

Mayor's Update



We had a tough few days.

Last Thursday afternoon, a GMC Yukon hit a Newton crossing guard at her crossing post at Brookline Street and Hartman Road by the Memorial-Spaulding Elementary School.

Then, on Monday morning, a Chevy Colorado struck a woman and her dog while they crossed Lexington Street in a signalized crosswalk near the Burr Elementary School.

We understand that both women will be okay; the Chevy truck, though, killed the dog.

How is Newton doing with pedestrian safety?

Whenever the number is more than one, we know we have important work to do. In the past five years, the

number of pedestrian-vehicle incidents has been:

2015 - 39
2016 - 59
2017 - 40
2018 - 33
2019 – 34

What happens when a pedestrian-vehicle crash occurs?

When a call comes into 911, emergency responders, fire and police, go immediately to the scene, take charge of the situation, and when necessary, an ambulance transports the person struck to a hospital. Taking care of the injured person is always the first priority.

Officers from the Newton Police Department's Traffic Bureau with specialized training immediately begin an in-depth investigation. They interview witnesses, speak with the person who was hit, and the vehicle driver. They do a reconstruction of what happened. Citations to the driver are given when warranted. The Newton Police Department works with our transportation experts to analyze what the root causes of the accident were and what steps we can take to address them. More on that below.

While that's what happens at an accident scene, we are constantly and continuously working to make Newton safer for pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers.

What exactly are we doing?

We review crash data and the characteristics at each of the locations and factor in circumstances such as proximity to a school, village center, park, MBTA or bus stop, etc. We consider the lighting, the layout of the street, intersection, crosswalk or

sidewalk. We look at the weather and time of day/season of the year.

We measure volume of traffic and speed of vehicles. Typically, we are collecting data at multiple locations. We use purposely small and inconspicuous electronics so drivers don't notice them and change their speed.

The locations are selected based on the crash data, information from our police and school administrators, concerns raised by City Councilors, residents and partners (e.g., Safe Routes to School, Transportation Advisory Group) and through our experts in both the Department of Public Works and the Planning Department. Jason Sobel, Director of Transportation Operations, and Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning, are two people who are especially involved.

All this data is then analyzed, and a priority list is created to focus on the spots most in need of safety, complete streets, and traffic calming measures. The top priority locations to be addressed next is now being finalized and should be completed in the next few weeks.

What types of things are we doing to calm traffic and reduce crashes?

The Newton Police Department leans in on enforcement. They do extra patrols, perform crosswalk "stings" with undercover police, put out electronic message boards, and have the regular patrols pay special attention to particular locations.

We also look at engineering solutions. While there are a wide range of options, some of the most used include:

- Speed Feedback Signs: These display the speed of vehicles in real time on an electronic sign. Data shows this feedback slow drivers an average of 2 to 3 miles per hour – a seemingly minor amount that can make a surprising large difference. Currently, we have them located on Waltham Street (where additional traffic calming measures are also planned) and on Hammond Street near Reservoir Avenue where the speed limit drops to 20 from 30 mph.
- Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons (RRFB): These instruments allow pedestrians waiting at crosswalks to press a button which then lights up flashing yellow signals. Look for these on Homer Street in between the side of City Hall and the parking lot at the Newton Free Library as well as eight other locations around the City, including at Auburn Street by Woodland in Auburndale.

- Roadway or Intersection Geometry Changes: We tighten up corners to make cars slow down, reduce crossing distances for pedestrians by bumping out the sidewalk, and add "chicane" lanes forcing drivers to execute a horizontal shift to slow speeds. We recently added painted



chicanes lanes on Waltham Street from Crafts to the Waltham border and on Washington Street from the Brighton border to Newton Corner.

- **Traffic Signal Additions:** It sounds like an easy and effective solution to install a full traffic signal to solve speeding and dangerous stretches of road; in fact, it's not simple. Specific and strict federal guidelines regulate where full traffic lights can be installed based on traffic counts and other factors.
- **A Combination of Solutions:** We added a rectangular rapid flash beacon last August at Waltham and Derby Streets by the Franklin Elementary School; curb bump-outs and median islands will be installed this summer. At Allen and Beethoven Avenues near the Zervas Elementary School, we are beginning to design curb-cut bump-outs, new crosswalks to create shorter crossing routes, and a "raised table" intersection.

I've heard from parents in the Memorial-Spaulding community who are concerned about safety given the volume and speed of traffic along Brookline Street and Hartman Road, concerns that have been heightened by the accident last Thursday.

Earlier concerns led to a new bus pullout in front of the school in 2016 to make it safer for students to get on and off the buses. We are taking a very close look at what the current data shows in the neighborhood around the school and listening to the input from neighbors, parents and educators. In the meantime, we installed temporary electronic flashing boards which flash drivers' speed, the 20 mile per hour school zone speed limit, and reminders for drivers to go slowly while recording useful speed data.

As we lean in to make our roads, sidewalks and bike lanes safer, we also all have to slow down and pay attention. Starting on Sunday, Feb. 23,

enforcement of the state's new distracting law begins. The new law bans any use of a hand-held device while driving. That means no scrolling, swiping, typing or otherwise using or holding a cellphone while behind the wheel, even when at a red light or stop sign.



(Humpty is staying warm and in style this winter! Thanks go to Cabot Elementary School parent Kristin O'Connor who knitted Humpty's custom hat and scarf.)



Congratulations Jill

I'm happy to join the Newton Free Library Board of Trustees in announcing Jill Mercurio as our new library director.

Jill is uniquely qualified to be our director. She brings to the role deep experience in the world of libraries and specific expertise in Newton from her eight years here. She started as the Library's Supervisor of Youth Services, then served as the Assistant Director, and, since August, our Acting Director. Hired by our previous Director Phil McNulty who became the head of the Minuteman Library Network, Jill is special:

- She focuses on service excellence in a welcoming way.
- She is forward-thinking, envisioning and then creating spaces and programs for our pre-readers to our older adults.
- She champions the library community, building strong, respectful relationships with our many patrons, our staff and the Trustees.



- She understands the changing role of our library as we lean into digital services, the maker movement and the unique needs of our diverse patrons.

The Newton Free Library, among the state's busiest, is a center of community in Newton and Jill will be moving us forward. It's full of books (296,043), audio and video selections (79,456), an ever-growing library of "things" (e.g., instruments, laptops, puzzles, board games) and access to 1.5 million titles through the Minuteman Library Network.

Congratulations Director Mercurio and thank you to the Trustees, including Barbara Meltz (President), Bharat Bhushan, Chris Kirby, Samuel Nathans, Jean Notis-McConarty, Sharon Stout and Geline Williams.

Coronavirus Info

As we have been hearing, a respiratory illness caused by a new coronavirus –named "2019-nCoV" – continues to spread from Wuhan City, Hubei Province, in China.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) have not recommended any special actions at this time.

The best place for the latest nationwide updates is directly from the CDC at www.cdc.gov/nCoV. The CDC is also providing updates for travelers [here](#).

We're paying close attention. When warranted, Newton updates will be at newtonma.gov.

Flu severity in Massachusetts has increased from moderate to high, according to the MDPH flu activity [report](#). Get a flu shot; it's not too late. Free flu shots are available for everyone 6 months and older here at City Hall. Call our public health nurse for an appointment at (617) 796-1420.

The following precautionary actions will help prevent respiratory viruses, including seasonal influenza and Coronavirus:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Questions? Call the Newton Health and Human Services Department at (617) 796-1420.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. A happy, healthy and prosperous

Lunar New Year.

P. P.S. We want to hear what your priorities are for Newton's open space and recreation plan. Join us on Thursday, Feb. 6, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the War Memorial at City Hall, as we begin the process of updating the plan. An online community survey will also be available [here](#) starting tomorrow, Thursday, Jan. 30.



P.P.P.S. Newton Community Pride has begun planning for the Linda Plaut Festival of the Arts in May and June. We have a well-deserved reputation for high quality and interesting events, drawing audiences from Newton and beyond. Interested in being a performer or producer? Please sign up at newtonfoa.org and email Festival Chair Chris Pitts cbpitts@gmail.com with a description of your proposed event.

