



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

City of Newton, Massachusetts  
Office of the Mayor

Telephone  
(617) 796-1100  
Fax  
(617) 796-1113  
TDD/TTY  
(617) 796-1089  
Email  
rfuller@newtonma.gov

October 19, 2020

Honorable City Council,  
Newton City Hall  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton Centre, MA 02459

Dear Honorable City Councilors,

As I deliver our Long-Range Financial Plan, Five-Year Financial Forecast and Capital Improvement Plan, we are in a period of loss, anxiety and uncertainty.

More than 1.1 million people worldwide and 220,000 in the United States have died with COVID-19, a disease unknown to us a year ago.

Since March, the worldwide economy has slowed dramatically as we have been asked or even “ordered” to stay home and stay away from offices, schools and more.

We are experiencing COVID-19 cases climbing again in Newton, the Commonwealth, the United States and across the globe.

In May, close to 25 million people in America were unemployed. Almost half of them still had no work last month.

In Massachusetts, the Restaurant and Hospitality, Retail, Performing Arts, Higher Education, and even Health Care industries have been pummeled. Economists predict that Massachusetts will see a slower recovery than after the “Great Recession of 2008/2009.”

Our lives and the economy may not return to a new “normal” until we have a widely available vaccine or therapeutic.

So many of us here in Newton are suffering seven months into this pandemic. Our restaurateurs and retailers have seen revenues plunge. Residents have been laid off or furloughed, with triple the number of Newtonians unemployed compared to a year ago. Our neighbors are struggling with food insecurity; requests to our food pantries have skyrocketed. People are having trouble paying their rent or mortgage. Too many are concerned about staying warm this winter. Parents are worried about their children – with too little time with friends and way too much with computers and screens. Climate change, systemic racism, police reform, and socio-economic inequality are weighing heavily on us.

As of today, October 19, 2020, 1,064 Newtonians have had COVID-19; 138 of them have died. Many of us have had loved ones pass, sometimes alone with no way to say “goodbye.” Those who remain behind cannot console each other with a hug.

We are in a world of hurt right now. We are in a state of hurt right now. In our good City, we are hurting right now.

But, we can and will meet these challenges.

We will recover.

Our Long-Range Financial Plan shows us the path forward. These financial investments, captured in charts and graphs, are ultimately about helping our people, our villages and our City not just recover but eventually thrive.

We will recover because we will continue delivering our essential services: teaching our students, picking up the trash, plowing the streets, filling the potholes, running our elections, supporting our restaurants and retailers, keeping our promises on retirement benefits to our employees, taking care of our parks and open spaces, responding to emergencies and keeping all of us safe.

We will recover by supporting the vulnerable. We will step up for our neighbors who are encountering financial hardship, finding themselves isolated, feeling hungry, facing homelessness, reeling from the inequities of racism or coping with COVID-19.

We will recover because we managed our finances with care so we came into this economic downturn from a position of strength.

We will recover because we have the wind at our back even as we face this storm. We have been assiduously investing in Newton: rebuilding our schools (we cut the ribbon at Cabot just a year ago), paving our roads and improving our villages (check out West Newton Square and Newtonville), preserving our green spaces (go for a walk in Webster Woods), and addressing climate change (sign up for 100% green electricity through Newton Power Choice).

We will recover because we acted quickly this spring and saved \$9.6 million in the FY2021 operating budget.

We will recover because all of us understand that some plans, projects and initiatives will be deferred due to the uncertainty about the economy; the Capital Improvement Plan that we submit reflects that reality.

But, our dreams of a better Newton for all our residents must not be deferred and cannot fall victim to COVID-19. While we will bend to our reality, we will not break. We will double down on our core values of respect, diversity and acceptance, leavened with a commitment to compassion, equity and inclusion.

I want to give great credit and deep thanks to all our employees – City and School – as well as our City Councilors and School Committee members. While coping with their own challenges and those of their families, they have been dogged public servants.

Our Health and Human Services staff has been working 24/7 to take care of us. They have kept us informed all along the way on how to take care of ourselves even as the understanding of this novel coronavirus evolved. Along with our Senior Services staff, they have helped those who are suffering.

Our police officers and firefighters have literally been on the frontline, working every day and every night to answer our calls and keep us safe.

Our teachers, principals and administrators have re-invented teaching and learning, not once but twice.

Our Clerk's staff significantly expanded their workload so that for both the primary and general elections, each of us could confidently choose how we wanted to vote.

We have so many others who did so much to keep the City running well. From IT to financial folks, inspectors to planning staff, custodians to DPW crews, librarians to lawyers, they pivoted seemingly seamlessly so we could serve all of you.

Maureen Lemieux, our CFO, not only led our work on the Long-Range Plan and Forecast but also simultaneously did so much more, including submitting our FEMA reimbursement paperwork and monitoring our revenues and expenditures daily. Likewise, Jonathan Yeo, our COO, prepared the CIP and oversaw operations in a pandemic. Dana Hanson, our Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion, is working on police reform, the City Seal project, myriad efforts to address racism, Grab and Go meal operations, and so much more. Ellen Ishkanian, our Director of Community Communications, kept everyone informed. Linda Plazonja, our Citizen's Assistance Officer, helped so many. Sam Nighman, the Mayor's Office Executive Aide, made it possible for me to try to be responsive and thoughtful even with a deluge of things to do.

I have much for which to be thankful.

We as a City have many heroes among us.

Each of us has so much we can do: wear our masks, physically distance, and monitor our own health daily.

In closing, I know we Newtonians are passionate. It's one of our strengths. We speak up for our children, our neighbors, our villages, and our planet. My commitment to you is:

- To hear all these voices and then speak up for the commonweal,
- To understand our individual needs and then to mold them into actions for the common good, and,
- To bring heart and head, compassion and empathy, managerial know-how and financial acumen to this time of tight wallets to build our common wealth.

As your Mayor, as your public servant, I submit this Long-Range Financial Plan, Five-Year Forecast and Capital Improvement Plan in that spirit.

Warmly,



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor