

Friday, May 12, 2023

Mayor's Newton Update



Emergency Housing Not Moving Forward

Efforts by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to revive the former Hotel Indigo at 399 Grove Street as temporary emergency family housing will not move forward.

DHCD decided that the tremendous costs to open the building for two years made the project unfeasible.

I saw outstanding leadership and a spirit of cooperation from DHCD, the State's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Catholic Charities and property owner Mark Development. I'm grateful to Interim Superintendent Kathy Smith and Assistant Superintendent of Student Services Casey Ngo-Miller who immediately leaned in to offer the support of the Newton Public Schools as we planned to welcome new students. I thank the many Newton residents and organizations who reached out to offer a helping hand.

Massachusetts is experiencing a housing crisis and a shortage of temporary emergency housing. We support our State's efforts to address this humanitarian and housing crisis and we continue to stand ready to help families facing homelessness.

Free Parking in Municipal Lots for Seniors

Newton residents ages 65 and older are eligible for free parking in the City's municipal parking lots.

The current red stickers issued by Newton's Department of Senior Services will expire on June 30, 2023. New stickers, valid through June 30, 2025, will be available for purchase starting on Wednesday, May 17.

How do you get a sticker?

The following information is needed:

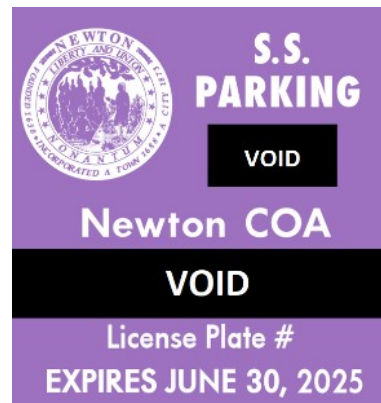
- A copy of your MA driver's license showing age 65 or older and a Newton address.
- A copy of your MA car registration.
- A check for \$6 per sticker payable to the City of Newton.
- A self-addressed stamped envelope for the return of your sticker or stickers.
- Please include a telephone number with your information packet in case the staff has questions.

The information can be mailed to Newton City Hall, Senior Services Department, 1000 Commonwealth Ave., Newton, MA 02459, or dropped off at 20 Hartford St., Newton Highlands (Brigham House)(the temporary headquarters for Senior Services as we construct the new Senior Center).

Click [here](#) for more information, including the City's [regulations](#), and click [here](#) for a map of municipal parking lots.

Newton Free Library: A LOT More than Books to Borrow

Our Newton Free Library has an amazing collection of "things" and "passes" to borrow.





What are “things”? Snowshoes. Beach tents. Induction cooktops. Electronic drums. Karaoke machines. Crochet hooks. Sewing machines. Braille scrabble. Full page magnifiers. Bocce sets. Puzzles. Blood pressure monitors. Carbon monoxide meters. Electronic soil testers. Stud finders. Metal detectors. Microscopes. Tripods. Binoculars. Fishing rods. Trekking poles. Robotics kits. Bluetooth speakers. Digital film scanners. GPS handheld navigators. Hotspots. Outdoor projectors and screens.

Browse the full list of non-traditional items available to borrow at the Newton Free Library [here](#).

The Newton Free Library also offers 30 museum, historical and recreation area passes available to Newton residents to visit for free or at discounted rates. The list includes the Museum of Fine Arts, the Peabody Essex Museum, the JFK Museum, the USS Constitution, Boston Children’s Museum, the Museum of Science, the New England Aquarium, the Boston Harbor Islands and many more. Passes can be reserved up to 30 days in advance. Find a full list of locations [here](#).

Sumner Tunnel Closing for 8 Weeks

An early heads up that getting to Logan Airport is likely to be slow both this summer and next.

MassDOT is completely closing the Sumner Tunnel for eight-weeks from Wednesday, July 5 to Thursday, Aug. 31 in 2023. They will do it again in the summer of 2024.

After nearly 100 years of service, the Sumner Tunnel (Route 1A South) needs significant improvements. MassDOT will be working on tunnel safety, the roadway surface, the tunnel ceiling, lighting & security systems, and cell phone, GPS, and

radio service inside the tunnel. They determined that full closure of the tunnel is needed to get this work done.

The tunnel is also currently scheduled to be closed on weekends through June 23 with the exception of this Mother's Day weekend and Memorial Day weekend of May 27.

Click [here](#) to sign up for weekly project email updates and the latest on travel options and construction progress. Visit the project website to learn more: mass.gov/sumner-tunnel. Questions? Email the project team at Sumner100@dot.state.ma.us.

Lining Fields With a Robot

The newest addition to our Parks, Recreation and Culture (PRC) maintenance crew is Turf Tank One, a GPS guided field painting robot that can line a playing field in 30 minutes.

(Click on the photo to see the robot in action.)

In years past, lining a field at the beginning of the season has taken four PRC staff an average of 90 minutes to measure, mark and line. We have 17 fields altogether, at the two high schools, four middle schools and 11 recreation league fields. We line each field in the spring for lacrosse, track & field, ultimate frisbee, baseball, and softball, and in the fall for football, soccer and field hockey. We also reline fields regularly when needed during playing seasons.



With the new robot and a handheld tablet, one person can handle the job in a third of the time using less paint and allowing staff more time for other projects – and I hear from Rob McClary of our PRC team, “The lines are unbelievably straight.”

A name for Turf Tank One?

Now comes the fun part. What should we call our new robot? Grand Rapids, Michigan named theirs Turfy McTankface. (I think we can do better than that.) Send your suggestions to: parks@newtonma.gov.

Click on the photo above to see Turf Tank One in action in Newton Highlands.

Data on the Massachusetts Economy

Massachusetts Secretary of Economic Development Yvonne Hao recently appointed me to serve on the State’s 2023 Economic Development Planning Council.

All new administrations are charged with writing a statewide comprehensive economic development policy and an implementation plan. I am representing Newton as well as towns and cities across the Commonwealth.

At our first meeting last Friday, we heard an excellent presentation on *Massachusetts Economic Growth and Challenges* in the Age of COVID-19 by Dr. Mark Melnik, Director of Economic & Public Policy Research at the UMass Donahue Institute.

Here are some slides and facts I found interesting:

Massachusetts at a Glance

3.5%

Unemployment Rate
March 2023
(28th lowest in the nation)

6.3%

Unemployment Rate (U-6)
2022
(24th lowest in the nation)

7.4%

Population Growth
2010-2020

2.8%

Job Growth
March 2022 – March 2023

17.6%

Foreign Born Residents
2021
(7th highest in the nation)

10.4%

Below Poverty Rate
2021
(9th lowest in the nation)

39.9

Median Age
2021
(17th oldest in the nation)

46.6%

Have a College Degree
2021
(highest in the nation)

Sources: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Local Area Unemployment (LAU) Statistics; Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021, 1 Year Estimates; UMass Donahue Institute MassDOT, Vintage 2022 Population Projections; November 2022. (UMDI-DOT V2022).

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Despite having the highest per capita income in the country, Massachusetts struggles with high cost of living

Massachusetts ranks...

Top 5

Most expensive childcare

4th

Most expensive electricity

3rd

Most expensive natural gas

5th

Highest home value

2nd

Worst traffic (Boston MSA)

... out of all U.S. states

Sources: Child Care: Center for American Progress, *The True Cost of High-Quality Child Care Across the United States* Table 1. Electricity and Natural Gas: US Energy Information Administration. Home Value: Zillow Home Value Index. Traffic: Inrix 2022. Global Traffic Scorecard.

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- Massachusetts is experiencing an historically high job openings rate, vastly exceeding the hire rate.

- Massachusetts has the highest per capita income in the country but also struggles with a high cost of living.
- Massachusetts in 2021 had the 4th highest rate of remote work in the country, and Newton and Cambridge, both at 44% at the top of the list, far exceeded the 23% state average.

I look forward to creating actionable goals that support businesses & non-profits and jobs in Newton and beyond.

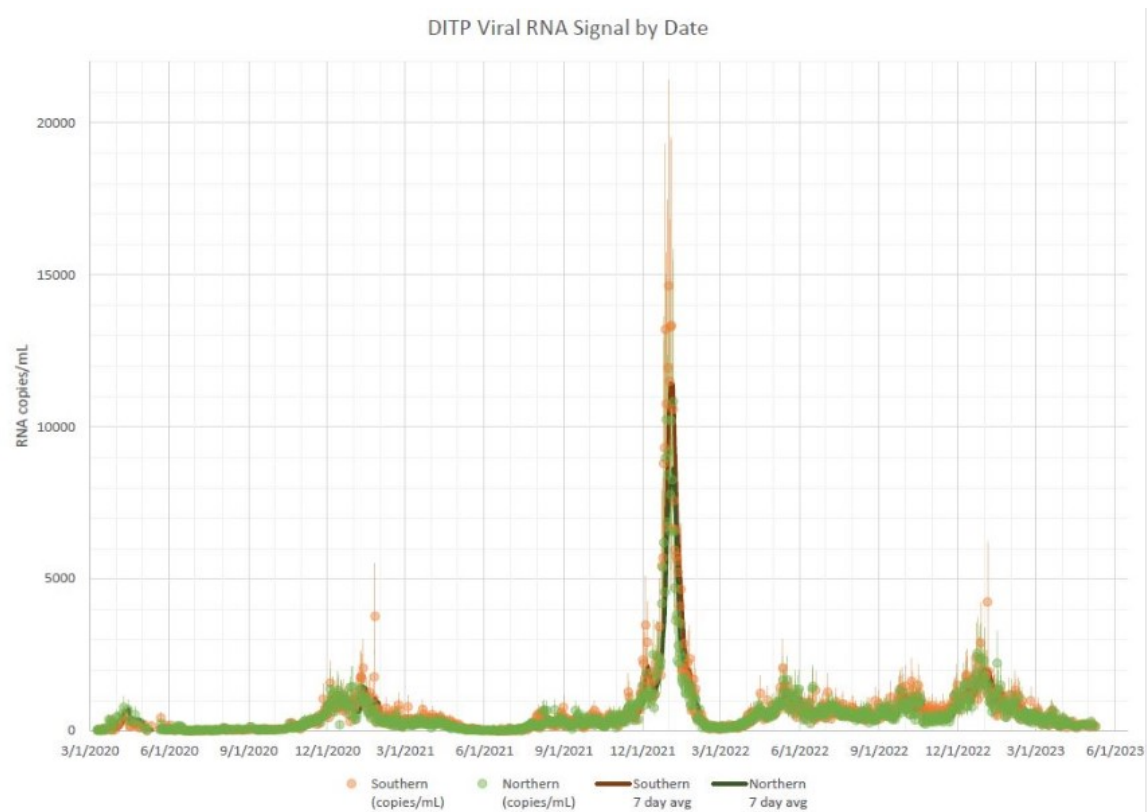
The Next Chapter in COVID-19

Yesterday the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Declaration was lifted in the country, the state and here in Newton. (Find more information at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).)

Week after week during the pandemic, we checked the MWRA wastewater tracking data as an accurate precursor of where the virus was heading. As we turn the chapter, it's sobering to look back at where we've been. I viscerally remember March-April 2020 when COVID-19 arrived. We had a virus spreading through our community with no reliable or widely available testing, no vaccine, few masks and no treatment. It was a frightening and uncertain time that left scars we are still working to heal.

I remember the uptick during the holidays at the end of 2020, and then the staggering Omicron surge at the end of 2021.

MWRA Wastewater Data through Tuesday, May 9



Our most up to date information shows that we lost 230 Newtonians to this pandemic. May our memories of these mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, friends and neighbors serve as a blessing.

The pandemic was also a time of remarkable resilience in Newton. When we were literally separated, we came together in so many ways to show up for one another. From drive by graduations to online concerts, food pantries & take out meals to walks on Comm Ave and in Webster Woods, we found ways to help each other and lift our spirits.

We don't know if we will keep this virus at bay permanently, but we know that if it creeps back, we have our toolkit ready.

Celebrating Teachers and Nurses

While I'm glad that Teacher Appreciation Week and National Nurses Week coincide this week, I know I speak for so many Newtonians by saying that we are so grateful to both groups of professionals every week of the year.

Teachers in Newton and beyond have been extraordinary during these challenging times, and nurses, with skill and compassion, literally save lives.

One way to say thanks to our teachers is to consider a contribution to the Newton Schools Foundation *Honor Thy Teacher* campaign. Learn more [here](#).

Warmly,

Ruthanne.

P.S. Wishing all Moms a day of joy on Sunday. Looking for a last-minute present? **All Over Newton** has a [Mother's Day Guide](#) of Newton small businesses with gift ideas.

P.P.S. **Family FunFest** is this Saturday and Sunday, May 13 and 14 with amusement rides, music, performances and more for all ages at City Hall from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Find event details at newtonma.gov/culture.



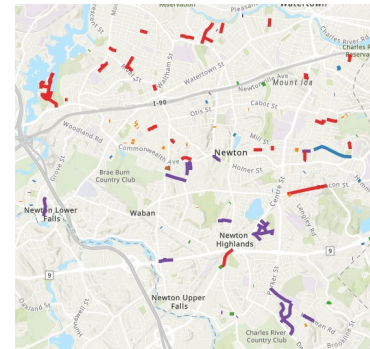
P.P.P.S. Don't miss the final weekend of the **Newton Piano Summit** this Saturday and Sunday, May 13 and 14 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Second Church in Newton. Find a full schedule of performers [here](#).





P.P.P.P.S. Bring the youngsters to Newton's Community DPW Day to "**touch-a-truck**," play games, win prizes and more at City Hall, 1000 Commonwealth Avenue, on Saturday, May 20, (rain date is Sunday, May 21), 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Consider helping local families facing food insecurity by bringing non-perishable items to assist the Newton Food Pantry (located here at City Hall).

P.P.P.P.S. This morning I ran into Peter, a City of Newton retiree, who wanted to know where to find the **road construction information**. We keep up to date information on our website. Click [here](#) for the schedule of work and click [here](#) for a map of road projects underway. Thanks for the suggestion, Peter.



Lion Drive

P.P.P.P.P.S. Run with the Lions on the newly named Lion Drive at Newton South High School. Sign up at raceroster.com/lions5k to run/walk in the **Newton South High School Booster Club second annual Lions 5K** to support high school athletes on Sunday, May 21. The ceremony is at 8:30 a.m. with the run/walk starting at 9:00 a.m. The Boosters invite runners and walkers of all ages to join them. Enjoy food, fun and prizes – including for the most creative Newton South spirit/Lions themed running outfit.

P.P.P.P.P.P.S. **Newton Community Farm's Annual Seedling Sale** is in person, at the farm (303 Nahanton Street) on Saturday and Sunday, May 20 and 21 from noon to 3:00 p.m. Choose from nearly 100 varieties of plants. Please bring a

cardboard box to transfer seedlings; a cart or wagon may also be helpful. Read the Farm's [FAQs](#) for tips and information, and find a list of varieties on sale [here](#).



P.P.P.P.P.P.P.S. **Historic Newton's annual Historic House Tour** is back in person for its 40th year on Sunday, May 21, noon to 5:00 p.m. Celebrate Newton's rich architectural heritage and take a look inside remarkable homes to see creative renovations and interior designs. Begin at the Durant-Kenrick House and Grounds, 286 Waverley Avenue, to pick up a map for the self-guided tour. Tickets are \$55 in advance (\$45 for Historic Newton members) and \$60 on the day of the tour. Find more information and purchase tickets [here](#). Questions? Call 617-796-1450.



P.P.P.P.P.P.P.S. Join the **New Philharmonia Orchestra** for *May There Be Peace*, featuring Julianne Lee on violin, on Sunday, May 21 at 3:00 p.m. at Brown Middle School, 125 Meadowbrook Road. Find more information and buy tickets at newphil.org.

P.P.P.P.P.P.P.P.S. Kudos to **Newton Youth Hockey (NYH)** players **Zach Firkusny and Leo DiMattia** and all their teammates who helped raise \$5,591 for the Newton Food Pantry. Zach and Leo were the two top fundraisers in this year's Fig Pot game between coaches and players. This was NYH's third Fig Pot and the athletes have now raised \$12,600 for local charities. Bravo!

(Photo: from left, Zach Firkusny, Jen Abbot of the Newton Food Pantry, and Leo DiMattia.)



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