

## Mayor's Update

Good Evening.

To President Albright, Vice President Lipof, President Emeritus Baker, Chair Goldman, Vice Chair Ray Canada, members of the City Council and the School Committee, everyone here at City Hall or watching at home, good evening.

I last stood here three weeks ago when I had the honor of administering the oath of office to our City Councilors and School Committee Members. On Inauguration Day, President Albright, Chair Goldman and I all pledged, in our own words, to build a greater, better and more beautiful Newton to transmit to our children and grandchildren – grounded in our sense of civic duty, inspired by our shared vision, and fueled by our tradition of working together.

Two years into my term, I am more convinced than ever that we will achieve that collective goal because so many do so much together to move our city forward.

**Our police officers and firefighters have worked together professionally, effectively, and compassionately.** They contend with blizzards, downed trees, and fires. No matter the hour, our emergency responders answer calls for help – alarms and accidents, medical and mental health emergencies, one after another.



*(Officer Justin Lau and Brett Ferolito with Santa and Dana Hanson.)*

Our police officers not only make us safe, they build community. On December 11<sup>th</sup>, Newton Police Lieutenant David Tempesta, while off duty, took down a would-be robber wielding a knife at a convenience store in West Newton Square. A few days before and just around the corner, Police Officers Justin Lau and Brett Ferolito brought smiles and high spirits to the West Newton Stroll as they joined Santa in greeting children of all ages.

We live in one of the safest cities in the country precisely because these women and men prepare for whatever emergencies may arise and stand ready to put themselves in harm's



way. That kind of bravery fills me with deep pride and enormous gratitude.

I am so proud of our educators who have touched the lives of thousands of students in our 23 schools. **This September marked the first time in Newton's history that our teachers welcomed kindergarten students to a full day of school.** We now have a new contract that reflects the deep respect and gratitude all of us have for our educators and staff, a contract that is fair and financially sustainable.

**Every day I see examples of so many other City of Newton employees working together and going the extra mile for our residents.** In the last two years, we've helped 131,265 people when they called customer service and responded to another 112,522 requests that came in through our 311

system; thank you Garrett Ross and your team. We've planted 1,849 trees, thanks to Marc Welch, the forestry crew and the Newton Tree Conservancy. We've paved 26.5 miles of roads, the most ever in a two year period, with a shout out to Shane Mark and the DPW crews.

We also said a fond goodbye and a huge thank you to many employees who retired after giving so much for so long to our City. We'll miss Donna Anastasia's unparalleled customer service, and "Snow Tsar" Dave Mandatori, Detective Jimmy McCarthy, and Deputy Fire Chief Jim Thorne. Just these four alone had a combined 169 years of service here in Newton.



I'm grateful to them, and our residents are as well. David Kenney who lives on Agawam Road is just one of many who sent in an email of thanks to me, in this instance praising Bobby Sullivan and a Utilities crew for their exceptional service and professionalism in addressing a water main issue.

*(With Bob DeRubeis)*

This dedication, this love for Newton, and this pride in

continuously improving our services is what has defined Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture Bob DeRubeis for 32 years. Bob loves his wife, Andrea, who is here with him tonight. Bob once said, though, that the City of Newton “had become his life, his family.” Andrea, thank you for sharing him with us. Bob, you might be retiring in just a few weeks, but we will always be your family.



**On Inauguration Day in 2018, I pledged to work doggedly so every resident feels part of our community and to ensure the concerns of all citizens are heard.** I meant it when I asked for your ideas and your input.

With Dana Hanson, our Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion, Linda Plazonja, our Citizen Assistance Officer, Ellen Ishkanian, our Director of Community Communications, and Sam Nighman, our Executive Aide, and so many others, we have worked hard to honor that pledge.

We will continue to work to make sure people know their concerns and ideas are valued—residents from Oak Hill Park to Upper Falls and from Nonantum, West Newton and Lower Falls and every village in between. Every time we send out a Mayor’s email, our residents ‘tap back’ their responses and share their perspectives. I am also listening at the hundreds of community events I’ve attended, in the checkout line at the grocery store or even when I’m walking Argus, our dog. I also host Open Office Hours at City Hall (and we’ve held 49 of them since 2018 – join us for our 50<sup>th</sup> on Thursday from 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.). I am listening.

**I am also grateful to so many good neighbors in our city who are helping** — Ted Kuklinski, Ann Dorfman, Eyal Dechter, and Mark Feldhusen have tended our beloved Wellington Park in West Newton. Our friends at the Newton Chinese Language School, the Newton Cantonese Language School, and the Greater Boston Chinese Cultural Association share their culture and heritage generously. May I say an early Happy and Prosperous New Year? Justin Traxler of Newton Girls Youth Soccer; the members of the St. Mary of Carmen Society who are already planning the 85<sup>th</sup> Festa; Susan Katcher, Joel Shames, and Lynn Slobodin who are bringing neighbors together through the Auburndale Neighborhood Association; the members of the Upper Falls Area Council who voted to rename their annual get together the John Rice Soup Social — it’s people like this who turn our city into a community, a community where we know our neighbors.

I am listening.

I am learning.

I am acting.

**Working together with the School Committee and the City Council, we are**

**getting in front of the issues, planning the work, and taking action.** I am so grateful to be working all of my fellow elected officials; each and every one of us share a deep love and passion for Newton.

I can say confidently that all of us in elected positions appreciate three important truths.

**First, the state of the city is strong.**

Excellent schools. Low crime rates. High quality services. Financial stability with triple A bond ratings. New school buildings. A wonderful community.

**Second, the future is coming and with it comes change.** We need to work together to take charge of our future and shape that change.

**Third, we face challenges.** Let me name three of them.

- Challenge #1: Home prices are rising. Our adult children too often can't afford to move back and we cannot say that no matter your income or your age, you have the ability to stay here or move here.
- Challenge #2: Traffic congestion is growing on our major arteries, cars are speeding through our neighborhoods, and there are still so many streets and sidewalks that require our attention. Drivers, cyclists and walkers too often feel frustrated or unsafe.
- Challenge #3: Threats to the environment are mounting.

**We are leaning in on these challenges and we are making progress.**



**For Challenge #1, we must work together to diversify our housing stock and ensure we have more permanently affordable homes and apartments so that people of all incomes can live here and be our neighbors.** This year we have a special opportunity to determine if we can transform the former Armory on Washington Street into homes for people with tight incomes.

With extensive community input, last year we developed a vision and a plan for the Washington Street corridor from West Newton Square to Newton Corner. Approved by the City Council in December, it put us—rather than developers—in charge of the future of Washington Street. This term we will tackle the zoning.

**To address housing affordability and the interrelated issues of transportation, economic development, climate change and quality of life in Newton, we will update our zoning ordinances this term.** Our planners have already delivered a draft zoning code to the City Council and, with extensive community input, we will refine and codify it.

I know we are wrestling with development issues, including, right at the moment, a referendum vote on the Northland rezoning, Riverside and at least two 40B projects. We must continue to be guided by our goals for Newton's future. We must address our serious housing challenges - we need different types of housing, especially for our older residents and we need more housing that is affordable; new buildings must be sustainable and green; new projects have to address transportation and traffic effectively; development has to add to our quality of life through design that is human scaled, feels like Newton and incorporates green spaces and gathering spots.

In the process of wrestling with these decisions, we need to listen carefully and respectfully to our neighbors.

**For Challenge #2, we will continue to invest aggressively to address traffic congestion, improve our roads and make them safer for all of us.**

Our residents, our businesses and our interdepartmental Complete Streets team will work together on the plans for our streets and sidewalks. We will put in state of the art traffic signals that can adapt to changing traffic conditions. We will redesign the streets and the signs to make all of us safer. We will help get people out of cars with better, safer bike lanes and perhaps with a bike share system that features bikes that are blue rather than lime green. We will have some inconveniences and more than a few headaches in the next 18 months as we construct the improvements to two village centers — West Newton and Newtonville. The results will be well worth it — wider sidewalks, better lighting, coordinated traffic signals, more trees, stormwater improvements and safer conditions. Plus, these village centers will look great.

I've been meeting with Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Pollock to advocate for our commuter rail, green line and bus systems. **We need public transportation that has better accessibility, better reliability and better frequency.** There is some good news; plans are underway for our commuter rail stations, the Newton Corner circle and the Mass Pike exit 17 interchange, the Newton Highlands Green line stop, and the signals and tracks on the Green Line in Newton.

Thank you Senator Cindy Creem, and Representatives Kay Khan, Ruth Balser and John Lawn for partnering with us on these projects, and so much more.

Nowhere are the stakes higher than in meeting Challenge #3, protecting Newton's environment and open spaces. **My pledge to build a greater, better and more beautiful Newton to transmit to our children and grandchildren requires immediate, sustained and meaningful action addressing the very real threat posed by climate change.**

**All of us must reduce our carbon footprint.** At the municipal level, we're replacing the city's sedans with zero-emission electric vehicles and installing more electric vehicle charging stations. We are improving the energy efficiency of our City and school buildings and installing solar panels on more of them. Through our municipal electricity aggregation program, Newton Power Choice, we are increasing the amount of green and clean renewable energy for our residents and businesses, stabilizing prices, and, thus far, lowering energy costs. **With the help of the Newton Citizens Commission on Energy and the City Council, we recently created and approved our first ever City of Newton Climate Action Plan.** We'll get an Energy Coach on board soon to help our residents and our businesses make smart decisions about heating and cooling, building and insulating, and embodied carbon and fossil fuels.

*(With Beth Wilkinson at Webster Woods)*

Addressing climate change also means reducing our solid waste, our trash. Sign up for the curbside food composting collection program we started in 2019; it's easy; it's effective; it's relatively low cost.

Addressing climate change also means protecting our open spaces. The ownership of Webster Woods was transferred permanently to the City of Newton on December 24<sup>th</sup>. This forest will remain intact in perpetuity, this generation and all the generations to come, because of a strong and permanent conservation restriction. Let's continue this important work by preserving, expanding and upgrading parks and fields across the city.

While we strive to meet these three challenges head on, we must not lose sight of other opportunities to strengthen our city.



**Building a greater Newton for the next generation means supporting those who did so much to build a greater Newton for us.** We are working together to build a new facility to meet the needs of our older residents. Finding a site has been tricky but together we'll figure it out.

**Building a better Newton also means bolstering arts, culture and community.** Last week, we celebrated the launch of the CREATE Newton comprehensive arts and culture plan. With the leadership of Gloria Gavis, over 1,000 Newton residents participated in the visioning process. Whether its Chris Pitts with his Piano Summit or Amelia LeClair with Capella Clausura, we will lean in because arts and culture brings us together, makes our days joyful, and bolsters our city's economy.

**To ensure an even greater Newton, we must prioritize providing our children with an excellent education. Regardless of their learning styles or abilities, the language spoken at home, the color of their skin, the income of their households, or whether they call home Newton or Boston, I am dedicated to ensuring all of the children in the Newton Public Schools receive an excellent education.**

I join the School Committee and the Superintendent in saying we need both to narrow achievement gaps and to maintain our deep commitment to students with disabilities and special learning styles.

I am so proud that we are taking the lead on ensuring our students become knowledgeable, responsible, and contributing members of our community, as our educators focus on both academic and social & emotional teaching and learning from preschool through high school.

**We will continue to repair, renovate and recreate our school buildings across the city to meet the needs of our teachers and learners.**

**Spreading and reinforcing the core principles of respect, diversity, and**

**acceptance from the halls of our schools to every neighborhood in Newton is our shared mission.** With the partnership of many – the Human Rights Commission, FORJ, the Newton Interfaith Clergy, NPS, Health and Human Services, and our Police, we will work to affirm and put into action our values of inclusion.

**Two years in, I know that local governments, including the City of Newton, increasingly need to be on the front line in helping our family members, friends and neighbors who are struggling with depression, anxiety, social isolation and addiction.** From vaping to opioids, we will meet the challenge as a community with information, education and more trained personnel in our schools, our Police Department, our Senior Center and at City Hall. Just over a week ago, members of the clergy joined me, our Superintendent and the Commissioner of Health and Human Services to work together on more effectively supporting our youth.

At the beginning of this new decade, I am confident.

**I am confident that this is the decade when we will fully fund our pension plan so we honor the promises we made to our employees and retirees;**

**I am confident that this is the decade when we will meet the threshold of having 10 percent of our housing units permanently affordable;**

**I am confident that this is the decade when we will turn to another four or five of our oldest, creakiest, and leakiest elementary schools to design and begin rebuilding for 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning;**

**I am confident that this is the decade when we will improve all our roads so we no longer bump painfully along; and,**

**I am confident that this is the decade when we will take meaningful action to add to our tree canopy and to reduce our carbon footprint.  
This will be a good decade, filled with progress.**

At the beginning of 2020, with our great team of educators and public employees, elected officials and residents, business people and non-profit leaders, with our goals for an even better Newton, and a community committed to respect, diversity, and acceptance, I can tell you with confidence, **the state of our city is strong and the future is bright.**

I close by asking all of us to work together, to be respectful and compassionate, and to take charge of the bright future of this city we love.

Thank you and good night,

Mayor Ruthanne Fuiller

