

## Mayor's Update



### Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about Parking Meter Rates

The Newton City Council recently voted to allow parking meters in Newton to have a variable range of rates and for the rates to be higher than now.

*What are the current rates?*

Right now, everywhere in Newton the rates are 50 cents for long-term spaces and 75 cents for short-term spaces.

*What will the rates be in the future?*

The Newton Planning Department has been given the authority to set parking meter rates from 50 cents up to \$3.75 per hour. However, any increases will be introduced gradually and modestly, with input from businesses and with a lot of advance notice. To repeat, increases will be introduced gradually and modestly.

*Why allow higher rates?*

The reason for having parking meters is not to collect revenue.

Rather, parking meters exist in Newton's commercial areas to encourage turnover of the most convenient spots so customers can more easily find a place to park. Lower rates at meters a greater distance away from businesses encourage longer-term parkers to park there, opening up spaces at the "front door" for customers staying for a shorter time. Thus, the plan is to increase rates some places but have lower rates in more remote parking areas.

The ultimate goal is to have approximately 1 out of 10 spaces available at peak parking times in high trafficked areas so customers can find a space. The goal is to eliminate people driving around in circles (with the associated emissions, congestion and aggravation) to find a space!

*Where will there be higher rates?*

The areas of Newton where we have heard the most concerns about parking crunches are in Newton Centre, West Newton and Newton Corner. Sometimes Newtonville, Newton Highlands and Washington Street in front of Newton Wellesley Hospital are mentioned as not having enough availability. Each of these villages are quite different and will have individual approaches to parking meter rates. A lot of attention will be given to protecting residential neighborhoods abutting villages from excessive spillover.

*When will there be higher rates?*

We do not expect to implement higher rates soon. We need to plan, listen, and engage,

village by village. It's probably more than a year away before any rates will increase.

We need to buy and install new meters and kiosks before moving forward. We have approximately 1,100 meters in Newton. They are old. A substantial number, close to 340 of them, are damaged. We will be installing new ones (pending City Council approval) in the next two years.

The new "Smart Technology" meters will allow us to track usage and help us set the rates appropriately.

*Will there be changes in the number of short-term and longer-term meters?*

Village by village, lot by lot, street by street, we will continue to adjust the number and location of short-and long-term meters, a process that also involves the Traffic Council. Commuters and employees need spaces where they can stay for a longer period and typically are willing to walk farther, especially if the cost per hour is more modest than the cost of metered spaces right in the heart of a village. The rates at the longer-term meters will be lower than the short-term meters, just as they are now.

*Do we have enough parking spaces?*

Maybe. Each village is different. For each village, we will inventory supply, measure demand, understand the needs of businesses and customers, develop parking availability goals, improve signage so drivers know about parking options, make sure it is safe to walk from more remote locations, and gradually implement variable parking rates.

Have some ideas for us?

Reach out to our Director of Transportation Planning, Nicole Freedman, at [nfreedman@newtonma.gov](mailto:nfreedman@newtonma.gov) with your comments, questions, and concerns.

## **Newtonville Rail Station Closed Right Now**

The MBTA closed the Newtonville Commuter Rail Station as a safety precaution related to the stairs. They closed it Tuesday late afternoon after an MBTA engineering team evaluated the condition of the stairs and determined repairs are necessary.

Trains are not stopping in Newtonville. Riders are being diverted to the West Newton station.

A shuttle bus will leave from the Newtonville station 20 minutes before the train is scheduled to arrive in West Newton. Shuttles will also be available from West Newton to Newtonville.

The MBTA suggests passengers can also consider taking the MBTA bus #553 and bus #554 that travel between West Newton and Newtonville. Schedules can be found at [here](#) and [here](#).



Zone 1 tickets/mTickets and passes/mPasses will be accepted on board trains for passengers travelling to or from West Newton station due to the Newtonville station closure.

We will provide updates [here](#) as soon as we receive information from the MBTA. At this time, the MBTA cannot say when the Newtonville station will reopen.

*(Congratulations to Rev. Crowley and the Myrtle Baptist Church Congregation on its 145th Anniversary celebrated last Sunday.)*

### **New Bike Share Models Being Explored**

Newton's bike share operator, Lime, has let Newton and our 15 partner municipalities know that they may not provide operations to our municipalities beyond May 2020. Lime's business model has moved primarily to scooters making it challenging for them to continue bike operations.

We are preparing now in the event Lime withdraws from Newton. Working with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and neighboring municipalities, we have researched vendor options. Given the changing landscape of bike share, we have determined that it is unlikely that a dockless vendor like Lime will offer bike share to Newton at no cost and/or without a requirement to provide scooters as well. (Note: Lime charges the user, but the system is offered at no cost to the City.)

Lyft, the operator of the dock-based BlueBikes (formerly Hubway) system operating in Boston, Brookline, Cambridge and Somerville, has made an attractive offer to Newton and five other municipalities abutting the existing BlueBikes system.

Newton, working with Arlington, Watertown and Chelsea, submitted a joint grant application to MassDOT's Workforce Transportation Program to cover the capital expenses to bring five stations of BlueBikes to each of our municipalities. A City match of \$20,000 would be required.

We will continue to discuss options with Lime and Lyft for the future. Our goal is to ensure bike share continues in Newton in 2020 and beyond.

### **Short-Term Rentals (e.g., AirBnBs)**



Starting on Jan. 2, 2020, owners of short-term rental properties in Newton will have to follow new requirements recently adopted by the City Council.

The goal is to ensure “the quiet enjoyment of Newton neighborhoods,” while allowing homeowners the opportunity to earn extra income renting their properties.

The new ordinance allows homeowners to rent rooms to people in their primary residence where they live at least nine months a year. The number of bedrooms that can be rented is capped at three, and the number of renters at nine at any given time.

In addition, homeowners are responsible for making sure renters don't become a nuisance by being noisy, creating trash, causing parking or traffic issues, or creating any other nuisance beyond which normally occurs in the immediate residential area. Three violations of these restrictions will result in an inability to rent for six months.

Residents who want to operate a short-term rental must register with the state, but also with Newton's Inspectional Services Department before renting their property. Registration will begin on December 1, 2019. Prior to registering, the short-term rental property needs to pass a fire inspection. Fire inspections can be scheduled now.

For more information about short-term rental requirements and the registration and fire inspection process, click [here](#).

### **Need Information About Affordable Housing Options?**

Learn about affordable housing rental options from local experts. Topics will include eligibility requirements for affordable housing, the application process, waiting lists and the affordable housing lottery.

Our Health & Human Services Department is organizing the forum and is building in time for questions.

Join us on Thursday, Nov. 14, at 7:00 p.m. at American Legion Post 440, 295 California Street.

Need more information? Call 617-796-1420.

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. Don't trash your Halloween Pumpkin, Smash it - and donate your treats to troops. Bring your pumpkin and candy to the War Memorial Circle behind City Hall, 1000 Commonwealth Ave. on Nov. 2, the Saturday after Halloween, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and have some fun smashing it before it goes off to the compost pile and becomes dirt to grow next year's patch.

P.P.S. Last week's rain and wind was really damaging and costly - \$267,000. More than 500 trees were damaged, 30 whole trees were lost and more than 2,000 cubic yards of “woody debris” was cleared. We invested 981 staff overtime and contractor hours to respond to emergencies, address urgent tree removals and hanging branches, and assess the risk to surviving trees. Thank you Marc Welch, Deputy Director of Parks, Recreation and Culture, for a well-organized and timely response.

