

Monday, Jan. 1, 2024

## Mayor's Newton Update

*This afternoon, as we begin the celebration of our City's 150<sup>th</sup> year, City Councilors, School Committee members and I gathered to begin a new year serving the community we love. I had the honor of administering to them the Oath of Office as they begin a new term.*



*Here are my remarks:*

President Laredo, Vice President Kalis, President Emeritus Baker, City Councilors, Chair Brezski, Vice-Chair Prenner, members of the School Committee, Congressman Auchincloss and District Director Dana Hanson, esteemed clergy, family, friends, and fellow residents of our good City of Newton.

Happy New Year!

Today, we pass the torch to a newly formed City Council and School Committee. To each of you who took the solemn oath of office to serve our City, a heartfelt thank you for your service.

Welcome, in particular, to our six new Councilors – Councilor Bixby, Councilor Block, Councilor Farrell, Councilor Getz, Councilor Lobovits, Councilor Micley – and our two new School Committee members – School Committee Member Davenport and School Committee Member Greenstein.

Together we have the privilege, the honor and the responsibility to work together on behalf of a remarkable community at a unique time in our history.

We are living – and we are serving – during a complicated, unsettled time.

At my first inauguration as Mayor six years ago today, I took the oath knowing full well that there would be challenges and difficult decisions ahead. I don't think any of us could have imagined the complexities that we've all navigated – the pandemic, economic turmoil, a nationwide racial reckoning, discontent and divisiveness, democracy challenged at home and abroad, hatred and antisemitism, and terrible tragedies in our community, all of which have tested our resilience.

We are gathered here today knowing that in Newton, we have persevered and are strengthened by our deep sense of commitment and compassion. As Cardinal O'Malley so eloquently said in his Christmas homily, "In a world where there is still no room at the Inn, we must commit ourselves to a compassionate response for the poor, the sick, the refugee, the prisoner, the stranger, the homeless, those who are of a different color, speak a different language, those who embrace another ideology."

We know we face challenges – housing, education, inequity, healthcare, climate change, transportation, finances.

Every day I have the privilege of working with some of the brightest and most committed individuals in municipal government, both the group taking the oath of office today and those who chose to work for our City. Together we are ready to meet the challenges.

As the Mayor of Newton and a proud Newtonian, I stand today on the first day of this new year confident about the future of this City we call home.

We are doing so much to move our City forward:

- We're breaking ground on a new center for our older residents, the people who helped build our City.
- We're constructing new school buildings. Less than a year ago, we opened the first facility ever built specifically for three and four year olds, the Newton Early Childhood Program; we just broke ground on the new home for the Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School community and received \$21 million in state funds to support the project; we are completing the designs for brand new Countryside and Franklin School buildings and an addition to Horace Mann, thanks to Newton voters last March and the Newton Retirement Board this past summer. This is the most aggressive school capital investment period Newton has seen in many, many decades.
- We'll upgrade facilities for our police officers and firefighters; the funding request is on the Council agenda today.
- We're renovating parks and tennis courts and adding lights and turf fields at our high schools.
- We'll be swimming at two new pools and splashing in a new spray park at the Gath complex this summer.
- We're fostering community and joy by investing in arts and culture and supporting a wonderful panoply of non-profits, who can utilize the new community auditorium at 150 Jackson Road in a few years.
- We're making our roads and sidewalks safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers.

- We're paving roads – lots of them – 53 during this past paving season with many more on tap for this coming construction season.
- We're greening our City by becoming one of 10 communities in Massachusetts requiring electrification for new buildings, with Newton Power Choice, with clean energy requirements for buildings, with coaching on heat pumps and electric vehicles, and with a building emissions reduction and disclosure ordinance.
- We're planting more trees and, thanks to our Urban Forester Marc Welch and the City Council, we updated our tree ordinance just a few weeks ago to better preserve our tree canopy and make sure we live up to our moniker, the Garden City.
- We're opening our doors. The Armory in West Newton will have 43 units of permanently affordable housing. We'll soon welcome new families to transitional housing on Washington Street at the FamilyAid West Newton Family Navigation Center. We've updated our zoning so many of our village centers can have a better mix of housing, shops, restaurants and public transit.
- We're pushing for better public transportation, working with State Rep. Kay Khan, Senator Cindy Creem and our partners at the State House and Congressman Jake Auchincloss, our Senators and our partners in Washington to get the critical final funding for three new commuter rail stations in West Newton, Auburndale and Newtonville to bring fully accessible, more frequent and reliable service to our City.
- We're committed to addressing the needs of our students and educators in the Newton Public Schools and supporting the vision of our new Superintendent, increasing the NPS operating budget, tapping into surplus funds and investing in facilities and curriculum while paving the way for a pay raise for our amazing educators and a fair and sustainable contract with their union, the Newton Teachers Association.

We begin a yearlong celebration of the City of Newton's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday today.

Thanks to great research by our Director of Historic Newton Lisa Dady, it appears lively debate is in our DNA. One hundred and fifty years ago, William Jackson and former Governor William Claflin, believing a new City government would raise taxes and breed corruption, strongly preferred annexation with Boston. James F. C. Hyde led a counter group in favor of a change to a city, preferring a smaller, more local democracy. Several feisty town meetings ensued. A small contingent in Newton Corner were so opposed to the City government model, they threatened to secede if Newton voted "yes" to become a standalone City.

A special town meeting was called. Newton voters – all white men as was the law at the time – overwhelmingly approved the change to a City.

On January 5, 1874, the City of Newton was officially born and history was made as our first mayor, James Hyde, took the oath of office. Hyde's inaugural address draws on themes that we all recognize today – 150 years later. Hyde called for additional space at the high school, a better water supply, a Superintendent of Streets, improved street-lighting, and ordinances to prevent the construction of improper buildings as well as dangerous ones. In the next few years, he advocated for the Newton Free Library, a Newton Centre Tree Club, and better public transit with more railroad lines.

Newton is a city defined by full throttled debate, where strong minded residents voice their opinions and committed elected officials marshal the resources to achieve our common good.

In Newton, we are also a city where neighbors know one another. Those relationships and the connections between residents are what political scientists call “social capital” – individuals engaging for common ends. Social capital is something that Robert Putnam, an esteemed American political scientist, says is essential to a democratic society.

As we celebrate 150 years of our thriving Newton democracy, we're blessed with an abundance of social capital. We have intense, spirited debate. We care passionately about our common goals.

I know this is a time of promise and I am confident that President Laredo, Chair Brezski and I are all committed to work together respectfully as we discuss, deliberate and debate the best path forward.

I love this community. I am grateful for the privilege of being Mayor.

Here's to 2024 and a happy, healthy and hopeful new year.

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller



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