

Mayor's Update



Gov. Baker today announced steps to reduce activity for a few weeks to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Specifically, Gov. Baker will reduce allowable occupancy at restaurants and bars, stores, gyms, libraries, theaters, offices, places of worship and other venues from 40% to 25% of pre-COVID seating capacity effective Saturday, Dec. 26, through Sunday, Jan. 10. He left open the possibility of extending the restrictions for an additional week depending on a range of data points, including hospital capacity.

The Governor's steps make sense. Concerned about the rise in cases and deaths, I had made the decision last week to rollback some activities in Newton. Newton will now follow the state guidelines starting on Dec. 26.

Today's steps announced by Gov. Baker today include:

- Restaurant seating will be set at 25% of pre-COVID capacity and distancing between tables and other requirements will remain in place.
- Fitness Center and Health Club capacity will be set at 25%.
- Movie theater capacity will be reduced to 25% with no more than 50 people per theater.
- Office spaces will be required to reduce capacity to 25%, but there will continue to be exemptions for offices providing "critical services," such as public safety, public health, and local government services.
- Certain industry sectors such as manufacturing, laboratories and construction will be exempt from the 25% limit.
- K-12 schools continue to be exempted from these capacity limits, but will need to follow Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) health standards and guidelines.
- Indoor event capacity is being reduced to 10 people.
- Outdoor event capacity is being reduced to 25 people.
- Private residences will continue to have the same limits of 10 people indoors and 25 outdoors.

Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders also announced an important change to protect hospital capacity. Effective Dec. 26, all hospitals in Massachusetts must postpone or cancel all non-essential, inpatient elective procedures unless postponement would lead to a high risk of significant decline for the patient.

We all know how much our small businesses, restaurants and stores, including those right here in Newton, are hurting. We're waiting to hear from Gov. Baker tomorrow about economic relief for these businesses. I am also carefully studying the specifics of the COVID relief package that just passed in Washington to understand exactly what is available to help our Newton residents, businesses and our City and employees.

While we "build a bridge to the vaccine," as Gov. Baker said today, let's shop and get our meals locally, stay home for the holidays, wear a mask, stay physically distanced, wash and sanitize our hands, and don't go out if we're feeling unwell.

This week thousands of healthcare workers in Massachusetts received the vaccine. In the coming months, the vaccine will be available to all of us. We can almost see the end. We just need to hang in there together.

Special Election on March 16, 2021

Mark your calendar. The Special Election to fill two vacant seats on the City Council will be on Tuesday, March 16, 2021.

The City Council last night set the election date to fill the at-large seat from Ward 1 left vacant after the death last month of Councilor Jay Ciccone, and to fill the at-large seat in Ward 2 left vacant by the election of Jake Auchincloss to the United States Congress.

Nomination papers can be picked up at the City Clerk's office starting next Tuesday, Dec. 28, and must be returned by 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021. Candidates for City Council at-large seats need signatures of 150 registered Newton voters certified by the City Clerk's Office for their name to appear on the election ballot.

City Clerk David Olson, City Council President Susan Albright and I were also able to work with Gov. Charlie Baker, the Secretary of State and our state legislative delegation to pass legislation allowing mail-in voting. A mail-in ballot application is being prepared, and should be available on the City's website at newtonma.gov next week.

Legislation to allow early in-person voting for this election is pending at the State House.



Jonah Temple, Employee of the Year

Jonah Temple grew up in Newton, attended the Newton Public Schools and interned for the City's Law Department. We were so fortunate that when we reached out to him about our Law Department in 2016, he left private practice and joined us as an Assistant City Solicitor.

Jonah is amazing— thorough, smart, collegial, calm and hard working. He thinks deeply about his recommendations and crafts them carefully to make them just right for the City of Newton. He may look young, but don't let his looks deceive you; he is wise and

experienced.

Jonah's input has been critical to the Zoning Board of Appeals. As one example, he does his work on Chapter 40B safe harbor calculations with grace and thoroughness. His thinking about the data is clear, his experience of having worked on litigation that helped to create the standard across of the Commonwealth invaluable, and his writing precise and accessible.

His work with the City's Land Use Committee is another stellar example of his vital contribution to Newton. Committee Chair and City Councilor Rick Lipof characterizes Jonah as "so capable and confident, it's like having a security blanket. He's been an impressive partner in all that Land Use does."

This year Jonah distinguished himself on two major initiatives which overlapped: Northland and Riverside. Numerous stakeholders took part in these projects and the processes became lengthy, contentious and complicated. Jonah collaborated with residents, developers, attorneys, City Councilors, planning department staff and many more. He relied on his skills as an excellent listener and earned everyone's respect as a reliable source of legal information. His precise crafting of the Board Orders for both these projects, the two biggest in Newton's history, will undoubtedly serve Newton well in the years to come.

With respect and appreciation, I today presented Jonah Temple with the City of Newton Employee of the Year Award 2020.

Linda Walsh, Innovator of the Year

Linda Walsh serves as the Deputy Commissioner of Health and Human Services for the City of Newton. She joined the City in 1987 and is approachable, accessible and knowledgeable. She is an excellent listener. She believes in the power of relationships and takes the time to invest in them— or, rather, to invest in us. When she talks, we listen.

Until this year, we could have said that Linda had probably seen and heard it all. She has been our "Go To" person on so many issues, from public health, nursing, school health, human rights, emergency services, restaurant protocols, employee wellness and even rats and sewer backups.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic.

Newton's Health and Human Services (HHS) staff had to help all of us with a novel coronavirus and reframe how we work and provide education, policing, firefighting, elections, libraries and so many other city services.

COVID-19 required the creation of a whole new infrastructure, one that had to be successful out of the box, without the luxury of months of designing or testing. Every division in the HHS Department required rethinking and reorganizing. Public Health and Environmental Health, the two divisions Linda heads up, began to absorb, digest and act in the face of an enormous amount of new and changing information on COVID.



Linda did that and so much more. HHS had to help all the other City Departments reimagine themselves and Linda was the lead person much of the time. So, too, when employees wanted to understand the impact of the virus on their particular and unique situation, Linda was there to help.

We know that Linda is incredibly smart. She understands the science of public health and easily translates those concepts into successful practices and protocols that meet the needs of the people on the ground in our schools and workplaces.

To reimagine these practices and protocols which ultimately affected so many required creativity, ingenuity, positivity, empathy and compassion, all qualities we've come to associate with Linda. During this crisis, she brought to bear her years of experience and her emotional intelligence.

This crisis also required an unimaginable level of work. Always, day or night, weekday or weekend, Linda made herself available to each of us. This is even more special as Linda had planned on retiring in the spring of 2020. Instead, Linda linked arms with Commissioner Deb Youngblood, and she hasn't let go. She worked harder, smarter and more creatively than ever. Sometimes she also worked thanklessly, knowing that creating change in times of a life-threatening virus meant not glory or glamour but sometimes, understandably, anxiety, distrust and anger.

Linda Walsh, at the very end of her career with the City, brought all that she had learned to the task of innovation in a dire public health crisis. She is a remarkable human being and public servant.

With respect and appreciation, I today presented Linda Walsh with the City of Newton Innovator of the Year Award 2020.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. "Let There Be Peace on Earth" is brought to us by more than 30 musicians from Newton's New Philharmonia Orchestra and dancers from the Boston Ballet School in Newton. Vocals are performed by South African soprano Goitsehang Lehoybe. Enjoy.

