

## Mayor's Update

*This evening I spoke about the challenges facing our community.*

Here is my address (watch it on NewTV [here](#)):

Good evening.

We are in a world of hurt right now.

COVID-19 has surrounded us with illness and death with 118 Newtonians lost. We're in a recession with job insecurity and unpaid bills.

Graduations, summer traditions and even swimming at Crystal Lake and Gath Pool have been replaced with face coverings, distancing and unending screen time.

The killing of George Floyd, and now Rayshard Brooks, has brought to the surface the pain of generations of people of color suffering racism and bias, and unequal access to housing, jobs, education and healthcare opportunities.

I've been listening and hearing you.

In recent weeks, I've heard a Black resident share her deep fear for her teenaged son when he goes for a jog in Newton, another lamenting the achievement gap for our students of color, and yet another who feared for his life when stopped by Newton Police close to his home. These residents' statements have been recent, but the worry, pain, hurt, and injustice has spanned their lifetimes. This has been their reality all along.

We are in a world of hurt right now.

These realities are either being heard for the first time or resonating more right now. In the past few weeks, I've heard hundreds of Newtonians call for justice for every person in our City – regardless of the color of their skin. Our community prides itself on our core values of respect, diversity and acceptance. We must live up to these words.

I've heard the righteous anger of so many young people who are demanding change, starting with policing but going farther and deeper.

Let me do my best to speak plainly about race and racism in our City in this difficult time.

Let's all clearly say and admit that systemic racism and unconscious bias surrounds us in Newton.

- That systemic racism is threatening public health, economic opportunity, educational achievement and the quality of daily life for people of color.
- That systemic racism requires systemic change.
- That systemic change will be difficult and uncomfortable but is essential and



urgent.

- That Black lives matter.

Even during this coronavirus crisis and economic collapse, anti-racist work can't wait because prejudice has not paused.

While this problem is bigger than any of us, each of us must do our part to change our nation. Especially with the vacuum of leadership in Washington, D.C., here in Newton we need to prove that it is more than a slogan that Black lives matter. That the lives of too many, including Ahmaud Arbery, Breanna Taylor, George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks, have to matter.

Let's together forge a better Newton, not just for tomorrow, but for the decades to come:

- Eliminating racial disparities
- Building a more equitable Newton
- Healing racial divisions
- Dismantling our own privately held biases
- Ensuring Newton is truly an inclusive, welcoming community where people of all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds can live and thrive, be safe and secure, feel welcome and be supported
- Opening the doors of Newton wider to people of color
- Developing more affordable housing opportunities so that more people of modest means can make Newton their home

I know these are high aspirations. I so vividly remember being 10 years old in Detroit, my first home, as the riots engulfed the city. It's been a long 50 years with so much work still to be done but that crucible of race and inequality forged my worldview. Yes, these are unmet aspirations, but they are the right aspirations, ones that I know we share in Newton.

The only possibility we have of achieving the seemingly impossible is by doing it together and with the fierce urgency of now.

Thus, I embrace the ideas of President Obama's Mayoral Pledge. While the President's pledge was directed only at police reform, I know that we need to go farther.

My pledge on racial justice to you is:

- We will review our practices holistically, deeply and widely;
- We will engage broadly;
- We will report back to the community in draft form, listen and redo; and,
- We will do better – we will revise our programs, policies and practices, create meaningful change, and drive forward reform in our city.

We have so many good, thoughtful and passionate people to partner with in this effort.

This includes Newton's Human Rights Commission, the leaders and committed members of FORJ, Families Organizing for Racial Justice; and the group named the Newton Coalition of Black Residents who banded together early in my Administration to challenge me, Chief MacDonald and the Newton Police Department to address the impact of implicit bias and racism on policing. We've listened, built relationships, and moved the needle a bit. I have met with this group in

the past weeks and have recommitted to continuing to work together.

In the coming days, I will work with not just these groups but also affordable housing and environmental justice advocates, our faith leaders, our School Committee members and City Councilors, our Fair Housing and Housing Partnership members, businesspeople, younger voices and others committed to this vital work of racial and social justice.

What are we going to do?

We begin with public safety and policing.

I am taking three important steps immediately.

First, we are adopting the “8CANTWAIT” reforms. The Newton Police Department is almost done revising its use of force policies. Effective Wednesday, NPD officially bans chokeholds and requires officers to intervene in instances of excessive force. Known as General Orders, the policy will be posted online by the end of the day tomorrow. We look forward to reviewing them with the Newton Coalition of Black Residents and others and revising them more, if warranted.

This is good but it isn't enough.

Second, we need a holistic reassessment of the role of policing in Newton.

For example, the Newton Police Department is increasingly concerned about the number of calls to 911 stemming from behavioral and mental health crises. At one time, the NPD were at the leading edge. They embedded a social worker within the Police Department to help people with their underlying challenges.

Can we do something even more effective? Rather than a police officer carrying a weapon and handcuffs, perhaps a crisis counselor responds, armed with social work skills, and ready to call for police backup if needed. Let's review what services the Newton Police Department provides, engage broadly, report back what we find, and revise what we do and who does it, if warranted.

As another example, the state's Civil Service system makes it difficult to hire officers that reflect Newton's diversity and to hold officers accountable for their actions. Let's assess our recruiting and hiring practices and the way we do investigations and discipline, grievances and arbitration. Let's decide if the Civil Service system can be reformed at the state level or whether Newton is better off leaving it. Let's decide, too, on civilian review.

Thus, I am announcing tonight that I am forming an independent Newton Police Reform Task Force. This group will undertake a holistic assessment of the department and make recommendations on the policies, procedures, practices and overall strategic direction for Newton's policing effort. Its' work should be based on an understanding through surveys, focus groups or interviews of what people of color are experiencing in Newton. Areas that the task force will consider include, but are not limited to:

Recruiting, Hiring, Training and Promoting  
Staffing Levels, Services Provided and Organization Structure  
Misconduct and Discipline  
Accountability and Oversight

I will work closely with the City Council President Susan Albright, the Newton Coalition of Black Residents, FORJ, the HRC, and others to appoint the nine members. If you are interested in serving, please email me a resume at [rfuller@newtonma.gov](mailto:rfuller@newtonma.gov) and the reason for your interest by Monday, June 22. I want the Task Force to begin meeting in the first week of July and report to me and the community every 6 weeks.

Third, I am revising the Fiscal Year 2021 budget I have proposed to the City Council. I will move \$200,000 from the police cruiser replacement line item in the police budget to the Mayor's Office. These funds will allow the Newton Police Reform Task Force to have the option of hiring a facilitator or a consultant to further their work.

I know that there are people, especially our young people, demanding defunding the police. They are asking if at this moment when COVID-19 has created an economic crisis, are we investing in the right places? The budget I submitted to the City Council prioritizes education. Tonight, I have called for re-imagining the Police Department and we will see in the coming months the budgetary implications. Let's decide first what we want to do and then budget accordingly. Please know I heard the widespread call and announced last week Sunday hours at the library, assuming we can re-open in a healthy and safe manner by then.

As we embark on this reshaping of public safety, please know I am deeply grateful for the work of our police officers. Most grew up in Newton and all of them love this community. Their commitment to just, fair, safe, unbiased and respectful community policing is deep. I am proud of them and their tradition of answering the call. The rank and file and the leadership of the Newton Police Department condemn the actions of the Minneapolis police officers that killed George Floyd. They also believe in continuous improvement and their input in this review process will be critical.

Here at City Hall, we have additional work to do. While it feels like an overwhelming task to dismantle a system that in so many ways reflects the structural racism in our society, I can directly influence our recruiting, hiring and training practices and diversity, equity and inclusion in our municipal workplace. I will partner with our Human Resources Director and Department Heads on this anti-racism work.

We know we need to address behaviors across the City of Newton so we eliminate inequities and injustices. Therefore, I am asking the Human Rights Commission to undertake a review of their role and the ordinance that defines their actions, a task they are eager to take on. While we may ultimately want another Commission to focus on this critical work, it is possible that the Human Rights Commission is the structure to serve this role.

Anti-racism and inclusivity are inextricably linked to Newton's decisions about housing, zoning and land regulations. While not the same as anti-racism, we need to provide opportunities for people of modest means to live here. There are proposals before us today – Riverside, Dunstan East, Riverdale, and the West Newton Armory – which provide those opportunities. The City Council, with the help of the Planning Department, is also overhauling our Zoning Ordinance which can open the doors of Newton wider and build a more economically diverse community. To our young activists, I encourage you to learn more about this initiative—tune in, learn, and have your voices be heard. Like the budget, zoning in Newton is a reflection of our values.

The Newton Public Schools also need to engage more in important work around race. Our educators, who are passionately committed to this, are reworking the curriculum, including what literature students read and what history is taught. Our

teachers need even more intensive professional development on teaching students of color and leading courageous conversations on race. This is an effort which the newly hired Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion will refine and expand. We know we need more people of color teaching in our classrooms and the new Director of Staffing and Human Resources with a strong track record in this area will lead this work.

Our schools are the beating heart of Newton because our children and grandchildren are our future. The last 90 days of distance learning have been challenging, to say the least. I've heard from parents worried about so much screen time, too little learning and too much isolation. They are anxious about school in the fall. I am one of two Mayors serving on the state's Return to School Working Group and the challenges for starting school safely in September are enormous. This will test all of us. We'll need every ounce of empathy and generosity of spirit as our educators do their best to figure it out so Newton's goals of social and emotional wellbeing, educational equity and academic excellence are achieved.

COVID-19 is not behind us. We are all going to need to do our best to continue to wear face coverings, practice good hand hygiene, and stick together as we stay 6 feet apart. This is how we will honor the memory of those who have died with COVID-19. These little things are big. They keep us safe. Let's keep this social contract.

Similarly, all of us need to make a special and ongoing effort to buy from our businesses here in Newton. Dine outside at our expanded sidewalk seating. Get take out from one of our restaurants and sit at a village center picnic table. Do curbside pickup from a village store rather than ordering from Amazon. Our village centers will only survive if we support our restaurants and stores.

In closing, Reverend Dr. Mary White gave a prayer of comfort during the funeral of George Floyd that touched me. She said, "At a moment when he called out for his mama, we believe that the ears of mamas across this nation reared up, that the ears of mamas across this world heard him cry ... All mamas began to wail for our children. We began to wail for our grandchildren."

This Mother and Grandmother hears that wail.

We are in a world of hurt right now.

By coming together, understanding the challenges facing our community, and taking action, we can drive Newton forward, building on our understanding that the destiny of people of color in Newton is the destiny of all of us.

Good night.

