

Monday, April 22, 2024

## Mayor's Newton Update



### A Choice on School Choice

The Newton School Committee is considering whether to opt in to the Inter-District School Choice program. The School Choice program opens our classroom doors to students who do not live in Newton by allowing a number of students, determined by the School Committee, from outside Newton in selected schools and grades through a lottery.

This is an important decision for the School Committee and for our community.

A hybrid Public Hearing is set for this Wednesday, April 24 at 5:30 p.m.; you can come in person at the Ed Center, 100 Walnut St., join on Zoom at <https://zoom.us/j/390017072>, or email your thoughts to the School Committee at [schoolcommittee@newton.k12.ma.us](mailto:schoolcommittee@newton.k12.ma.us).

School Choice was suggested as an option to consider by School Superintendent Dr. Anna Nolin for a number of reasons. It has the potential for some reimbursement for students of staff who don't live in Newton. It is a way to increase revenue. (When the Superintendent and the School Committee Chair recommended using the NPS Education Stabilization Fund over five years, it created a gap for three years of \$5 million which Superintendent Nolin said she understood and would address.) It fills classroom seats as Newton is experiencing declining enrollment. Click [here](#) for the Newton Public Schools' presentation on School Choice and scroll down for links to more information on the program, including answers to [frequently asked questions](#).

The Newton Public Schools have always opted out of the School Choice program. If we move forward and opt in, Newton will become the first among our "peer" school districts and among a very few in Greater Boston that accept students who do not live in the district, except for the METCO program. (Click [here](#) for a list of school districts participating in School Choice.)

The program requires a student's home district to pay the "receiving" district (in this case, Newton) \$5,000 per student annually. Once placed in a Newton school, the School Choice students would be guaranteed enrollment through graduation. (Transportation would be the responsibility of the student/student's family.) For example, should NPS opt in to School Choice and decide on, let's say allowing 100 students from outside of Newton to enroll for the 2024-25 school year, Newton would receive an additional \$500,000 to supplement the \$282.6 million FY2025 NPS budget.

NPS would have the discretion to decide how many, and in which grade, out-of-district School Choice students would initially be enrolled. For example, an elementary school grade with very small class sizes could be selected for a few or several students. If more students apply for spots than are available, the program requires students to be chosen randomly through a lottery process, without discrimination. No preferences (other than for siblings) are permitted. NPS would decide each year whether to add more School Choice students.

Notably, as part of the contract with the Newton Teachers Association, children of staff who live outside Newton are allowed to enroll in the Newton Public Schools at no cost to their home district. As part of the new contract, staff children are still guaranteed a spot in the Newton Public Schools. But if School Choice is approved, then staff must enter their children in the lottery and at least try to have their child covered by School Choice. If the student of an NPS educator “wins” the lottery, then Newton would receive a net amount of \$2,700 annually. (While NPS would receive \$5,000 annually for staff students enrolled, NPS would simultaneously lose come current Chapter 70 State funding. Currently, 127 students of NPS staff who live outside of Newton attend the Newton Public Schools.)

Special education expenses for School Choice students are partially reimbursed.

I and other members of the School Committee have raised many questions about School Choice. A vote is scheduled for Monday, May 6.

Click [here](#) to watch the most recent School Committee discussion about the issue at the April 1 meeting. The discussion on School Choice begins at the 2:02 mark. Click [here](#) to find information on the Newton Public Schools website related to School Choice.

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### **City Council Looking to Follow Brookline's Lead on Cigarette Buyers' Age**

Newton's City Councilors are considering an ordinance that would follow the lead of our neighbor, Brookline, and prohibit sales in Newton of tobacco or e-cigarette products to anyone born after Jan.1, 2004.

The proposal would not take existing rights away from anyone aged 21 and over who are currently able to buy legally these products in Newton. Instead, the new ordinance would create a “nicotine free generation” by preventing anyone not yet of the legal age of 21 to ever be able to purchase cigarettes or tobacco products here.

Brookline's Town Meeting passed a bylaw in 2020 that banned sales of tobacco products and e-cigarettes to anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 2000. The bylaw went into effect in 2021. Brookline became the first community in the country to restrict tobacco sales to anyone born in the 21st century. Last month, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court unanimously upheld the Brookline bylaw which had been challenged by a group of store owners.

Within weeks of the Supreme Judicial Court decision, the towns of Stoneham and Wakefield passed similar bylaws prohibiting sales to people born after Jan. 1, 2004, and Malden has held a public hearing on a similar ban.

According to WBUR, 10.4% of adults in Massachusetts reported current cigarette smoking in 2022.

There are currently 36 retailers in Newton permitted to sell tobacco products. Programs & Services Committee Chair Councilor Josh Krintzman said his committee has heard from some of them worried about the impact of the ordinance on their businesses. (Click [here](#) to watch the April 10 meeting on NewTV.) The Programs & Services Committee will continue to consider the proposal in future meetings.

Want to weigh in? Email the City Council at [citycouncil@newtonma.gov](mailto:citycouncil@newtonma.gov).

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## **Fires: Lithium-Ion Batteries ... Plus, Get Out, Stay Out and Call for Help**

*(Photo: Chief Gentile speaking to the press in the aftermath of a tragic house fire in Newton earlier this year.)*

It's been tough a period for Newton and the Newton Fire Department (NFD) as we've seen twelve structure fires in the last six months, and tragically, three people have lost their lives.

Fire Chief Greg Gentile stresses that fire investigators have seen no connection or common causes between these fires.

That said, NFD has seen an increase in the number of fires caused by lithium-ion batteries.

These batteries power everything from small devices such as e-cigarettes and smart phones to large ones like scooters, e-bikes and electric vehicles.

The Massachusetts Department of Fire Safety last week released new statewide tracking data that identified 50 fire incidents over the past six months across Massachusetts connected to lithium-ion batteries.

When used correctly, lithium-ion batteries are generally safe.

However, when overcharged, overheated, or abused, they can fail quickly and without warning, erupting in an explosion of toxic gases and flames that can ignite nearby furnishings.

Chief Gentile is sharing both overall fire safety tips as well as information on how to prevent lithium-ion battery fires:

- Be sure you have *working* smoke alarms installed on every level of your home.
- Use only the original equipment manufacturer's lithium-ion batteries and charging equipment designed specifically for your device. Aftermarket or generic batteries and chargers may be less expensive but are more likely to pose a hazard and are often what Newton fire fighters are seeing as the cause of battery-related fires.
- Store scooters and e-bikes outdoors, if possible. If you must store them indoors, keep them and their batteries clear of doors, windows, and stairways.
- Charge the battery directly from a wall outlet, not via an extension cord or power strip. Place it on a hard and stable surface, not a bed, couch, or pillow.
- Charge only one battery or device at a time and unplug it when it's fully charged. Don't allow a charged battery to continue charging.
- If you notice changes to the battery or the device, including damage, an unusual odor, a change in color, too much heat, change in shape, leaking, smoking, or not keeping a charge, stop using it right away.
- Don't put lithium-ion batteries in the trash; they should be recycled. Find a recycling drop-off location at [call2recycle.org/locator](https://www.call2recycle.org/locator).

Click [here](#) for more information on lithium-ion batteries.

If any type of fire occurs in your home:

- Help your loved ones and pets get out quickly,
- Close the door behind you,
- Call 911 for help,
- Never go back inside.

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## Celebrations and Remembrances

Newtonians come from a wonderful array of countries, ancestries, ethnicities and faith traditions.

As the month of Ramadan ended, I wish our Muslim neighbors a joyous Eid Al-Fitr. **Eid Mubarak...**

For Jewish neighbors sitting down for a Passover seder tonight, **Chag Pesach sameach...**

For Armenians remembering the genocide this Wednesday, we pause to remember with you the lives lost during the **Meds Yeghern** and pledge to redouble our efforts here in Newton to forge a community where all of us can live with safety, respect and inclusion.

*(Photo: Armenian Genocide survivor Markouhi Marderosian, the late grandmother of Ellen Ishkanian, Director of Community Communications in the Mayor's Office.)*

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### Thanking Newton's Dispatchers

*(Photo: With, from left, Dispatcher Mikhail Higley (holding a proclamation honoring Public Safety Telecommunications Week), Dispatcher Brian Marderosian, Captain Dennis Dowling, Dispatcher David Keefe and Superintendent George McMains.)*

Hundreds of times a day Newton's public safety telecommunicators – or dispatchers as they are affectionately known – answer emergency and non-emergency calls for assistance and information for police, fire and ambulance (as well as DPW and forestry issues, and more). They perform dispatch and crisis intervention, provide vital pre-arrival instructions for first responders, and they do it all while monitoring and operating computer and radio systems.

Join me in expressing deep gratitude and respect for our public safety telecommunicators – Newton's lifeline 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

By the way, we're also hiring emergency telecommunications dispatchers right now ... Interested in being on the first line of public safety in Newton? Join our team and click [here](#) for more information.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

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**P.S. Hammond Pond Parkway (southbound) from Beacon Street to Route 9 will be closed** today, April 22, through Wednesday, April 24, from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In other words, Hammond Pond Parkway is one-way towards Beacon Street for a few days. Southbound traffic on Hammond Pond Parkway will be detoured to Route 9 via Hammond Street, while northbound traffic will continue on Hammond Pond Parkway. The closure is part of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's \$11.3 million reconstruction of Hammond Pond Parkway.

P.P.S. Applications for the **2024 City of Newton YouthWorks Summer Internship Program** are open through Sunday, April 28. The program is for first generation to college, English language learners, low income, and students receiving academic or social support who live in Newton or attend the Newton Public Schools to have hands on experience through paid summer internships. Click [here](#) for more information.

P.P.P.S. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a charity that helps those in need in Newton, is holding a **clothing drive** this Sunday, April 28, from 9:00 a.m. to noon and 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The truck will be located in the parking lot of Our Lady Help of Christians Church, 573 Washington St. (but the parking lot entrance is along Adams Street). Accepted items include clothing of all types and all seasons, coats and shoes, as well as other textile items, such as linens, towels and blankets in clean and good condition. Questions? Email [svdp@sholnewton.org](mailto:svdp@sholnewton.org).

P.P.P.P.S. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) will hold a virtual public information meeting on preliminary work to **replace and rehabilitate a series of nine bridges at the I-90/I95 interchange in Newton and Weston**. Anticipated traffic impacts of the first stage of construction are among the topics to be discussed. The project is scheduled for completion in 2027. Click [here](#) for more information on the Thursday, April 25, at 6:00 p.m. virtual meeting and to register for the Zoom.

P.P.P.P.S. There's still time to sign up and volunteer for **NewtonServes** on Sunday, May 5. Register at [newtonma.gov/newtonserves](https://newtonma.gov/newtonserves).

P.P.P.P.P.S. Today we join billions of people around the globe to celebrate our earth, our planet, our home. On **Earth Day**, join me in thanking the dedicated, determined Newtonians fighting for our planet's survival.

*(Photo: With members of Green Newton at Earth Day celebrations yesterday at Newton North High School.)*

*(Photo: Couldn't resist sharing a photo of my grandsons Henry and Jeremiah celebrating Earth Day.)*

### **Past PSs Happening Soon:**

P.S. Join the Newton Human Rights Commission and the Newton Free Library for a panel discussion examining **book banning** on Monday, April 29 from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the library, 330 Homer St. Panelists will answer questions as well as discuss how librarians build library collections and explore the importance of intellectual freedom. Click [here](#) for more information.

P.P.S. Join us at **Pettee Square** at the intersection of Chestnut and Oak Streets in Upper Falls tomorrow, Tuesday, April 23 at 10:00 a.m. for the official groundbreaking for a new raised intersection with cross walks, new traffic signals, relocated utility poles, new paving following roadway milling and new pavement markings, new concrete sidewalks with new ADA accessible curb cut ramps, upgrades to the drainage system, better lighting, new benches and more trees.



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

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