

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Mayor's Newton Update

HHS Commissioner Walsh to Retire

With deep gratitude I want to let you know that our terrific Commissioner of Health and Human Services, Linda Walsh, has decided to retire in June. Linda has served our City admirably for more than 37 years with wisdom, dedication, and compassion.

Linda, a Registered Nurse, began her career in Newton as a public health nurse during the summer of 1986. For decades and with seven promotions, Linda has been our “go to” person on issues ranging from public health, school health, emergency health and mental health, as well as restaurant health and safety, pest control (a.k.a., rats), employee wellness, human rights and so much more.

During her tenure, Newton expanded the number of school nurses from just seven to at least one in every school today. With her help, Newton led the state in establishing a robust Automated External Defibrillator (AED) program, placing these lifesaving devices throughout our public buildings. With Linda, we have significantly expanded our ability to link Newtonians of all ages to support for mental health crises, substance use disorders, and domestic violence situations. She has been a key member of our Emergency Management System team, a unique collaboration between Newton Health and Human Services, Police, Fire, our ambulance service provider, and Newton-Wellesley Hospital, providing quality assurance and continuous improvement to our 911 responses.

Linda's brilliance and deep understanding of the science behind public health policies combined with a keen ability to transfer that knowledge into language we can all comprehend helped us enormously during the pandemic. Linda had planned to retire in 2020. But as the pandemic surrounded us, she stayed at her post of Deputy Commissioner, faithfully, effectively and calmly guiding residents, employees, employers, and first responders through the many stages of the pandemic.

(Photo: With then Deputy Commissioner Walsh at the emergency warming center set up at City Hall during the 2018 Boston Marathon.)

Linda linked arms with HHS Commissioner Deb Youngblood to update and operationalize our Emergency Management system over the course of a few short weeks. Linda adapted quickly in the face of continually changing information, taking the lead in working with all our City departments to help us reframe how we did business and keep our government functioning well during those difficult months.

In November 2021 when Commissioner Youngblood decided to step away from municipal government to take a job leading a local non-profit, Linda stepped forward to be our Commissioner when public health officials across our nation stepped back from the pressure and strife of those responsibilities.

Over her long career, Linda's compassion and leadership both publicly and privately has helped ease our community's pain during times of great tragedy. This was true again most recently when HHS organized meetings for community members with mental health professionals in the aftermath of this summer's murders. Helping people through challenging circumstances are what Linda deems her most rewarding experiences in Newton.

She is a remarkable human being and public servant. We will miss Linda's sagacity, experience, collaborative nature and creativity, as well as her unmistakable and infectious laugh echoing through the halls of City Hall. With my heartfelt thanks, affection and respect, I wish Linda the best when she begins her next chapter this summer.

More Progress on Roads

As temperatures become consistently warm, our street crews will be resuming paving operations.

During last year's road construction season, Newton's Department of Public Works addressed 53 roads and this year 63 more are on tap.

We are repairing a mix of busy, high volume streets as well as quiet, low volume neighborhood roads.

DPW staff selected the roads using the City's Pavement Condition Index (PCI) analysis. The condition index is derived from a radar mounted on a vehicle that drives every single road in Newton. (DPW's contractor will be rescanning all City roadways this fall to update the PCI for each road.) The PCI lists the condition of all roadways in Newton on a 0 to 100 scoring system (0 being a roadway in complete failure, 100 being a new one). You can find the PCI of your road by clicking [here](#).

Over the past six years, the Pavement Condition Index of Newton's overall road network has risen from a 62 to a 72. While there is obviously a long way to go, we are making steady and real improvement, helped by paving major roadways such as Parker, Dedham, Washington, Crafts, Watertown, Chestnut, and Comm Ave.

Our planned paving schedule for this year concentrates on neighborhood roads with a PCI under 53 and major thoroughfares that need preventative maintenance to avoid falling into disrepair and/or major work.

DPW is using four types of repair and maintenance road techniques. They use several criteria to determine which treatment is used on which road. The criteria include the condition of the existing road, the travel volume, the cost/benefit analysis, as well as whether sewer, water or utility upgrades are planned.

Maintenance Overlay: Covers the existing pavement with a new layer of pavement. Pothole patching and other pavement repairs are done prior to installation of the new surface. Maintenance overlay will be used on 51 residential roads with low traffic volume. Cast iron structures along the road (such as manholes, catch basins and water and gas) are reset to meet the new pavement elevation when required.

2024 Maintenance Overlay Streets:

Abbott Street
Alden Street
Alexander Road
Allison Street
Andrew Street
Ballard Street
Barnes Road
Bemis Road
Bonaire Circle
Braeburn Road
Brookdale Road
Cappy Circle
Carlton Road
Charles River Terrace
Chaske Avenue
Clinton Place
Comm Park West
Crofton Road
Dalby Street
Elliot Memorial Road
Ellis Road
Great Meadow Road
Green Park
Hillside Road
Laurel Street
Leeward Road
Linder Terrace
Magnolia Avene
Manhattan Terrace
Marla Circle
Milton Avenue
Norwood Avenue (Newton Centre)
Park Drive
Parker Road
Proctor Street
Roland Street
Rosalie Road

Sharon Avenue
Shuman Circle
Stoneleigh Road
Town House Drive
Treeland Circle
Truman Road
Voss Terrace
Wesley Street
Westgate Road
White Oak Road
Wilde Road
Willard Street
Winona Street
Woodchester Drive

Mill and Overlay: Grind 0.5 to 2 inches from the existing road surface and then resurface. Mill and overlay will be used on 10 streets, usually ones with moderate and/or high traffic volumes.

2024 Mill and Overlay Streets and/or Sections of Streets:

Arnold Road
Auburndale Avenue
Homer Street
Lincoln Road
Meadowbrook Road
Roosevelt Road
Theodore Road
Walnut Street
Waltham Street
Valentine Street

Cold-in-Place Asphalt Recycling: This pavement rehabilitation process involves grinding, pulverizing, and mixing 3 to five inches of the existing poor-quality pavement and mixing that material with an asphalt emulsion binder which is then put back on the road and compacted.

Sections of 2 streets – Austin Street from Lowell Avenue to Chestnut Street, and Albemarle Road from Crafts Street to Watertown Street – will be done with the cold-in-place asphalt recycling technique.

Bonded Wearing Course: A high performance thin hot mix overlay which provides a new paved wearing surface, seals the existing pavement, preserves curbs, and creates a high skid resistance surface. Bonded wearing course will be used on 1 section of street – Watertown Street from Albemarle to Walnut – a treatment which was previously used on the rest of Watertown Street.

A few more roads may also be added to the list in the coming weeks.

Unfortunately, sometimes weather and underground utility infrastructure work by National Grid or another utility company sometimes delay our scheduled paving

projects.

City of Newton Receives Best Bond Rating and Low Borrowing Costs

The City of Newton once again received a “Aaa – Stable” rating - the highest possible - from Moody’s Investors Service.

That rating immediately made a positive impact.

We issued a \$28,160,000 30-year general obligation bond (including refunded 2014 bonds) at a highly advantageous net interest rate of 3.31%. A large number of banks bid on our bonds (11). We are saving a total of \$1,080,629 over the remaining life of the refunded bonds. We also issued a \$50,075,000, 360-day bond anticipation note (a.k.a., a BAN) for a low net interest rate of 3.18%.

The bond proceeds will provide funding for a portion of the rebuilds of the Franklin and Countryside Elementary Schools, the Gath Pool and athletic fields. The BAN proceeds will be used for construction costs for the new home for the Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School at 150 Jackson Road and for the Cooper Center for Active Living in Newtonville.

Maintaining our Aaa bond rating is critically important as it ensures the City receives the lowest interest rates on the bonds we issue which in turn saves the City and our taxpayers’ money.

When rating us as Aaa-Stable, Moody’s wrote about Newton:

“The Aaa issuer rating reflects a strong and diverse economy within the greater Boston metro area with high resident income over 200% of the US median and wealth as measured by full(equalized) value per capita of over \$400,000.

The rating also incorporates a healthy financial position bolstered by diligent and forward-looking fiscal management.

Although the city’s available reserves and net unrestricted assets are large on a nominal basis; as a percent of revenue the amount is equal to 24.9% as of the fiscal 2023 audit, which is well below the state (37.9%) and US (60.2%) medians for the highest rating category.

Newton’s long-term liabilities are likely to remain manageable given taxpayer support for certain debt exclusions to the levy limit and the city’s aggressive funding commitment towards pension and OPEB liabilities while maintaining a modest fixed costs ratio.

The stable outlook reflects the expectation that the economy and taxpayers will continue to support the city’s financial position with satisfactory reserves and liquidity while managing a large capital plan and continuing to reduce the unfunded pension and OPEB liabilities.”

Ensuring the City's financial strength reflects my commitment to Newton's sustainability, now and for the long term. I will continue to invest in our schools, infrastructure, services and programs, tackle our significant long-term liabilities for our retirees, and maintain our financial health and economic stability.

Fun to join Senate President Karen Spilka and women leaders from across Massachusetts at her annual Galentine's Day gathering this week (postponed because of the faux storm in February). We had fun celebrating and supporting women during Women's History Month.

(Photo: Top, with, from left, District Attorney Marian Ryan, Gov. Maura Healey, Newton Dems Chair Sharon Stout and State Sen. Cindy Creem. Bottom, with, from left, Melrose Mayor Jen Grigoraitis, Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll, Amesbury Mayor Kassandra Gove, and Medford Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn.)

Electrification Ordinance Before City Council on March 18

Newton's electrification ordinance got a unanimous "yes" vote on Monday from the City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee.

The proposed ordinance will be in front of the full City Council on Monday, March 18.

The electrification ordinance requires all new construction and "major renovations" to use electricity rather than be powered by gas or oil. Waiver and exemption provisions are included. For example, outdoor gas grills and outdoor heating appliances that are not connected to the building's natural gas or propane infrastructure are allowed, as are emergency generators.

If approved by the City Council, Newton will join Acton, Aquinnah, Arlington, Brookline, Cambridge, Concord, Lexington, and Lincoln, which have similar requirements. All of these cities and towns will be participating in the Massachusetts Ten Communities Program for electrification. (All of New York State, as well as San Francisco, Seattle, Oakland, and Sacramento also have similar requirements.)

Why are we requiring new buildings and major renovations to be powered by electricity? Electricity can come from fossil free sources - for example, wind and solar. We can't clean the heating oil and gas we use for heating our buildings. New buildings and major renovations will be in place for decades and decades, and buildings account for about 64% percent of Newton's CO2 emissions. Thus, to move us off fossil fuels, we need new buildings and major renovations to electrify — the absolutely lowest-hanging fruit in terms of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

Reengage, Reconnect, and Celebrate

We're celebrating both Newton's 150th birthday and the 50th Annual Mayor's Community Breakfast in May. Importantly, this is a moment in history when these celebrations will help us reconnect, reengage and recommit to our community.

Please save the date to join us for the Mayor's Community Breakfast on Wednesday, May 22, from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. at the UMass Amherst Mt. Ida Campus in Newton.

Started by Mayor Theodore Mann in 1974, I invite residents, community groups, businesspeople, public officials, and clergy of all faiths to come together with the Harmony Foundation, the Newton Interfaith Clergy Association, the Rotary Club of Newton and the Newton Public Schools for a morning of camaraderie and community, music and inspiring ideas.

Check newtonma.gov/mayor in the coming weeks for a link to purchase tickets.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Calling all students in Grades 7 through 12 interested in exploring career options:

- Join Newton Youth Services at the Newton Free Library, 330 Homer St., for the second **Career Exploration Speaker Series** on Sunday, March 23 from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. to hear from people who work in public health, a NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) nurse, a nurse educator, an X-Ray technician, and more.
- Stop by **Career Pathways** to meet representatives from Newton Fire and Police Departments, Mass General Brigham Hospitals, Village Bank, MassBioEd, trade unions, and many more (presented by Newton Youth Services in partnership with the Newton Public Schools and MassHire Metro/West) on Wednesday, March 27 from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. at Newton South High School

P.P.S. The men of the Highland Glee Club are donning their kilts for an afternoon of **Celtic melodies and traditional Irish pipes** this Saturday, March 16 starting at 3:00 p.m. at the City Hall War Memorial, 1000 Commonwealth Ave. Click [here](#) for more information and to purchase tickets in advance.

P.P.P.S. Good job Newtonians - We **diverted 97,820 pounds of textiles from our trash** in 2023 by dropping, clothes, shoes, purses and more into Helpsy bins. Click [here](#) to see what items you can put in the Helpsy bins, and [here](#) to find the 10 bin locations in Newton.

P.P.P.P.S. What was Red Sox legend Johnny Pesky really like? How about Yaz? Hear about **Boston Red Sox players and managers** from recognized Boston baseball historian Herb Crehan at the Hyde Community Center, 90 Lincoln St., on Thursday, March 26 from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.. Crehan will

begin with Pesky and end with Alex Cora. RSVP is requested (but not required) to attend. Please stop by the Front Desk of Newton Senior Services at Brigham House, 20 Hartford Street, call 617-796-1675 or send your name, telephone number, and email address to our receptionists at seniorprograms@newtonma.gov.

P.P.P.P.S. Join the fun exploring outer space by soaring into the Children's Room at the Newton Free Library, 330 Homer St., until the end of March to design a felt solar system or go on a Stars of History Scavenger Hunt. Click [here](#) for more info.

P.P.P.P.P.S. Interested in becoming a housing discrimination tester? Suffolk University Law School's Housing Discrimination Testing Program (HDTP) is seeking individuals who are interested in being trained as housing discrimination testers. A tester attempts to rent an apartment and then provides an objective and unbiased report on the treatment received during the search. Testers are paid \$100 for in person tests, and \$50 for a phone test (where testers do not tour in person). The next training is Wednesday, March 27 from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at the Newton Free Library. To register, email Paige Stopperich at pstopperich@suffolk.edu.

Past P.S.s Happening Soon:

P.S. The deadline to submit an original three-line poem to **Haiku Newton** is Wednesday, March 20. Click [here](#) for more info.

P.P.S. Celebrate spring with the Newton Public Schools as part of **Walk, Ride or Roll to School** on Wednesday, March 20. Click [here](#) for more info.



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