

Mayor's Update



This morning, the City of Newton once again received a “Aaa – stable” rating (the highest possible), from Moody’s Investor Services for our \$38.3 million General Obligation Municipal Purpose Bonds that we are selling in the next few weeks.

Moody’s wrote, *“The Aaa rating reflects the city’s large and wealthy tax base, diverse economy, manageable debt profile and commitment to reducing its unfunded pension and OPEB liabilities. The rating also incorporates strong fiscal management with a stable financial position. The stable outlook reflects Moody’s expectation of continued financial stability due to conservative five-year budget forecasting and capital improvement plan as well as adherence to comprehensive financial reserve and debt policies. The outlook also incorporates the ongoing strength in the city’s tax*

base and economy.”

Maintaining our Aaa bond rating reflects my commitment to Newton’s financial sustainability, now and for the long-term. I will continue to invest in our schools, services and infrastructure, tackle our long-term liabilities for our retirees and maintain our financial health and economic stability.

(Nicole Banks, Newton’s new Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture. She starts on March 2.)

Introducing Our New Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture

I am delighted to welcome Nicole Banks as our Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Nicole brings years of experience, a collaborative approach, and positive energy to this important role in Newton.



Nicole met with a wide range of people during our interview process and we were all impressed. Having earned her CPRP (a Certified Parks and Recreation Professional credential granted by the National Parks and Recreation Association) and as the President-elect of the Massachusetts Recreation and Parks Association, she is a leader in her field, has learned the best of practices and it shows. She is seasoned and knows how to lead. Her quiet confidence and ability to relate well to a wide range of people will be invaluable to all of us.

For the past seven years, Nicole has served as the Director of Recreation in Westwood, a department which includes a broad range of activities from aquatics, fitness, arts and sports to “Westwood Day” (a day that includes a road race, an antique car show, music, and fireworks). She led new capital improvements and has

overseen fields management. She believes deeply in working closely with staff, commissions and boards, and other departments, including DPW and Police. She knows it takes a team of engaged experts and dedicated volunteers to effectively and efficiently bring initiatives to fruition. Prior to her work in Westwood, she served as the Director of Recreation in Milford, New Hampshire for nine years.

I look forward to introducing Nicole to the City Council's Programs and Services Committee as my recommendation is subject to the approval of the Council.

I also invite everyone to stop by and thank our extraordinary Commissioner as he begins a well-earned retirement after 43 years of service. We will be celebrating with Bob DeRubeis on Wednesday, Feb.12 from 1:00 to 3:00 pm in City Hall Room 204.

(Celebrating with members of the Newton Planning Department and representatives from the Newton Housing Authority and 2Life Communities.)

More Affordable Housing for Older Residents

Two much needed affordable housing developments for older people are moving forward in Newton. Gov. Baker delivered the good news on Tuesday that both the Newton Housing Authority and 2Life Communities received low income housing tax credits from the State.



Construction of 123 new affordable housing apartments in Newton can proceed.

Haywood House:

The Newton Housing Authority's "Haywood House" received credits for a 55-unit senior affordable housing building which will also include a renovation of the current community space. This building, when completed, will complement Newton Housing Authority's Jackson Gardens senior public housing right next to it on JFK Circle in Nonantum. Thirty-two units will be for seniors with incomes at or below 60% of the area median income, with 11 of these specifically reserved for seniors below 30% of the area median income; twenty-three units will be for seniors with incomes between 80% to 99% of the area median income. Three units will be fully accessible and four will be designated for households that have been homeless or are at risk of homelessness.

Haywood House, named after the late Reverend Howard Haywood, received a Comprehensive Permit from Newton in July 2018 and previously received commitments for \$3 million in Newton Community Preservation Act funding as well as \$625,000 in City of Newton Community Development Block Grant funding.

FYI: The Newton Housing Authority is not an arm of the City of Newton. A standalone agency, the Newton Housing Authority has provided affordable housing in Newton for fifty years. With its 1,030+ units of housing, it provides more than 1,300

people (families, older residents, people with disabilities) safe and affordable housing here in our city as well as a variety of social service programs.

Golda Meir House:

2Life Community (formerly JCHE) received credits for a 68-unit addition at its current Golda Meir House on Stanton Avenue near Newton-Wellesley Hospital. The sixty-eight units will be for seniors across a range of incomes, with the majority (50) reserved for seniors at 60% and below the area median income, including nine reserved for people with disabilities who have chronically experienced homelessness.

The Golda Meir expansion project received a Comprehensive Permit from Newton in December 2018 and previously received a commitment of \$3.25 million in Newton Community Preservation Act funding.

A Solemn Anniversary

Twenty years later, we remember the lives lost and honor the fire fighters who fought the fast-moving blaze that ripped through the business complex at 200 Boylston Street/Rt. 9 in Chestnut Hill.

Feb. 9, 2000 started as a sunny day that ended changing so many lives. Five people died and dozens of businesses were destroyed despite the efforts of our Newton fire fighters who guided so many through the smoke and flames.

To those who lost loved ones and friends, to those who were there that day, and to all of the women and men of the Newton Fire Department who stand ready, you're in our hearts on this solemn anniversary.

Bluebikes & Wells Avenue Shuttle Coming

We received exciting news from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) yesterday morning.

MassDOT awarded Newton two significant Workforce Transportation Program grants. This funding will allow us to pilot both a "first mile/last mile" shuttle to and from the Wells Avenue Office District and to bring the Bluebikes bike share network to Newton.



Wells Avenue Shuttle: MassDOT awarded Newton \$250,000 to start a shuttle system between three mass transit lines (Newtonville, Needham Heights, Newton Highlands) and the Wells Avenue business district area which includes the Mount Ida Campus of UMass Amherst. We will offer affordable, reliable, sustainable, convenient, shared first mile/last mile transportation. We hope that the service will allow many of the 7,000 employees who live in proximity to these MBTA lines and work or go to school in the Wells Avenue area will take advantage of this option for using public transportation to commute.

Our next step is to go out to bid for a company to operate the shuttle. The shuttle could be on the road by this fall.

We are grateful to the Newton-Needham Regional Chamber, the Mount Ida Campus of UMass Amherst, William James College, the JCC Greater Boston and Jumbo Capital Management for their commitment to support this pilot. This is truly a for-profit, non-profit and government sector (State and City) partnership.

Bluebikes: Newton, along with partner community Watertown and two others, received \$340,000 to expand the Bluebikes bike share program to our communities. (Bluebikes is already operating in Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Somerville and Everett.) Newton's share of the grant is \$80,000 which we will match with \$20,000 of City funding. Newton will be able to expand the regional service here with five docking stations. Stay tuned for information as we determine where those stations will be located.

Bluebikes will replace Lime Bikes, the dockless bike share that had operated in Newton. Lime recently pulled out of Newton and another 15 cities and towns after it moved its business model primarily to scooters. Bluebikes currently uses a "dock" system in which bikes are picked up and returned to specific locations – or docks.

Kudos to Director of Transportation Planning Nicole Freedman who thought through the shuttle and bike share strategy and helped Newton receive these grants.

Funding for Upper Falls Improvements?

We applied at the end of last week for a \$396,000 state grant to pay for design and engineering of two projects in Upper Falls.

One project would extend the Upper Falls Greenway (a wonderful linear park) north from Easy Street to Curtis Street (behind National Lumber on Needham Street).

Currently the Greenway at this end stops suddenly, truncating safe access to Needham Street and the MBTA Green Line stop in Newton Highlands (which otherwise would be a short walk).

The other project would result in a significant upgrade of Pettee Square. At the intersection of Oak Street and Chestnut Street (aka Pettee Square), we are aiming for traffic signal replacements, roadway milling and new pavement, new concrete sidewalks, new ADA accessible curb cut ramps, upgrades to the drainage system, new pavement markings, lighting upgrades, new traffic signs, landscaping and streetscape improvements, and potentially a raised table intersection and raised crosswalk at the Greenway.

The MassWorks Infrastructure Grant Program from Commonwealth's Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development provides capital funding to municipalities for public infrastructure projects that align with housing production, private development, and job creation.

(The area in pink will be affected by the water shut-down Feb. 15.)

Water Upgrades (and

some inconvenience) on one end of Needham Street

The Newton Department of Public Works is installing new valves on the water main under Needham Street. The work that starts on Monday, Feb. 10 will be inconvenient for residents of the immediate area and commuters, but it is essential in addressing issues in the aging system.

Crews will begin digging under the Route 9 bridge on Winchester Street on Monday, Feb. 10 starting at 7:00 a.m. and work until 3:00 p.m. for five days through Friday, Feb. 14. A police detail will be there so traffic will be able to continue through under the bridge and onto the east and west bound lanes of Route 9 while crews are working. But, expect heavy congestion.

On Saturday night, Feb. 15, water will be shut down in the area overnight from 11:00 p.m. to noon on Sunday.

The shut down will affect approximately 10 residences, the Avalon Apartments and the businesses along Needham and Winchester Streets. If your home or business will be affected, you will get a notice. The Newton Fire Department will have fire fighters monitoring the area during the water shut down.

Questions? Call Terry Crowley in the DPW at 617-796-1006 or Newton Utilities 617-796-1040. You can email Terry [here](#).

Monitoring the Coronavirus

The risk of infection from the coronavirus remains low for people here. While the risk here is low, I know there are people in Newton who are deeply concerned as they have friends and family in places hard hit by the virus. We stand with all of you during this time of worry.

The Newton Health and Human Services Department continues to monitor the situation closely, with help from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH).

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



- The best place for the latest nationwide updates is directly from CDC [here](#).
- Massachusetts updates from MDPH are available [here](#).
- The Newton HHS department will post updates when appropriate to the City of Newton website [here](#).

Want to provide help? Join us next Wednesday, Feb. 12, 7:00 p.m. at Newton North High School. Newton North and the Jingshan Exchange program are hosting Comedy for a Cause, a show with NNHS alum Jesse Appell talking about his experience living in China and “what makes China laugh.” Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for students, and all proceeds will go for medical supplies for the Jingshan School and Wuhan University Hospital. But tickets [here](#).

Newton North & Jingshan Exchange Program Present

Comedy
For A Cause

武汉加油

NNHS alum Jesse Appell 艾杰西
on living in China
&
what makes China laugh




SCAN ME

Newton North High School Auditorium
Wednesday 2/12 | 7:00 pm
Tickets \$10 | Students \$5

All profits donated to Jingshan School &
Wuhan University Hospital for Medical Supplies

Confused about Heat Pumps?

The City just received a \$10,000 grant from the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center to implement a “HeatSmart” program.

The program will help Newtonians adopt heat pump technologies for heating and cooling and for domestic hot water. These technologies will help us reduce our reliance on natural gas and other fossil fuels.

The City will be working closely with Green Newton, Newton Mothers Out Front, and Mass 350 Newton Node on program implementation. We’ll let you know when it is up and going.

Making Newton’s Commuter Rail Stations More Accessible

The MBTA and the Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) is looking for input from seniors and people with disabilities about how to improve the design of the Newtonville, West Newton and Auburndale Commuter Rail Stations. Participants will receive Amazon gift cards.

Interested? Have questions? Please email Jan Carpman, PhD, at jcarpman@ihcdesign.org or call 617-695-1225 x241.

Consider going on one of the station site visits:

- Newtonville, Thursday, Feb. 13, 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.
- West Newton, Monday, Feb. 17, 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.
- Auburndale Station Thursday, Feb. 20, 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.

You can also attend one of three workshops at the Newton Free Library, 330 Homer Street:

- Friday, Feb. 14, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

- Tuesday, Feb. 18, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
- Friday, Feb. 21, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Accommodations: Upon request (preferably 14 days in advance), IHCD will provide auxiliary aids and services leading to effective communication for people with disabilities, seniors, and people whose first language is not English.

Find more information about the MBTA accessibility project [here](#).

Commuter Rail Weekend Service Disruption in the Spring

Weekend MBTA commuter rail service in and through Newton will be suspended from Saturday, February 29, 2020 to May 2020.

The MBTA is suspending weekend service to upgrade the signal system for Positive Train Control (PTC). PTC is a federally mandated safety control system that reduces speeds when needed and helps to avoid collisions.

During this period, there will be no weekend commuter rail service at Auburndale, West Newton, Newtonville, Boston Landing, Lansdowne and South Station. The MBTA is NOT providing bus shuttles in Newton. Instead, commuter rail service will be replaced with free bus shuttles between Framingham and Wellesley Farms, and then from Wellesley Farms to South Station with no stops in between. More information can be found [here](#).

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Newton Police Sgt. Dan Devine invites people with developmental disabilities and their families to an Open House on Wednesday, Feb. 26, 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., at Police Headquarters, 1321 Washington Street. While all members of the community are always welcome at the station, Sgt. Devine and the department are reaching out to folks who may need a little extra help. Come and tour the station, meet some officers and participate in some simulated scenarios. Questions? Contact Sgt. Devine at ddevine@newtonma.gov.

P.P.S. Enjoy some hot soup with your neighbors at the Newton Highlands Soup Social this Saturday, Feb. 8, at 6:00 p.m. at the Hyde Community Center, 90 Lincoln Street. It's free! There will be an open gym for kids, hot soups, bread, ice-cream and entertainment by the Newton South High School Newtones. The event is sponsored by the Hyde Community Center and several generous local restaurants. Questions? Contact John Rice 617-201-7088 or director@hydecenter.org.

P.P.P.S. Celebrate the League's 100th birthday at the League of Women Voters Newton National "Women Power the Vote Day of Action" festivities on Friday, Feb. 14 at the War Memorial in City Hall, 1000 Commonwealth Ave., 4:30 to 6:00 p.m.

