

Mayor's Update



I didn't expect to be worrying about snow before Thanksgiving, but here we are.

Tomorrow morning is going to be a mess.

The latest forecast is for snow to start between 8:00 and 9:00 p.m. tonight, with expected accumulation between 4 and 8 inches. The snow is expected to change over to rain sometime between 3:00 and 5:00 a.m. The temperature of the pavement will be below 32 degrees until about 8:00 a.m., so the snow/sleet will be a problem, creating, in the words of our DPW Commissioner Jim McGonagle, "a slushy, sloppy, slippery

mess."

To complicate things, this storm has come so early in the season that it's caught some of our plow contractors by surprise, some of whom don't yet have their equipment ready for the winter season. It's also hit before all the leaves could be cleared, so I'm asking for your help. If you're able and have a few minutes before the snow gets heavy, please clear the leaves from the storm drain in front of your house so we have fewer drainage problems tomorrow.

DPW crews have been out pre-treating the roads all day, and they'll be out clearing the streets from the onset of the storm, through the night until the streets are clear.

It's far too early to know whether school will be able to start on time Friday, or if there will be school at all. I'm having a conference call with City department heads and School Superintendent David Fleishman at 10:00 p.m. tonight and at 4:00 a.m. tomorrow morning before the decision is made.

A reminder: **The mandatory on-street winter parking ban went into effect today.** From Nov. 15 through April 15 cars are not allowed to park on any City of Newton street for longer than one hour between the hours of 2 a.m. and 6 a.m.

Progress at the MBTA

(1) Commuter Rail

Good news to report from the MBTA! A \$46 million project to improve accessibility at the Auburndale, West Newton, and Newtonville commuter rail stations is underway and a design firm, VHB, has just been selected.

Plans include building sloped walkways at the Auburndale Station; adding ramps and elevator access at West Newton Station; and adding ramp access in Newtonville.

I still have some concerns. While I'm deeply committed to making these stations more accessible, the design does not increase the number of trains because we will still only have one track serving our Newton riders.

In addition, funding is only secure for the design phase, according to James Jackson, Deputy Assistant General Manager of the MBTA. Nonetheless, this is real progress.

These accessibility improvements will likely take about five years to design and complete (2.5 years in design phase, 2.5 years for construction).

(2) Newton Highlands Green Line MBTA station

The design for the Newton Highlands Green Line MBTA station project is 75 percent complete

to improve accessibility with ramps (and canopies!) from Walnut Street, Station Avenue and Hyde Avenue. The inbound and outbound platforms will also be raised to make access to and from the Green Line trains safer and easier.

This \$16.9 million project will probably start in 2021 and take one and a half to two years to complete.

(3) Newton Corner Circle

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) set in motion plans for a project to reduce traffic congestion around the notorious circle at the MassPike in Newton Corner to make it safer for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians.

The project to upgrade and replace all the traffic signals around the circle and reconfigure pavement markings and lanes will go onto the state funding list by the end of this year. It will likely take two years for the design phase, and then another two or three years to complete.

The plans don't call for any bridge or road redesigns, but the work is expected to alleviate back-ups caused by cars coming into the confusing circle from the MassPike, Centre, Galen and Washington Streets.

I'm grateful to Secretary Stephanie Pollack, Senator Cynthia Creem, Representatives Kay Kahn and Ruth Balsler for the work they've done to get these projects on the MBTA and MassDOT's radar.

With U.S. Army Major Cara Salmon, of Newton, at Sunday's Veterans Day ceremony at American Legion Post 440.

Adult Retail Marijuana: What Now?

Newton voters last week decided against banning or limiting the number of adult recreational marijuana establishments that would be allowed to open in the City.

So, what happens now?

Last night, the City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP) voted to approve zoning for adult recreational marijuana establishments.

The City Council last February voted a moratorium on all adult recreational marijuana establishments until Dec. 31, 2018 to allow zoning regulations to be created.

The Planning Department and members of ZAP had been working on zoning since February to regulate where the adult recreational marijuana establishments would be located if approved by voters. The full City Council is scheduled to vote on the new zoning at its meeting on Nov. 19.

No more than eight adult recreational marijuana stores will be allowed to open in Newton. The state law allows for Newton to have "not less than" eight stores, but the Newton's zoning regulations cap the number at eight (20 percent of the City's liquor store licenses).

The adult recreational marijuana establishments are heavily regulated by the State Cannabis Control Commission. No one under the age of 21 will be able to enter the stores or purchase recreational marijuana without photo identification.

The Newton zoning would allow adult recreational retail establishments in small areas across the City in specific business and commercial zones. The stores would not be allowed in buildings which also have residential units; there must be a buffer of at least 500 feet between a store and a school; and there would be a buffer of at least a half mile between stores to prevent a cluster of adult retail marijuana stores in one area.



In addition, no products can be visible from outside the store according to state regulations. Newton's zoning would require at least 25 percent transparency into the establishment to keep these stores looking like others in the City, but the windows would have to look into a lobby or other area without products.

Garden Remedies, at 697 Washington Street, is currently the only medical marijuana establishment now in operation in Newton. It was exempted from the moratorium and was already granted a provisional special permit to expand into adult recreational marijuana, depending on the result of last Tuesday's vote.

They are now moving forward with plans to sell recreational marijuana. Garden Remedies needs to expand the parking lot and do interior renovations before opening for retail sales, according to attorney Stephen Buchbinder. He said the work is not expected to be complete until late winter or early spring.

There are currently no other applications for adult retail marijuana establishments in Newton. Cypress Tree Management was granted a special permit in October to open a medical marijuana establishment on Elliott Street at Route 9. The owners have expressed interest in expanding into retail sales but have not yet filed an application to do so.

To get permission, Cypress Tree Management would need to apply to the state Cannabis Control Commission, negotiate a host agreement with Newton, and get a second special permit from the City Council.

Stay informed about what's going on in the City by checking Newtonma.gov.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. - Due to the tremendous volume of yard waste, combined with the anticipated snowstorm tonight, there will be no yard waste collection for the Friday trash routes on Nov. 16. We encourage everyone to bring in yard waste from the curb and apologize for this inconvenience. Yard waste collection for tomorrow's route will occur on Saturday, Nov. 24 (because of Thanksgiving next Thursday).

P.P.S. - We don't anticipate any impact from tonight's storm on trash and recycling pick-up tomorrow (Nov. 16) - the Friday trash and recycling will be picked-up as usual.

