

Mayor's Update



Members of the Newton Teachers Association came to the lawn at City Hall this morning. I offered to speak to the teachers; NTA President Mike Zilles declined the offer.

Here is what I would have said:

Welcome to City Hall. Thank you for being here.

Ours schools are the heart and soul of Newton. You, the educators, are the heart and soul of our schools.

I came out here today because I wanted to be sure that I could hear you, loud and clear.

I have been listening closely to you not just today but in the days and months leading up to today. I read the postcards you sent. I see your signs.

You need and deserve a fair contract now. I will do all I can to help settle this contract expeditiously and make sure NPS has the resources it needs.

With your contract expiring this Saturday, Mike Zilles and your Executive Board and Ruth Goldman and the School Committee bargaining team have been hard at work for a long time trying to hammer out an agreement. I know these teams are bargaining in good faith.

I know it's frustrating for you to start the new school year without a contract.

And I know the school budget allocation has been central to the discussions.

Let me talk about the school allocation.

Since 2004, we have welcomed more than 1480 students to our schools. We needed to provide more teachers, aides, special ed services, transportation, and classrooms for all those students. While it is only one factor, enrollment has a big impact on the budget allocation.

We now have had two years when the enrollment increases have leveled off, and even declined. That matters when we put together a budget allocation.

In addition, last year when I became Mayor, the leadership of the School Committee asked me to provide a "floor" for the school allocation for the coming years. I took that request for a floor seriously and worked hard to develop an allocation that I could guarantee.

I guaranteed a 3.25% increase every year, whether or not a trade war with China spirals out of control, whether or not interest rates surge, and whether or not a recession hits.

I made a commitment. You have my word.

Last year, when our Chapter 70 Education Grant from the state unexpectedly fell almost half a million dollars short of the forecast, I didn't cut that funding for NPS. Rather, I added an additional \$1 million to support our Kindergarten teachers as we roll out full day Kindergarten. As a result, the school allocation increased by 3.9%. The amount of money dedicated to the Newton Public Schools for this school year, \$236 million, is the highest it has ever been.

(The newly renovated Cabot Elementary School.)



In addition, a newly renovated Cabot Elementary School opens next week, and we are well on our way to renovated schools for the Newton Early Childhood Program and for Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School.

Here is my pledge to you.

While we will not be able to agree to everything that you have put on the table, I will meet with your leadership and the leadership of the School Committee and look at everything and work with everyone to figure this out.

I know that you are dedicated to our students and your craft.

I am dedicated to settling the fairest and most equitable contract that Newton can sustain, a contract that works for our educators, for our students, and for our community. We need to do this as soon as possible.

Welcome back to school.



(With Newton residents who own Newton-based Meal Mantra which sells gourmet simmer sauces at the Tuesday [Farmers' Market](#) in Cold Spring Park.)

Newton's New Economic Development Director

The City of Newton is pleased to name Devra Bailin as the City's Economic Development Director.

Ms. Bailin is uniquely qualified to help Newton's businesses thrive. She most recently served for almost nine years as the Economic Development Director for the Town of Needham. In that position, she helped develop economic strategies, public-private partnerships, and programs, policies, procedures and zoning to streamline and support economic development. She has been an active member of the Newton Needham Regional Chamber Board for six years as well as serving as a board member of the 128 Business Council. Previously, she was an elected member of the Needham

Planning Board for fifteen years, bringing her legal training to this volunteer position. Ms. Bailin is a graduate of Wellesley College and Harvard Law School.

As Economic Development Director, Ms. Bailin, who succeeds the former Director Kathryn Ellis, will work in the Department of Planning and Development to advance the City of Newton's economic development efforts. Ms. Bailin will also serve as the City's chief liaison to the Newton business community and will work closely with the City's Economic Development Commission.

She will start in the position the first week of October. Welcome Devra.

Streamlining the Permitting Process

Residents and businesses every day apply to the City of Newton for a whole range of permits, from a plumbing and gas permit to install a new boiler to a special permit for permission to build a major development such as Northland.

Some applications begin and end with the Inspectional Services Department. Others wind their way through multiple departments. All of them need to be tracked and recorded and moved along expeditiously.

Newton's permitting software was state of the art when it was installed 14 years ago, but we're overdue for an update. This week we kicked-off the process. Working with the City Council, we have hired a consultant to look closely at the current permitting process and software with an eye toward making it more streamlined and accessible to people inside and outside of City Hall. Stay tuned!

(Speaking with Congressman Joe Kennedy and Fire Chief Gino Lucchetti at Fire HQ yesterday.)

Push for Funding

State Senator Cindy Creem, State Representatives Kay Khan and Ruth Balser and I are pushing to get funding for the Mass Pike Exit 17 in Newton Corner.



Here is the letter we sent yesterday to David Mohler, Chairman of the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization:

We write to express our disappointment that the "Traffic Signal and Safety Improvements at Interchange 17" project on the Mass Pike in Newton Corner (TIP ID #609288) was not included in the Draft Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). This is a heavily used and dangerous interchange.

We understand that, in order to be programmed in an upcoming TIP cycle, this project needs to appear in Destination 2040 because the project may add capacity to the highway system. It adds capacity since the I-90 / Mass Pike Eastbound off-ramp may potentially be modified from its current "1.5 lane" approach to 2 lanes; please know the off-ramp often functions currently with 2 travel lanes merging onto the circle at Newton

Corner.

The first goal expressed in the MPO's vision of a modern, well-maintained transportation system is one of safety. It calls for making investments and supporting initiatives that help protect transportation customers, employees and the public from safety and security threats.

The dangerousness of this Newton Mass Pike Interchange 17 is well documented and long standing. As described in the MPO's "Traffic Patterns and Operational and Safety Improvements" memorandum, dated May 19, 2006, the Newton Corner interchange is "unusual in its ramp systems being fully and directly integrated into the local roadway system and the dense, urban, commercial, and residential environment. Regional and local traffic is fully mixed in a small amount of space; the interchange's roadways must accommodate maneuvers in and out of on-street parking spaces, side streets, and parking garages, bus operations, and pedestrian traffic." This memorandum confirmed that the validity of "the operational and safety concerns expressed by City of Newton officials and those documented in other previous studies/articles." It goes on to suggest a number of safety improvements that should be considered. Written in 2006, conditions have gotten even worse in the intervening 13 years.

The Traffic Signal and Safety Improvements at Interchange 17 project was included in the MPO evaluation process, along with several other projects across the region. No other project received a higher score (i.e., a worse score).

On behalf of all those who travel through or across the Newton Corner interchange and circle on foot, on bike, on bus or in a vehicle, we continue to express our deep concern that, due to funding limitations, this highly-scoring project has not made its way onto Destination 2040, in any of the timebands.

We look forward to continuing to work with Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the Metropolitan Planning Organization to improve safety at Exit 17, on the Massachusetts Turnpike and its bridges as well as on the interconnected local roadway network. Let's find a way to move this serious safety project forward.

(Snake Wrangler J.P. LaPierre with his family at City Hall yesterday receiving a commendation of thanks on behalf of all Newtonians for finding the missing Burmese Python.)

Thanks to the Snake Wrangler

J.P. LaPierre brought his life-long experience and love of all animals to the hunt for Lightning, the Burmese Python who had been missing in Nonantum for four days. J.P. consulted aerial maps, reviewed weather reports, and tracked Lightning under a stair of a

nearby yard.

A sigh of relief could be heard across our good City when Lightning's cage door clicked shut.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. The Annual 9/11 Commemoration Ceremony is on Wednesday, Sept. 11, at 6:00 p.m. at Newton Fire Headquarters, 1164 Centre Street. The ceremony, hosted by the Newton 9/11 Memorial Committee and the City of Newton, honors the eight Newton residents killed in the attack 18 years ago.

