

Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2023

## Mayor's Newton Update



I am disappointed that the City Council last night did not approve my proposal to transform one-time funding into additional revenue, primarily for the operating budget of the Newton Public Schools and also for City operations. The plan would have created predictable, dependable funding for NPS well into the future.

Ten City Councilors voted to provide the funding; thirteen voted no. The “no” votes were for very different reasons - wanting less funding for NPS, wanting more funding for NPS, wanting flexibility annually on decisions for any funding, wanting to decide how the Newton School Committee would use the funding, wanting the funding for capital investments, and more.

Based on the comments from City Councilors last night, I can see that there exists no consensus among them on whether/how/when to provide additional operating funds for NPS, which is concerning.

The checks and balances of the executive and legislative branches in Newton are an extremely important aspect of our local government. These checks and balances also mean that there is no way for me as Mayor to provide NPS with additional operating funds without support from the City Council. I will continue to work with them to try and find a way forward that is sustainable and that a majority can support.

My years as Mayor and as a Newton School Committee member, the person proposing the City of Newton Budget and the allocation to the Newton Public Schools, have reinforced for me the need for additional funding for students even when considering that the national trend in declining student enrollment has materialized here in Newton.

My commitment to providing additional funds for Newton Public Schools can be seen in my actions as Mayor:

- I have ensured that Newton Public Schools each and every year receives at least a 3.5% increase in their budget (with the exception of the onset of the pandemic when we cut back on funding across the board, including to NPS; I made sure to add back in that \$1.5 million to NPS the following fiscal year).
- I provided during the pandemic \$24 million in one-time federal ARPA and CARES funds to NPS (on top of the federal funds NPS received directly) to

allow our schools to not just stabilize, but to increase the support for the extraordinary needs of students.

- I proposed an operating override to provide the funds that our students require recognizing that a generation of students will need our help, that student needs will remain greater than they once were, and that inflation resulting from the pandemic has created significant budgetary pressures.
- I proposed to the City Council in late August that we transform a windfall of one-time funds into an ongoing stabilization fund to provide additional financial resources that Newton Public Schools need.

I will continue to propose ways to support NPS. The financial forecast we recently delivered to the City Council includes increasing the NPS allocation by 3.5% over current funding in the spring. Once we receive the bids on the Lincoln-Eliot project at the end of this month and understand the costs, I hope to be coming forward to the Council with proposed funding for one-time NPS needs. This funding will complement the work already done – the addition at Oak Hill Middle School and the renovated new home for Newton Early Childhood Program – and work underway for new/substantially renovated buildings for Lincoln-Eliot, Countryside, and Franklin and an addition at the Horace Mann Elementary School.

I will craft Budgets and funding proposals to support the many, many needs across our City from paving our roads to public safety to educating our children, while continuing to achieve the highest rating possible, a triple A, from our credit rating agency.

We are a financially stable city that lives within our means. We will continue to provide our community with services and programs, schooling and safety, even as we seek legislative consensus on our priorities.

### **Home Prices Up, Sales Down in Newton**

Newton home values continue to rise to record high levels with year-to-date prices of single-family homes up approximately 6.3% in 2023 from a median of \$1.6 million to \$1.8 million.

Condominium prices in Newton are also going up but more gradually. Year-to-date condo sales prices increased 2.7% from a median of \$892,500 to \$916,750.

While homeowners are seeing the price of their properties rise, fewer are opting to sell, creating a tough market for buyers who are facing high interest rates along with high prices and low inventory.

Home sales across Massachusetts are at a 13-year low. Statewide 1,300 fewer homes sold this September compared to last, a drop of 26.5%. During the first nine months of this year, home sales fell 24.6% from the same period in 2022.

In Newton, 26 homes were sold last month, eight fewer than the 34 sold in Newton last September. Year to date, home sales in Newton also went down 23.5 percent, from 476 to 364.

Year to date figures also show fewer condominiums being sold in Newton with 242 so far this year compared to 290 over the same period last year. While the year-to-date total is down, condo sales for the month of September rose 51.9% compared to last year, with 41 sold last month compared to 27 in September 2022.

The bottom line is that with high mortgage rates, record high prices and lower inventory, it is hard to buy into Newton while current owners have increasingly valuable property.

The Warren Group compiled this data and the State House News Service reported on it.

*Awhile back, we asked Newtonians to help us name our new Parks, Recreation and Culture GPS guided field painting robot that can line a sports field in just 30 minutes.*

*Thanks to everyone who wrote in, we got a lot of clever suggestions.*

*After considering the options, our Parks, Recreation and Culture team chose to name the robot Sweet Adeline, a version of the names suggested by Charlie Jack and Ellen Metzger. If you see Sweet Adeline at work, ask one of the Parks, Rec & Culture work crew members for a Sweet Adeline sticker!*

## **What are RRFBs?**

With 29 Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons, or RRFBs, already installed across Newton and a total of 44 by the end of December, we thought it would be a good time to provide some information about exactly what they are and how to use these traffic lights.

The Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons, or RRFBs, are the pedestrian-activated flashing yellow lights you've likely seen at midblock intersections in Newton. The RRFBs are placed on both sides of a crosswalk and include pedestrian crossing signs. They are designed to improve safety by increasing drivers' awareness of pedestrians crossing streets at locations other than intersections.

The rapid flashing yellow lights remain unlit until activated by a person using an audible pedestrian push button which emits a “chirping” sound to make them easy to locate for visually impaired pedestrians. The RRFBs flash with an alternating high frequency (affectionately known as a fast wig-wag flickering pattern) to alert the driver that pedestrians are crossing the street.

The LED lights flash long enough to allow pedestrians to safely cross the street in the crosswalk.

The safety data is impressive. Federal research indicates RRFBs can result in motorist yielding rates as high as 98 percent at marked crosswalks. Additionally, studies have shown that RRFBs can also significantly reduce the number of pedestrian crashes.

For pedestrians, please be sure to make eye contact with the driver and check carefully before going into the crosswalk even with the rapid lights flashing.

For drivers, slow down, yield or stop if a pedestrian wants to cross whether the lights are flashing or not. Drivers must allow the pedestrian to pass through the crosswalk entirely before proceeding. Other drivers should never attempt to pass a stopped car at any crosswalk because an out-of-sign pedestrian may still be crossing.

The City of Newton Department of Public Works (DPW) has developed a multi-factor prioritization system to evaluate the dozens of RRFB requests that come in from residents and City Councilors concerned about safe pedestrian crossings.

The City of Newton DPW installed our first RRFB in 2018 at Homer Street & City Hall Drive near the library.

In September of 2022, I designated ARPA funding for the installation of 15 additional RRFBs, and by the end of 2023 we'll have 44 RRFBs.

Thank you to [Newton Safe Routes to School](#) for the primer below.

### **A Soldier's Remains Come Home**

Eighty years after his B-24 Liberator bomber was shot down over Romania during World War II, 27-year-old Newtonian 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Alfred W. Pezzella's remains are coming home.

Lt. Pezzella's bomber crashed on Aug. 1, 1943 after being hit by enemy fire. His unidentified remains had been buried in an American cemetery in Belgium. In 2017, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency continued the work of identifying soldiers buried in Europe using anthropological and mitochondrial DNA analysis.

They identified Lt. Pezzella's remains this past April, and notified his extended family, now spread across the country.

This Friday, Lt. Pezzella's remains will be received at Logan Airport by officers from the Massachusetts State Police and National Guard. On Tuesday morning, he will be honored with services at Brasco & Sons Memorial Chapels in Waltham before being buried at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne.

We will post more details about Tuesday's services at [newtonma.gov/veterans](https://newtonma.gov/veterans) as they become available.

I know Newton's Mayor Paul Goddard would have stood by Lt. Pezzella's grave as a military trumpeter played taps had he been identified and brought home as a hero when he died all those years ago. On Tuesday, I will stand in Mayor Goddard's place to honor this brave Newtonian who gave his life for his country.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

**P.S. Needham Street from Winchester Street to Tower Road will be closed to traffic** starting at 8:00 p.m. this Sunday, Oct. 22 through 6:00 a.m. the following morning, Monday, Oct. 23 for MassDOT contractors to complete paving this section of road. Newton Police will be at the site to direct traffic to detour the work area and message boards and signs will display up-to-date info.

The work is part of the State's Newton-Needham Corridor Project that is bringing much needed improvements to Needham Street. This includes better turn lanes, continuous sidewalks, new crosswalks, state of the art traffic signals, better bus stops, safer bike lanes, and renovation and widening of the existing bridge over the Charles.

Below is an overview of the remaining work this year:

- Winchester St./Needham St. to Centre St. – Final paving scheduled for next week. Final striping to be completed in the following weeks. Area will be completed by the end of this year.
- Winchester St./Needham St. to South Meadow Brook – Intermediate pavement has been completed. Sidewalk and driveway installation will continue in the section this year as long as weather permits. Work will be completed and final paving in the spring of 2024.
- Needham St./South Meadow Brook to Oak St. – No MassDOT work scheduled on this portion of the roadway currently. Underground utility work is ongoing.
- Charlemont St. – Full depth reconstruction from now through the end of the year.

- Charles River Bridge – Reconstruction ongoing and will continue through this year and the rest of the winter. Intermittent lane closures for this work.

The project is slated to be completed next summer, 2024.

P.P.S. Green Your Halloween at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual **Pumpkin Smash** on Saturday, Nov. 4 outside City Hall, 1000 Comm Ave., from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Come fling, throw and smash your pumpkin in various ways, including with machines made by the Newton Ligerbots. It's a ton of fun, and all the orange pumpkin from this family friendly event will be composted and turned "green," creating valuable amendment for our soil and reducing waste from greenhouses gases. Save time and [Pre-register for the event](#). (Same day registration is also available.)

P.P.P.S. **The Yale Whiffenpoofs**, the country's oldest collegiate a cappella group, will perform on Saturday, Oct. 28 at 5:30 p.m. at The Eliot Church in Newton, 474 Centre St. This year's fourteen member group includes Newton South graduate Ethan Kopf (Class of 2020). They'll sing two 40-minute sets with a mixture of old Yale tunes, jazz standards and hits from across the decades. Click [here](#) for more information and to purchase tickets. (The Princeton Footnotes a cappella group joined us for Harvest Fair last weekend.)

P.P.P.P.S. Join the Friends of **Newton Free Library** this Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 21 and 22 as they transform the entire library into an **18-hole mini golf course** with greens and holes winding through the stacks and down the spiral staircase. The *adults-only* event is on Saturday starting at 6:00 p.m. *Family* tee times are on Sunday beginning at 9:30 a.m. Click [here](#) for more information and to buy tickets.

P.P.P.P.P.S. Newton Community Pride is once again honoring a Newton resident for their accomplishments in the arts at **Meet the Maestro with Boston Pops Conductor Keith Lockhart** on Wednesday, Nov. 8. The event starting at 6:30 p.m. at the Showcase SuperLux at The Street in Chestnut Hill will be moderated by NPR Co-Host Jim Braude. Click [here](#) for more information and to buy tickets.

P.P.P.P.P.S. Come be swept off your feet with the **ballroom dancing duo Dance Caliente** who are performing and teaching the Waltz, Argentine Tango and more dances on Thursday, Oct. 26 from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. at the Hyde Community Center, 90 Lincoln St. Thanks go to the Newton Cultural Council for sponsoring this event. RSVP is requested (not required). Call 617-796-1675, stop by the front desk at 20 Hartford St. or send your name, telephone number and email address to [seniorprograms@newtonma.gov](mailto:seniorprograms@newtonma.gov).

Past P.S.s happening soon:

P.S. Historic Newton will present the original documentary film **An Uncommon Education: The Allen School** about the pioneering educational experiment in

West Newton during the mid-1800s this Saturday, Oct. 21 at 7 p.m. at the Allen Center, 35 Webster Street, West Newton. Tickets are on sale [here](#).

P.P.S. Students across Newton invite us all to “purple out” and join them in wearing purple on Friday, Oct. 27 to spotlight the intersection of domestic violence and gun safety during **Domestic Violence Awareness Month**.



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