

Monday, Sept. 18, 2023

## Mayor's Newton Update

*This evening I presented to the City Council our Capital Improvement Plan for the five years, FY2025 to FY2029.*

*The following are my remarks:*

I'm so pleased to deliver to the City Council our Capital Improvement Plan for the next five years, FY2025 to FY2029.

This is an exciting period with so many wonderful infrastructure projects moving forward that allow us to better serve our students, our older residents, our park and recreation users, and our drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians, among others.

One of our major priorities is to improve road conditions, make traffic flow a bit more smoothly and a lot more safely, and make Newton better for people walking and bicycling.

We're embarking on this much needed work over the next 5 years on a firmer footing than in years past - with Waverley and Ward, Chestnut and Walnut, Cherry and Albemarle, Woodward and Crafts, Watertown and Adams, Lowell and Homer, Comm Ave and Washington, California and Concord, and 54 residential streets that were in the worst condition either repaved or currently under construction.

*(Photo: Recent paving along Lowell Avenue.)*

With this CIP, a lot more roads will be paved. More sidewalks will be replaced. More bike lanes will be created. We will add to the 21 rectangular rapid flashing beacons at crosswalks we're installing in 2023, finish the first ever Bike/Pedestrian Plan, rebuild Pettee Square in Upper Falls, and finish designs for the village center in Newton Highlands and the Washington Street pilot.

*(Photo: Architect rendering of the new Lincoln-Eliot School.)*

On the school side, we move our construction team from the fabulous new permanent home for our Early Childhood Program over to the Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School with a groundbreaking in December even as we finish up the designs for three more elementary schools - Countryside, Franklin and Horace Mann. Meanwhile, the Ward and Underwood communities are deeply interested in decisions the School Committee will make on these two important elementary schools. I also expect we will have an opportunity to use Free Cash for school maintenance projects; more on this in a minute.

*(Photo: Architect rendering of NewCAL, our new senior center, on Walnut Street in Newtonville.)*

The Newton Center for Active Living, or NewCAL, will move forward. When we only received one bid from one construction company and that bid was significantly higher than our professional cost estimate, we decided to put it back out on the street. Josh Morse, our Public Buildings Commissioner, is working hard to drum up more bidders. We should have more information and a better idea of the schedule and cost by year end.

At the Library, we're turning from the amazing Children's room expansion and renovation to the critically important heating, ventilation and air conditioning makeover.

The Capital Improvement Plan also includes significant investments in many other buildings – chief among them our Police Headquarters and Annex. We need to move quickly to build on the substantial HVAC and IT infrastructure improvements recently completed at NPD Headquarters. The facilities need improvements in a lot of areas - community spaces, training rooms, the evidence room, the parking lot, bathrooms, work spaces and more. The CIP also includes investments at firehouses, DPW facilities, and City Hall.

*(Photo: Design of the new Gath Pool complex. Join us for the groundbreaking this Friday, Sept. 22 at 6:00 p.m.)*

Parks & Recreation facilities get a lot of TLC. A new outdoor Gath pool complex will open next summer (join me, Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture Nicole Banks and Friends of Albemarle at the groundbreaking this Friday at 6 p.m.). Next month come to the ribbon cutting for the great, accessible walkways and a fishing platform at Crystal Lake's Levingston Cove.

We also invest in our fields and parks. We replaced the two synthetic turf fields at Newton South this summer, both with lights. Now we're turning to two synthetic turf fields with lights for Newton North, one right at the school and the other at Albemarle. We're also moving forward with a lot of investments in grass fields at Albemarle, Burr and McGrath (with a shout out for financial support from the Community Preservation Commission and our youth leagues). Tennis, pickleball and basketball courts get investments (thank you FoNT for your help). We're actively exploring replacing the former railroad bridge over the Charles at Christina Street as well.

We will invest in our critical underground systems, infrastructure that provides clean water, takes care of our sewage, and helps us with stormwater, especially as climate change brings more intense rainfall.

I want to give a heads up that the Federal Government is requiring that cities and towns in Massachusetts a requirement to invest heavily in the control of phosphorus. Phosphorus is a particularly challenging element of stormwater runoff that damages the health of the Charles River, Bulloughs Pond, and Crystal Lake, and exacerbates invasive aquatic plants and algae blooms. In

Massachusetts, only the City of Boston has a larger requirement than Newton. We'll be facing hundreds of millions of dollars of investments in required work in the coming decades. We're almost done with the plan for Phase 1 and we'll circle back with a lot more information but all of us can expect significant increases in our stormwater fees in the years ahead.

In another area where we need millions of dollars of investment, I'm working with four Newton residents — Congressman Jake Auchincloss, State Senator Cindy Creem, State Representative Kay Khan, and City Council President Susan Albright — to pursue aggressively Federal and State funding to rebuild all three of our commuter rail stations. The design work is fully funded to make the three stations accessible with double-sided platforms to allow regular, bi-directional service. The MBTA has said that we will see the designs at the 75% completion level this year.

Let me add another cautionary note. All of us know we've been experiencing inflation, labor shortages, and scarcity of materials. As a result, construction costs are up 30% over the past few years. While we're seeing some indications that the construction market may start to cool off, we don't see signs of deflation. The sharp increase in costs will inevitably mean stretching out our capital improvements with the completion of infrastructure projects taking longer than we would prefer.

I also have some good news to share from City of Newton Comptroller Steve Curley. When we put together our Five-Year Financial Forecast delivered to the City Council two weeks ago, we asked him to provide us with a FY2024 Free Cash estimate. Steve let us know today that while closing out the FY2024 books, he has determined that there is \$5.3 million more in Free Cash expected to be certified this fall than he had originally calculated. This is the result of having not included the unappropriated Free Cash of \$5.3 million from last year, FY2023, that closes out at year-end to this year's Free Cash.

This is wonderful news.

The Operations Booster Stabilization Fund allows us to use one-time monies and create an account that will pay long-term dividends. The Stabilization Fund is important for the longer term financial health of the Newton Public Schools and the City of Newton.

Addressing the here and now with one-time funds is also important. Once the Free Cash is certified, we can use a great deal of it to fund important, real-time projects now, including roads and sidewalks, School and City buildings, and other capital projects. Prioritizing these immediate-term needs that have real-time positive and tangible impacts will be done with the input of our elected bodies. Each and every use of Free Cash will come to the City Council for approval just as the Operations Booster Stabilization Fund is before you tonight.

The capital assets of the City of Newton are community treasures. We know that many of our treasures are in need of substantial investment. If we follow the course charted by this CIP with discipline and determination, we will be well on our way to fulfilling that Athenian Oath of old that appears on the walls of Newton

North - to transmit our good City greater, better and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.

Let me close with a few thank yous:

- I am grateful to our residents who voted to move forward with the Countryside and Franklin Elementary School projects in March.
- I'm thankful to the Newton Retirement Board for their collaboration which helped move the Horace Mann Elementary School Project ahead.
- I'm grateful to the many neighborhood groups and leagues that help fund investments in parks, playgrounds and fields.
- I'm consistently impressed with the work done by people like Luis Perez Demorizi and Alex Valcarce in planning our work and overseeing the construction.
- Our Commissioners, Directors and Chiefs on the City side and Stephanie Gilman, Liam Hurley and Dave Stickney on the School side invest a lot of hours figuring out what we should be doing.
- Maureen Lemieux, our CFO, analyzes what we can afford.
- Jonathan Yeo, our COO, is the leader, coordinator, and chief collaborator on our many capital improvement projects.
- Our City Councilors and School Committee members guide the prioritization process and help us sort through the many details so that these projects become the best versions of themselves.

I'm grateful to each of you.

Thank you, and good night.

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

Click [here](#) to read the Capital Improvement Plan.

Click [here](#) to see COO Jonathan Yeo's Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan PowerPoint presentation.

Click [here](#) to read the Long-Range Financial Plan and Five-Year Forecast that I presented on Sept. 5.



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