the supplier of the electricity for customers rather than leaving it up to the utility, and customers have options regarding the amount of their renewable electricity purchase. Also, customers can feel secure that this is a City-vetted program, as opposed to the solicitations they receive from competitive suppliers of electricity.

At 95% "green," Newton will continue to lead the Commonwealth with the Newton Power Choice program. Of the more than 50 cities and towns with municipal aggregation programs that provide electricity from renewable energy sources above the amount mandated by State law, none provides an amount of Class I renewable electricity comparable to the 95% in this new Newton Power Choice contract.

For energy experts out there, please know that Newton's purchase of renewable power is entirely "Class I" Renewable Energy Credits, which is mostly wind and solar power. Also, Newton has specifically excluded biomass from its green power purchase.

If you are on a tight budget, there are opportunities for financial assistance with electricity bills. Customers with low incomes may qualify for Eversource's low-income rate, which provides a discount of approximately one-third. These customers may also qualify for a reduction in their electricity bills from Newton's low-income solar program. Please contact Eversource about payment plans and financial assistance programs and find more information at eversource.com.

The best way to save money on your total energy expenditure is to reduce your use of energy. Learn more about how to save money and energy with a Mass Save Home Energy Assessment from Newton's partner Home Performance Contractor, [Endless Energy](#).

Energy Coaching

Also, we have a wonderful resource for our residents, energy coaches. Our city staff and volunteer experts can help you make decisions about home insulation, heating & cooling and heat pumps, solar panels, and electric vehicles. Click [here](#) for more information.

Weatherizing Affordable Housing

In the fall of 2022, I authorized the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for energy sustainability studies for affordable housing organizations in Newton.

The City of Newton's Sustainability and Planning teams and staff from the Newton Housing Authority (NHA) completed their first analysis for NHA's Horace Mann buildings at 8 Brookside Avenue. This analysis identified several opportunities, including considerably increasing weatherization across all 72 apartment units and nine buildings.

Coordinating with National Grid, Eversource, and our community action agency, ABCD (Action for Boston Community Development), we have leveraged the analysis of the buildings into a funded project to implement the weatherization.

ABCD obtained approval from Mass Save to fund the full cost of this \$193,000 project, including attic insulation, crawl space air sealing, and apartment air sealing. The work is being done by ABCD this month to help immediately with the coming cold weather.

We're excited to see the energy and climate payoffs from this ARPA investment.

"Catchup" Water Bills

From 2010 through 2012, the City replaced residential water meters and installed water meter reading transmission units (MTUs) on the outside of each building to streamline the billing process. The MTUs allow Newton's Department of Public Works employees to remotely collect the water usage data for billing without entering homes.

The MTUs worked well until 2019 when a number of them began to malfunction and did not transmit readings. The overseas manufacturer of the MTUs was unable to provide the required number of replacement MTUs due to significant

supply chain issues and due to no longer supporting the current meter hardware and software.

Despite the MTU malfunctions, the water meters continue to accurately record water usage.

Since the malfunctioning MTUs have not been sending actual meter readings from properties, the City estimates water consumption based on like periods over the previous four years.

In addition, every property owner who receives a bill based on estimated usage is sent a letter each billing quarter informing them of the malfunctioning MTU and asking them to take a photo of their water meter gauge and submit the photo to our Water Billing Department so that the bill can be adjusted to reflect the actual usage.

The City is in the process of replacing all water meters and MTUs, as best practice is to replace meters every ten years. The City is installing new meters and MTUs at every home and business within Newton from a reputable, long-standing national company.

Since mid-May 2023, the City has installed approximately 4,600 meters with a goal of replacing 500 meters per week until completion.

For property owners who did not read their meter within the past year and send the information to the City, they may receive a “catchup bill” when the new meter/transponder is installed as the actual read from the new meter/transponder may be higher than the estimated reads.

The City of Newton has been paying the MWRA for all the water used by every customer over every billing period for all these years. All water and sewer customers have to pay for their actual water and sewer usage.

The City will perform a daily analysis of the water consumption to ensure that any catchup bill accurately reflects the appropriate historical rate tiers for water through the estimated read. The City of Newton charges tiered rates based on the amount of water used.

Also, before each water meter is replaced, the City takes a photo of the water usage and identification number on the “old” meter.

The City offers two options for a one-year zero interest free payment plan for all catchup bills. Property owners may pay in equal amounts over twelve months or wait until the end of the twelve months and pay in full.

The City’s water/sewer rates are set each year by the City Council for the upcoming fiscal year. The City bases its water/sewer rates on our MWRA assessment, operational costs of the City’s Utilities Division, and the cost of needed capital improvement of the water/sewer infrastructure.

Please reach out with questions or concerns to Newton Customer Service at 617-796-1000 or via e-mail to waterbilling@newtonma.gov.

Another Reason to Be Thankful

Just four days after the sudden death of Newton Police Captain Billy Spalding, the non-profit 100 Club stepped forward and provided a \$30,000 check to Captain Spalding's wife, Stephanie. President Joe Abely and the 100 Club volunteers raise money for families of fallen first responders to help bridge the financial gap between their loved one's death and the beginning of any benefits they may be entitled to receive.

Coming off Thanksgiving during this holiday season, they are another reason to be thankful.

Learn more about the work the 100 Club does for our first responders at 100clubmass.org.

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. Join the fun this weekend when we've transforming City Hall into an 18-hole mini golf course complete with greens and holes winding through the entire building – including a secret staircase. Admission to the **Holiday Mini Golf Hole in Fun**? Bring a new and unwrapped gift for a child, newborn to age 10, to support the Holiday Gift Drive sponsored by The Village Bank, our Newton Health and Human Services Department, and the Rotary Club of Newton.

Play on Friday, Dec. 1 from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 2 from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., or Sunday, Dec. 3 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Click [here](#) to sign up.

(Photo: With Eli, a second grader at Countryside School, and his creation "Harry Potter's Gingerbread Great Hall")

P.P.S. It takes just 15 minutes to donate and help provide critically needed blood to help save lives. Newton Health and Human Services is partnering with the MGH Blood Donor Center and hosting a **mobile blood drive at City Hall** on Thursday, Dec. 7, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. For more information, see [frequently asked questions](#), [eligibility criteria](#), and [tips for a successful donation](#). Click [here](#) to register.

P.P.P.S. All Over Newton's Third Annual **Newton Centre Holiday Shop & Stroll** is Sunday, Dec. 10, from noon to 4:00 p.m. Stroll through Newton Centre, visit participating retail stores, restaurants, and bakeries and take advantage of

special offers, tastings, and holiday refreshments along the way. The Temple Emanuel Children's Choir will complement the FUSN carolers at this year's stroll, and some of the shops will be offering discounts for shoppers who bring an unwrapped gift to help Stuff-A-Cruiser for the Village Bank and Newton HHS Holiday Gift Drive. Newton Police Officer Justin Lau and NPD Comfort Dog Leo will be there too. Get more info at allovernewton.com.



P.P.P.P.S. Looking for a flu or COVID-19 vaccine? Newton Health and Human Services is partnering with the Holtzman Medical Group to offer **flu and updated 2023-2024 Moderna COVID-19 vaccines** for people 6-months and older at the Newton Free Library Druker

Auditorium, 330 Homer Street on Wednesday, Dec. 6, Wednesday and Thursday Dec. 13 and 14, and Monday and Tuesday Dec. 18 and 19. Find more info and register [here](#).

P.P.P.P.P.S. Join the free pop-up event, **Power Hour – Full Body Band Workout**, offered by the Newton Parks, Recreation and Culture Department on Thursday Dec. 7 and 14 at the Lower Falls Community Center, 545 Grove Street and learn how to strengthen major muscle groups using resistance bands and your own body. Find more info and register for the pop-up [here](#).



P.P.P.P.P.P.S. Need **help with your heating bills**? The ABCD (Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.) Home Energy Assistance Program, also known as Fuel Assistance, provides financial assistance to income-eligible households for heating bills. New applicants can apply online [here](#) for the 2023-2024 heating season. Returning applicants should receive recertification paperwork in the mail. Need some help with your application? Call Newton Health and Human Services at 617-796-1420 with questions or to schedule an appointment. Find more info about the program [here](#).

P.P.P.P.P.P.P.S. Most of the City's 15 **Bluebikes stations are closing for the winter**. Please reach out to Josh Ostroff, Director of Transportation Planning at jostroff@newtonma.gov with any questions about Bluebikes.

P.P.P.P.P.P.P.S. Add your voice to help us **design a safer, more welcoming and more attractive Washington Street**. Newton's Planning staff last night hosted an online meeting to share several concepts for a long-term pilot project to improve Washington Street from Chestnut to Lowell Avenue (between West

Newton Square and Newtonville). Watch the meeting video on the [project web page](#). Then, let us know what you prefer by completing a 10-minute survey [here](#) by Dec. 17.

Past P.S.s Happening Soon:

P.S. The **Celebrate Newton Holiday Craft Fair 2023** with live music and more than 50 Newton or Newton connected artists and vendors selling unique gifts is Sunday, Dec. 3 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Newton South High School, 1 Lion Drive (formerly 140 Brandeis Road).

P.P.S. Join the Waban Improvement Society for hot chocolate and sweets at the annual **Waban Lights and Family Sing-Along** on Sunday, Dec. 3. Festivities begin at 4:45 p.m. in front of the Waban Library Center, 1608 Beacon Street. Click [here](#) for holiday song lyrics.

P.P.P.S. The Nonantum Children's Christmas Party Association hosts the amazing **Park Lighting at Coletti-Magni Park**, 386-392 Watertown Street, with hot chocolate and caroling starting at 6:15 p.m. this Sunday, Dec. 3 and Santa arriving just before 7 p.m.



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller | 1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, MA 02459

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