

## Mayor's Update

### Current Cases

There are 768 Newton residents who have tested positive for COVID-19 as of Sunday, June 21, according to preliminary data. This number has remained relatively consistent during the few past weeks or so as very few new cases have been reported (and a few have been reassigned to other towns or cleaned out as duplicates).



While the data is encouraging, as we continue to reopen we must remain careful. Today we entered the next phase of Gov. Baker's reopening plan which allows indoor table service at restaurants, offices to resume at 50 percent capacity, close-contact personal services (with restrictions) and retail dressing rooms with an appointment. (FYI: We expect preliminary state guidance on school in the fall to be released tomorrow.)

Let's keep our neighbors and frontline workers safe: wear face coverings, stay 6 feet apart from others, wash our hands, limit our interactions with people outside our own household, and stay home if feeling unwell.

### Dining on the Street

As Massachusetts begins allowing limited indoors service, Newton restaurants will also be able to serve diners at tables set up in parking spaces on the street in front of their establishments.

They've already been serving diners on sidewalks and private parking lots, and at picnic tables provided by the City.

This next phase of Newton *Al Fresco*, allowing tables in parking spaces on the street, helps restaurants stay in business with more options on where to serve meals.

Safety is top of mind. Protective barriers are required along the three sides of the outdoor dining that face the street. Additionally, restaurants will need to provide temporary movable accessible ramps for mobility challenged individuals.

Protective barriers can be expensive, but they're necessary. We're working hard to provide as much of this safety equipment as possible to restaurants to use, free of charge, on a first-come first-served basis.

We're also applying for MassDOT's *Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program* for funding to purchase more traffic safety equipment and supplies, including ramps, as well as protective planters and flower pots which can add to the aesthetic for restaurants while providing protection.

The Newton *Al Fresco* Guide for Restaurants is [here](#).

## **Supporting Economic Development**

Two months ago, I asked the Newton Economic Development Commission (EDC) to help with our recovery by providing me with ideas on how we can assist Newton businesses in regaining their footing post Covid-19. EDC Chair Phil Plottel and the 13 EDC members recently completed their work.

Their outreach and a survey found Newton's businesses particularly concerned about attracting customers back, the high cost of reconfiguring space and regulatory barriers.

What did the EDC recommend?

Expanding outdoor dining into sidewalks, parking lots and streets (we moved forward a few weeks ago with sidewalks, private parking lots and picnic tables; restaurants can apply as of today for seating on the street); Adding outdoor cultural offerings in village centers to attract people (we're on it); Promoting a "buy local" marketing campaign (in process); Amending aspects of Newton's zoning ordinance to make it more business friendly (we'll try with the help of the City Council); Providing support for Newton-based child care providers (this is critical) and developing a privately funded Newton Small Business Recovery Fund (EDC is taking the initial lead on this).

The complete set of recommendations offered by the EDC can be found [here](#).

### **Riverdale: A Unanimous "Yes"**

Newton's Zoning Board of Appeals on Wednesday unanimously approved 204 apartments as part of the Riverdale Comprehensive Permit 40B project (a.k.a., Residences on the Charles).

The project is in Nonantum at the end of Riverdale Avenue, off California Street and along the Charles River, next to Forte Park.

When built, it will include 204 apartments (51 of which will be permanently affordable), 3,995 square feet of ground floor commercial and community space, and 236 parking spaces. Also, as part of the project, Criterion Development will provide the City with \$1.94 million in funding to upgrade the lighting and landscaping at nearby Forte Park and undertake transportation-related improvements including pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements at the Los Angeles/California and Bridge/California intersections.

Wondering why this was approved by Newton's Zoning Board of Appeals rather than the City Council? The Zoning Board of Appeals, a quasi-judicial body, by state law decides requests for comprehensive permits that are filed under Chapter 40B of the Massachusetts General Laws.

More information about Riverdale can be found [here](#).

### **MBTA Service Increasing**

Today, the MBTA expanded service on Commuter Rail routes and resumed full service on subway lines (with new safety protocols) as part of the next phase of the Commonwealth's reopening plans. Commuter rail lines will go from service levels of 45% last week to 85% this week.

The expansion comes after a dramatic dip in ridership during the COVID-19 Stay at Home order.

In a call last week with Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Pollack and MBTA General Manager Steve Poftak, they noted that ridership had fallen to very low levels, on the Green Line to 10% to 15%, 4.5% on commuter rail lines, and 33% on bus routes.

They also outlined the steps being taken to keep MBTA employees and riders safe. These measures include mandatory face coverings; hand sanitizer dispensers, disinfectant wipes and more cleaning; and encouraging windows to be open on buses to improve ventilation.

The MBTA will also be “tracking” ridership on buses to add more where needed to try to maintain a cap of 20 passengers per bus to allow physical distancing.

The Ride has been providing full service. Rides have been limited to one passenger at a time, but if demand reaches 2,500 passengers a day, two customers per ride will share a larger vehicle.

It's too early to gauge whether riders who regularly used public transportation before COVID-19 will return as we start heading back to the office. Right now, according to Secretary Pollack, car traffic is coming back faster than ridership on public transportation.

Reminder: Shuttle buses are replacing trains along the Green Line D branch through Sunday, June 28, from Riverside to Kenmore, to allow accelerated work on the track improvement project.

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. Newton's Parks, Recreation and Culture Department is so pleased to offer fun, short programs of 90 minutes or less with small groups and creative programming to allow for physical distancing. Check out the art, nature, LEGO, yoga and Chinese language offerings and much more.

Face coverings are required. The programs will be held at the Lower Falls Community Center, 545 Grove Street, starting on Monday, June 29. For more information or to register click [here](#), or contact Channon Ames DiClurcio at [cames@newtonma.gov](mailto:cames@newtonma.gov) or 617-796-1523.

P.P.S. Newton resident Tom Friedman, a board member of Friends of Newton Tennis, alerted us to information about becoming a member and using the clay tennis courts in Newton Centre. Find more information at [www.newtontennis.com](http://www.newtontennis.com).



