

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023

Mayor's Newton Update

Last night, more than two hundred people gathered at Newton City Hall for a long-planned program on interrupting antisemitism and hate in Newton. With Israel at war against Hamas terrorists, the gathering became even more essential. Below are my comments which follow on my statement from Sunday.

In addition, Hamas has designated tomorrow, Friday, Oct. 13, as “a day of general mobilization,” creating additional fear amongst all of us. Newton Police have been taking added precautions since Saturday morning. NPD is in close touch with Jewish and Israeli affiliated institutions and the Newton Public Schools and will be providing extra security measures.

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, Remarks at City of Newton Interrupting Antisemitism and Hate Program on Wednesday, Oct. 11, 2023

Last Friday, I drafted my remarks for tonight. At that time - which now feels like a lifetime ago – I wanted to speak about the fraying of our social and political fabric and the rise of extremism, polarization and isolation in Newton and beyond. In times like these, antisemitism and hate fester and flourish.

I had written that we need to strengthen alliances of understanding and action to interrupt the escalating number of anti-Semitic and hate incidents in Newton.

So many good people joined us to help with this work: Newton’s Human Rights Commissioners chaired by Rabbi Keith Stern, the members of the Harmony Foundation, and the Temple Reyim and Temple Emanuel ADL Kulanu Groups as well as allies including our Superintendent Anna Nolin and the Newton Public Schools, the officers in the Newton Police Department including Superintendent George McMains, District Attorney Marion Ryan, our State delegation including Representative Ruth Balsler, the Anti-Defamation League and ADL leaders Rabbi Steinberg and Rabbi Fish, and our Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion, Hattie Kerwin Derrick.

Then, on Saturday, we woke up to the news that turned the world on its axis. Thank you all for summoning the strength to come tonight. For me, I find being together necessary and comforting.

As Mayor of the City of Newton, I want to start by repeating the words of the President of the United States. Hamas’ attack on Israel is pure, unadulterated evil.

We condemn the horrific, coordinated and deadly terrorist attacks by Hamas in Israel which include the murder and kidnapping of civilians.

The City of Newton stands in solidarity with the people of Israel in the face of these terrorist assaults.

Here in Newton, this is personal for many and many are fearful. We gather tonight to share their heartbreak and to bring comfort and strength. Please know, as a precaution, the Newton Police Department has increased directed patrols of synagogues.

Israel is now at war. As President Biden said, "Israel has the right to respond - indeed has a duty to respond - to these vicious attacks."

And yet our hearts ache. We know more innocents will suffer. For, alas, there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens, including a time for war and a time for peace.

Here at home, this is a time in Newton when Jews are hurting . . . and we know this is a time in Newton when Palestinians are hurting.

Israel is now in a war that Hamas terrorists brought to its land, a war started with the slaughter of babies, toddlers, young people, parents, grandparents and Holocaust survivors.

I fervently pray that the days of war ahead may produce a durable and lasting time of peace.

Tonight, here in this War Memorial, we stand together in connection and in allyship. We gain strength and comfort from each other by being in community. With antisemitism and hate incidents in our country rising against Jews, Blacks, members of the LGBTQ+ community, Muslims, Asians, immigrants and others, our need to act as allies to respect the rights, differences and dignity of others is essential.

In Newton, we are here tonight to deepen our understanding of each other and our connections with each other. We are here together to speak out against antisemitism and hate, violence and terrorism. We join together to stand up for our community values of respect and inclusion, diversity and equity, acceptance and compassion.

I want to finish by quoting Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, the President of Hebrew College located here in Newton, "We pray for comfort for those who are grieving, healing for those who are wounded, relief for those who are sick with worry over missing loved ones, and a safe return home for those who have been kidnapped."

(Click [here](#) to watch a video of last night's entire program.)

Updating Newton's Tree Preservation Ordinance

The City of Newton's Tree Preservation Ordinance, enacted over twenty years ago with updates in 2014, was one of the first such regulations in the Commonwealth. Our Ordinance continues to be one of the most comprehensive tree protection ordinances in Massachusetts, one that other municipalities emulate.

Protecting our healthy trees as well as planting new ones is a shared goal. Not only are trees beautiful, they improve the quality of the air we breathe. They provide shade and lower the heat index, and, in turn, energy consumption. They sequester carbon. They help manage water run-off and flooding.

The majority of Newton's tree canopy is made up of trees on private property, and, when combined with the City's street and park trees, Newton has an important urban forest that enhances our quality of life and the City's environment.

The Tree Preservation Ordinance protects our urban forest and ensures responsible stewardship as we invest in planting more trees and caring for those we have.

We have a superb City Forester, Marc Welch, who has been instrumental in developing the City's tree strategy and implementing the ordinance since inception. Marc has been working for over a year with the City Council's Programs & Services Committee to update substantially the ordinance. The goal is to increase the number of trees protected and the number of new trees planted.

The Council Committee is just about ready to send the draft ordinance to the full City Council for final action.

In brief, the changes would include the following:

- Increasing replacement requirements for larger diameter (or larger "caliper") trees to address their greater environmental importance
- Adding protections for smaller diameter trees
- Limiting significantly the removal of trees without replacement
- Adding procedures for protecting trees
- Increasing the payment required for trees cut without replacement to better reflect the City's cost of mitigating the impact to the environment
- Requiring most applicants to work with qualified arborists to better ensure tree longevity and reduce uninformed tree removal
- Protecting trees on lots adjacent to construction

Current Ordinance

The ordinance currently requires replacement of all trees 8-inches in diameter or larger when removed for new construction of a home, an addition, a deck or a pool. (A property owner can either replace the tree on their property or make a payment to the City for the replacement on public property.) Currently the ordinance requires an inch for inch caliper replacement as well as a \$150 permit. Please know that both the current and the proposed ordinance allow trees that are unhealthy or dangerous to be removed without replacement.

Proposed Updates to the Ordinance

The proposed new updates will lower the replacement threshold of all trees from 8-inches to 6-inches in diameter when removed for new construction of a home, an addition, a deck or a pool.

The proposed new updates increase the permit fee from \$150 to \$200.

They also increase the number of new trees to be planted in accordance with the size of the trees removed.

Greater emphasis is also placed on the types of replacement trees allowed to be planted. Replacement trees will need to be of the same or similar type as what is being removed (when appropriate) and the new replacement trees will be selected for their positive impact on the environment, including a preference for native tree species.

The proposed ordinance better protects trees during construction by requiring a certified arborist be engaged by the property owner at the start of a project and to stay engaged to monitor the trees throughout construction. The certified arborist will develop plans that will require the protection of trees on neighboring properties as well as on the project site. Additionally, by requiring a Certified Arborist be involved from the beginning, it is expected that applicants will get good advice on ways to prevent excessive tree removal.

In the updated ordinance, homeowners in 1 and 2 family homes will still be able to remove a tree of an average size on their property, perhaps to add a swing set, to add a bit of sun to their garden, or for reasons other than exterior construction. In those types of instances, tree replacement will most likely not be required. However, very large trees would still need to be replaced or the owner would have to pay a fee in lieu of replacement which the City would use to fund replacement trees across the City. Under the updated ordinance, 1 and 2 family homeowners will file for approval to remove trees through a straightforward online portal (free of charge) so we can keep an accurate record of activity.

We look forward to finalizing the changes to the ordinance with the Council to reflect our shared commitment to our tree canopy, protect trees and the environment, and at the same time allow homeowners an appropriate amount of flexibility and appropriate costs.

Interested in learning more? Consider zooming into the next Programs & Services Committee meeting on the Tree Preservation Ordinance currently slated

for November 8. A link to the committee's website is [here](#).

New Dashboards Track COVID-19, Flu, and RSV

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) recently launched several new weekly dashboards [data website](#) that track viral respiratory illness trends across the state focusing on COVID-19, influenza and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus).

Data in the chart below from hospital emergency departments shows that 10.2% of emergency department visits during the last week were for COVID-19, flu or RSV.

The new Viral Respiratory Illness Reporting homepage provides a number of data points with more in-depth data available by clicking on different dashboards, including comparisons of current data to previous seasons.

The dashboards will be updated weekly on Thursdays. Click [here](#) to find the Viral Respiratory Illness Reporting.

Honoring Newton's Bob Engler

Bob Engler is stepping down from the Board of Directors of the Newton Community Development Foundation (NCDF) after more than 40 years. NCDF develops and manages exceptional affordable and market-rate housing while surrounding residents with programs and services.

Starting when he wrote his master's degree thesis at MIT in 1971 on the state's then new 40B affordable housing law to creating and leading a company that is a leader in the field of affordable housing, Bob has generously lent his knowledge and expertise to the city he calls home.

Thank you, Bob, for focusing on supporting housing for those who could otherwise not afford it and spending your career opening Newton's doors wider.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

Past P.S.s happening soon:

P.S. The 22nd running of **Paddy's Road Race**, The Shillelagh Shuffle to benefit Newton Athletes Unlimited, starts at 9:00 a.m. this Sunday, Oct. 15 in West Newton. Not yet registered? In person registration for athletes of all ages and abilities will be held on Saturday, Oct. 14 and on race day morning at Paddy's Publick House, 95 Elm St., West Newton. Click [here](#) for more registration and race details.

P.P.S. The **West Suburban YMCA 's Teen Center Relaunch Party** is tomorrow night, Friday, Oct. 13. Enjoy free food and games for youngsters 12 to 14 at the party from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. at the Church Street Y, 276 Church Street.

P.P.P.S. **Newton Nomadic Theater's *The Village Cidiot*** continues for its final weekend tomorrow and Saturday, Oct. 13 and 14, at Gregorian Rugs in Lower Falls. Click [here](#) for more details and to purchase tickets.

P.P.P.P. S. **The Newton Harvest Fair and Kid's Carnival** with live music, crafts, food trucks, the GreenExpo, kids rides and more is this Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 14 and 15 in Newton Centre. Click [here](#) for more information.



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