

Friday, Feb. 9, 2024

Mayor's Newton Update

NPS Moving Forward

It's great that our students and teachers returned to classrooms on Monday morning.

This has been an incredibly difficult time for our youngsters, parents/caregivers, teachers and staff at NPS, and the community. People are rightfully reaching out with questions about how we ended up with schools closed for 11 days, what led to the resolution last Friday, and the impact going forward on School & City services and the fabric of our community.



A competitive and sustainable four year contract (rather than the usual three years) was ratified by the Newton Teachers Association (NTA) on Sunday and unanimously by the Newton School Committee (of which I am a member) last night.

Here are a few key provisions:

- Cost of living increases (COLA) will go up annually in each of the four years by 2.5%, 2.5%, 3.0% and then a blended average of 3.625% for year four, or 12% by the end of the four-year contract for a large majority of our 2,000 plus NPS employees (1,369 teachers in Unit A; 78 administrators, in Unit B; and 30 staff members in Unit E). The COLAs are in addition to approximately 4% annual "step" increases in pay for approximately half of the staff who are earlier in their careers.
- Increased pay for all of the 628 aides and behavioral therapists in Unit C, with a focus on entry level employees.
- Increased planning time for elementary staff being explored through collaborative committee work.
- Added social workers at the elementary level (part of Superintendent Nolin's initiatives prior to the strike).
- Changed healthcare copays.
- Increased parental leave.

Click [here](#) to see a Contract Highlights Slide Presentation prepared by the Newton Public Schools, click [here](#) to see the Return to Work Agreement, and

[here](#) to see the Memorandum of Understanding between Newton School Committee/NPS and the NTA.

Throughout the negotiations, as Mayor I focused on serving our students, honoring priorities of teachers, allowing Superintendent Anna Nolin to move forward with important initiatives, and working within our financial framework so that the contract would be sustainable for taxpayers with no layoffs in our schools or City departments. Each of these goals were achieved.

The funding that enabled us to achieve these goals was almost entirely available to the School Committee's negotiating team before the decision by the NTA to go on strike. They used that funding in their contract proposals. In December 2023, I finalized the plan for allocating additional funding over five years from one-time Overlay Surplus monies to NPS. Along with a 3.6% increase in the NPS operating budget, this provided an overall increase to the Newton Public Schools of more than 5% for our next school year. I bolstered that funding with an additional \$3 million in one-time funds, known as Free Cash, before and during the strike to support the Superintendent's priorities..

Over the next weeks and months, we will need to reflect, reconnect, and reengage as a community to begin the process of rebuilding trust.

As our Superintendent Anna Nolin implored all of us in the Newton community at last night's School Committee meeting: please don't retreat at this important time. We need to seize this moment of hurt, and recommit to each other, rather than retreat to separate camps. Let's be united in our support for our community – from our students to our seniors, from Auburndale and Nonantum to Newton Centre and Upper Falls, for people of all backgrounds and traditions – and engage with respect.

Do you have suggestions on ways to reflect, reconnect and reengage? Please email me and our Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion, Hattie Kerwin Derrick, at reengageNewton@newtonma.gov.

I know Newton continues to be one of the best places to raise a family, look out for our neighbors, wrestle with the challenges of our times, and age in place.

MBTA Applies for First Phase of Funding for New Commuter Rail Stations

Along with Congressman Jake Auchincloss, State Rep. Kay Khan, Senator Cindy Creem, and City Councilors (past and present), I've long been pushing for the MBTA to upgrade our three Commuter Rail stations in Newtonville, West Newton, and Auburndale to make them accessible and to reconfigure the platforms for more frequent service.

We secured all the design funds. We have been seeking the federal and state dollars to pay for the construction (now estimated at \$200 million plus for all three).

Last year, the MBTA tried to secure grant funding towards the construction of the three stations through the federal All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP). The MBTA was unsuccessful.

I visited with General Manager Eng in December to urge the MBTA to reapply for an ASAP grant.

The MBTA said “yes,” using a different approach that they believe will be more successful.

They are separating the Newton Commuter Rail Stations Accessibility project into three phases with Phase I being the Newtonville station. They submitted an ASAP application on January 30 for accessibility improvements and a reconfigured platform for the Newtonville Station with a commitment to reconstructing the additional two stations after completing Newtonville.

The MBTA is in the process of scheduling a community update, most likely on Thursday, March 28 in the evening on zoom. They will discuss their updated design for Newtonville (a center, accessible platform rather than two platforms), a timeline (five years for construction if the ASAP grant is successful), and the construction cost estimate (likely \$50 to \$60 million). Between the remaining funding available in the MBTA's CIP and the ASAP grant, the MBTA thinks they would have the full construction monies available and can move forward immediately with finalizing the design and construction for the initial Phase I Newtonville station.

Are you wondering (and I was) why the MBTA picked Newtonville for the first one to upgrade? The terrain in Newtonville allows for one central platform which is less expensive than building two platforms. (West Newton and Auburndale will require two platforms.) The MBTA is under a tremendous amount of cost pressure right now and can only commit to the \$50M - \$60M in investment currently with the ASAP grant covering approximately 80% of the construction cost.

While I would have preferred the full funding now for all three stations, I'm hopeful that this strategy will be successful and we will move forward more quickly with a funded plan for improving the first commuter rail station for Newton. Please know that I'll keep advocating for all three stations.

The Needham Street bridge over the Charles River at the border between Newton and Needham will be closed for eight hours next Thursday night, Feb. 15. Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) contractors will be installing precast sidewalk panels as part of the \$43 million Needham Street Improvement Project.

Work to widen the bridge and improve Needham Street to better accommodate cars, bikes, public transportation, and pedestrians is expected to be completed by MassDOT this summer.

Questions or concerns? Email the MassDOT Project team [here](#). Find more information about the project [here](#) and sign up for project updates and advisories

[here](#).

Ballots Being Mailed for March 5 Presidential Primary

Newton's City Clerk's office mailed out the first batch of ballots last weekend for the Tuesday, March 5 Presidential Primary in Massachusetts.

Ballots will continue to be sent to everyone who requested to vote by mail in the Democratic, Republican or Libertarian primaries. Voters will be choosing the party nominees for President as well as state and party ward committee members.

If you haven't already received a mail-in ballot and want to vote by mail, click [here](#) to fill out an application, or click [here](#) for instructions on how to request a ballot by mail or in person. The deadline to request a ballot is in two and half weeks, Tuesday, Feb. 27.

Ballots must be signed and returned to the Newton City Clerk's Office by mail, or in one of two secure drop boxes located outside the front door of City Hall. Ballots can also be dropped off in person at the City Clerk's Office on the first floor of City Hall. To be counted, mail-in ballots must be returned by 8:00 p.m. when polls close on election day, Tuesday, March 5. (Please give plenty of time for the U.S. Post Office to get your ballot back to City Hall.)

Voting in a Primary

Each of the three recognized political parties in Massachusetts – Democratic, Republican and Libertarian – hold their own primary and separate ballots are printed for each. (Click [here](#) to see sample ballots for each party.)

In Massachusetts, all voters can participate in the primary. If you're registered in one party, however, you can only vote in that party's primary.

Unenrolled voters and members of "political designations" (click [here](#) for more information on political designations) can choose a party ballot when voting in person and as they check-in at a polling location. Choosing a ballot will not result in you being enrolled in that party.

Voters who are not enrolled in a party who want to vote by mail must select a party primary on their Vote by Mail application.

Find more information about voting in the primary [here](#).

In-Person Voting on Election Day

Polls will be open across Newton on Tuesday, March 5 from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Not sure where you vote? Click [here](#). Click [here](#) for a map of polling locations in Newton.

Recap of Important Dates

Saturday, Feb. 24 at 5:00 p.m. – the last day to register to vote or change party affiliation.

Tuesday, Feb. 27 at 5:00 p.m. – the last day to apply for Vote by Mail.

Saturday, Feb. 24 through Friday, March 1 – Early in-person voting at City Hall.

Tuesday, March 5 – Election Day. Polls are open from 7:00 am – 8:00 pm.

Tuesday, March 5 – All vote by mail ballots must be received by U.S. Postal Service or in the two drop boxes at City Hall by 8:00 pm. We cannot accept late ballots.

School Enrollment

The Newton Public Schools projects enrollment for next year to decline by 0.6%, or 74 students, from a total of 11,596 this year to 11,522 next year. This continues a trend of declining enrollment in Newton and across Massachusetts over the past six years.

Newton Public Schools Chief of Data and Research Dr. Katy Hogue presented an abridged enrollment report at last night's School Committee meeting. Click [here](#) to read the abridged enrollment analysis. The complete Enrollment Analysis Report book will be shared by NPS later this month.

The projected enrollment varies by level. High school enrollment is projected to increase by 0.9% (+35 students) next year while elementary school enrollment is projected to decline by 2.2% (-108 students). Our four middle schools are projected to remain stable with a difference between this year and next of just one fewer student.

The five-year enrollment projections through 2028-29 expect overall enrollment declines as larger current classes graduate and smaller kindergarten classes enter. (The five-year projections include students expected to enroll from new residential developments.)

The graph below shows more than 45 years of enrollment in the Newton Public Schools, from 1975 to 2023, as well as projections from fall 2024 through 2028. The graph illustrates the trend of sustained increases during the 1990's, then a six-year period of stability, followed by a growth trend of thirteen years, the decline over the past five years (including the 2020 COVID drop), and the projected decline for the next five years. By 2028, enrollment returns Newton Public Schools to that of the late 1990's / early 2000's.

A Demographic Study Report on enrollment prepared by Cropper GIS and McKibben Demographics is being presented to the School Committee on Monday, Feb. 26. Find the zoom link at the NPS [website](#) under the School Committee tab.

After 42 years, Auburndale's gift shop, Just Next Door, closed its doors last Saturday.

Owner Amy Shih helped us celebrate birthdays, holidays, and special occasions. She recognized the important role small businesses play in the fabric of our community and always gave her time and resources to make Newton a better place.

Creative, warm, and caring, Amy's impact on Newton is immeasurable and she will be greatly missed.

Join us for a last hurrah for Amy. Stop by the Auburndale Community Library, 375 Auburn St., tomorrow, Saturday, Feb. 10 from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. to celebrate and thank Amy for all she's done for Auburndale and for Newton.

We Want to Hear From Older Newtonians

We are moving forward with the construction of the Newton Center for Active Living, NewCAL, which will open next summer of 2025. We need to hear from our older residents to help us plan for the future programs and services at the new building.

A team from the University of Massachusetts Boston is helping us conduct a community needs assessment.

While the UMass team sent a survey to a random group of 5,000 residents, we encourage everyone 60 and over to participate. Find more information about the survey at newtonma.gov/seniors.

If you didn't already receive a survey, click [here](#) to fill out an online survey. Or, drop by the current Senior Center at 20 Hartford Street in Newton Highlands or call the front desk at 617-796-1675.

The deadline for completing the survey is next Friday, Feb. 16.

Building "Trust, Transparency and Understanding" With NPD

Join Newton Police officers during the month of March for a workshop geared towards promoting trust, transparency and understanding between members of the Newton Police Department and Newtonians.

Choose from 18 workshop sessions on nine different days in various locations in Newton to listen, learn and better understand one another as we work together to foster a more just and united Newton.

NPD is presenting the workshops in partnership with a national nonprofit, Dedication to Community (D2C), which provides forums and community events to improve our collective understanding of policing and to foster belonging, reconciliation, and unity.

Honoring Captain William Spalding

The innovative leadership of Newton Police Captain Billy Spalding who passed away in November brought us this opportunity. He secured the grant funding for this project shortly before his death. Captain Spalding believed deeply that strong and meaningful relationships between police and the community they serve are essential.

How to Get Involved

Each workshop session is four hours long. D2C instructors impart life principles through personal stories and interactive sessions, modeling communication and interpersonal skills which participants learn and practice through authentic dialogue, small group work, and guided individual reflection and presentation. There is no cost to attend and light refreshments will be provided. Seating is limited and pre-registration for the workshop is required.

Click [here](#) to see workshop dates, times, locations and to register.

As the **Year of the Dragon** begins tomorrow, I wish everyone a healthy, happy, joyful, and prosperous Lunar New Year.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Tickets are on sale for the **Tanglewood Marionettes production of Cinderella** on a new date, Saturday, Feb. 24. The performance in the War Memorial at City Hall, 1000 Comm Ave., begins at 2:00 p.m. Tickets are \$6 per person in advance, and \$10 at the door if seats are available. Click [here](#) for more information.



P.P.S. Do you know someone who should be honored for their work on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community? The Newton Human Rights Commission (HRC) is seeking nominees for its annual **LGBTQ+ Pride event** taking place at City Hall

on Tuesday, June 4 at 5:30 p.m. Please click [here](#), fill out the form and submit a nomination to hrc@newtonma.gov by Friday, April 26.

P.P.S. Craft the perfect valentine this Sunday Feb. 11 (and still be home for the Super Bowl) at **Historic Newton's Vintage Valentines** afternoon. All materials for creative, loving, and fun valentines will be provided for the all-age friendly crafting session at the Durant-Kendrick House, 286 Waverley Ave., from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Looking for an adult only workshop? Join Historic Newton on Tuesday, Feb. 13 for a 21+ valentine workshop also at the Durant-Kendrick House. Click [here](#) for more info and to register.



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller | 1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, MA 02459

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