

## Mayor's Update

### COVID-19 Updates and Losses

#### Vaccines

The great news today is that over 300 of our City's first responders received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine from Newton Health and Human Services staff this week.



We've heard from many people interested in when they can receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Newton is closely adhering to the state's rollout phases. We are in close touch with the State and tracking their rapidly evolving plans for the next groups in Phase One and Phase Two. Our Health and Human Services team will work with many partners across the Commonwealth to ensure the widest and most expedient distribution possible according to state and federal priorities. When we can effectively and efficiently administer the vaccine ourselves (like we did this week for first responders), we will do so. We'll also keep you well informed including around other vaccination site options as many more will be forthcoming.

*(Photo: Pictured clockwise from top left: Health and Human Services Public Health Nurse Educator Shin-Yi Lau and HHS Deputy Commissioner Linda Walsh vaccinating Newton Police Captain George Mead, Newton Public Safety Telecommunicator Julie Kelly, Newton Firefighter Craig Quatromini and Newton Fire Captain Ronnie Fremantle.*



Our goal is to get the vaccine distributed effectively, efficiently and quickly to help keep all of us, our families and our community safe and healthy, help our businesses be open, and allow us to resume our normal lives.

The State is updating its rollout plan twice a week which in turn impacts what we do and when; check the latest updates that are available from the State [here](#).

Healthcare personnel (who have directed a lot of questions to us about getting the vaccine) can find updates [here](#).

If you are interested in the State rollout generally, Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) has information regarding vaccine shipments and administration, by geographic areas and by demographic factors [here](#).

<b>COVID-19 in Newton</b>
<b>Total Cases 2,740</b>
<b>Total Deaths 177</b>
<small>*As of 1/13/21</small>

### Newton Cases and Losses

Unfortunately, the rest of the COVID-19 news this week is not good. Over the past seven days, from Jan. 6 – 13, we had 253 new positive cases among Newton residents. This brings our cumulative total to 2,740. By comparison, we had just 7 people in Newton who tested positive during the week of July 22 - 28 after we flattened the first curve.

Over the two-week tracking period from Dec. 27 to Jan. 9 used by the State for its reporting period, we had 476 new positive COVID-19 cases in Newton. We continue to be in the State's yellow category along with our neighboring communities of Brookline, Needham, Weston and Wellesley. Watertown is now also yellow, after being in the high-risk red category last week. Boston and Waltham are both categorized as red, along with 227 other communities across the state.

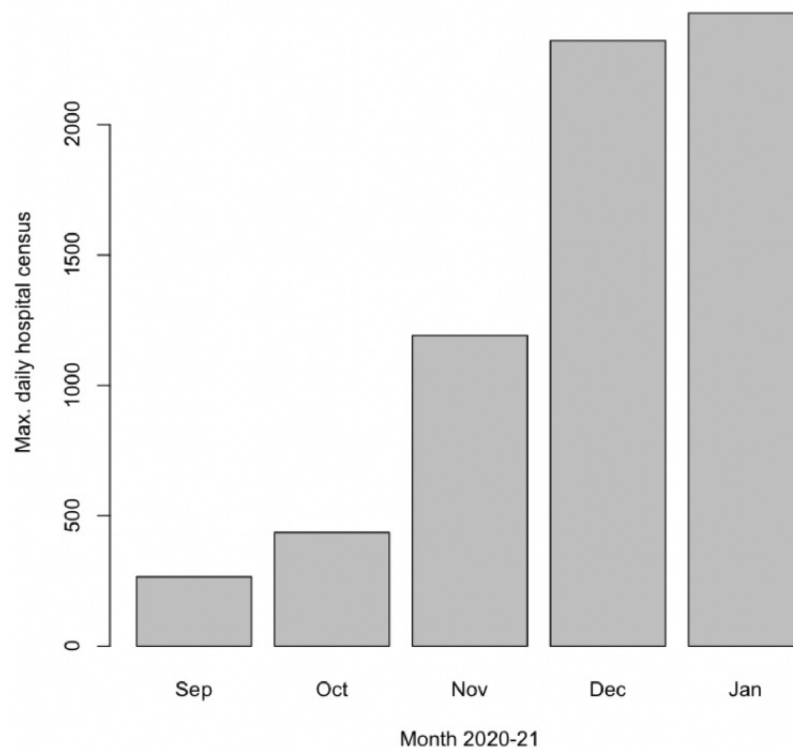
The incidence rate in Newton increased to 37.1 cases per 100,000 people from the 29.5 reported during the previous two-week period. In our neighboring red communities of Boston and Waltham, the incidence of COVID-19 per 100,000 are 72.4, and 66.9 respectively.

The positivity rate in Newton is 2.96%, meaning that of the 17,703 tests administered over the two-week reporting period, 2.96% came back positive. This is similar to the previous two-week period when our positivity rate was 3.08%. (Interestingly, the total number of tests that have been administered to Newton residents since the beginning of the pandemic is 249,094 through Jan. 12 and we have a population of approximately 88,000 residents; some of us have never been tested while others have had multiple tests.)

This week, the virus has again taken a deadly toll on our community. Another four residents of Newton died with COVID-19, bringing the total number to 177 people. May those who are mourning find comfort and healing.

One of the advantages of my job is that I get to regularly hear from some of our foremost experts. A professor at Northeastern's Emergent Epidemics Lab, Samuel Scarpino, shared the graph below earlier this week depicting the doubling month-on-month since September of hospitalizations in Massachusetts.

Hospitalizations have doubled month-on-month since Sep.



This increasing number seems especially cruel as the vaccine begins to arrive. While the glimmer of hope is on the horizon, the data shows we're still in the thick of the pandemic. The advice, by now so familiar, continues: Wear a mask, wash hands, physically distance, and stay home if not feeling well. Let's do it.

### Newton Public Schools Cases and Updates

*(Photo: NPS testing site)*

Another 40 people in the Newton Public School community tested positive for COVID-19 since we last reported the number on Jan. 8, bringing the cumulative total to 188. Some of the newly reported cases were people who were tested during the December break and had not yet been reported. For the current reporting week from Jan. 7-13, there are 33 reported cases. Of the 33, 11 are in-person students, 9 are in-person staff and 13 are remote Distance Learning Academy students. The full dashboard with data week by week is available [here](#).



By Feb. 1, students who chose the hybrid option will be back to school in-person at least two days a week. As soon as we are allowed to vaccinate our educators, we will.

We recognize the vaccination of our educators will be another important step toward full re-opening. Writing for myself, Commissioner of Health and Human Services Deborah Youngblood, and Superintendent David Fleishman, please know that with the vaccine on the horizon, NPS is exploring the implications for additional in-person learning for the spring. NPS is also planning for the fall with the goal of the option of full in-person teaching and learning for families.

Another layer of protection is good ventilation in our school buildings. I authorized \$2.3 million of City funds to modify and improve ventilation systems in all school buildings. Under the direction of Building Commissioner Josh Morse and his team and in partnership with NPS led by David Stickney, that work is now almost entirely complete. Find information about the HVAC work in each school [here](#).

The asymptomatic testing program for NPS in-person educators and staff is also in full swing. Since the launch of the program in December, no new COVID-19 cases have been identified via that testing program. Through yesterday, 1,130 tests have been performed.

We are also actively exploring expanded testing for teachers, staff and potentially students. Newton Public Schools with partners from HHS and medical consultants, formed a working group to evaluate potential expansion of testing protocols and the pooled testing program announced last week by Gov. Baker. I'll pass along their updates as soon as I can.

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## **Housing Assistance and Eviction Diversion Resources**

COVID-19 has had a devastating financial impact. Businesses are shuttered, some closed for good, and jobs have been lost.

The most recent unemployment data is from November 2020; it shows an unemployment rate of 6.7% statewide, compared to 2.3% a year earlier in November 2019. People in Newton are in a slightly better situation with an unemployment rate of 5.4% in November 2020, compared to just 1.7% the previous November 2019.

We're particularly concerned about our low- and moderate-income households. Last July, we launched the COVID-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program for income eligible Newton renters who experienced income loss due to the pandemic. Since then, the Program has assisted more than 200 Newton renter households with emergency rental assistance.

The pandemic and the need for rental assistance persists. On Tuesday, Newton's Community Preservation Committee approved our request for an additional \$1.2 million to extend the rental assistance program. The additional funding will cover existing households in the program who still remain income qualified and assist new households through June 2021, pending approval of the City Council. Learn more about the program and apply for assistance [here](#).

Looking for more housing assistance and information about evictions? Click [here](#) for additional Newton specific housing assistance programs, State housing assistance resources and a recent helpful guidance from the Massachusetts Attorney General for renters and landlords on COVID-19 eviction protections, resources, legal assistance and the moratorium. Please reach out to City of Newton

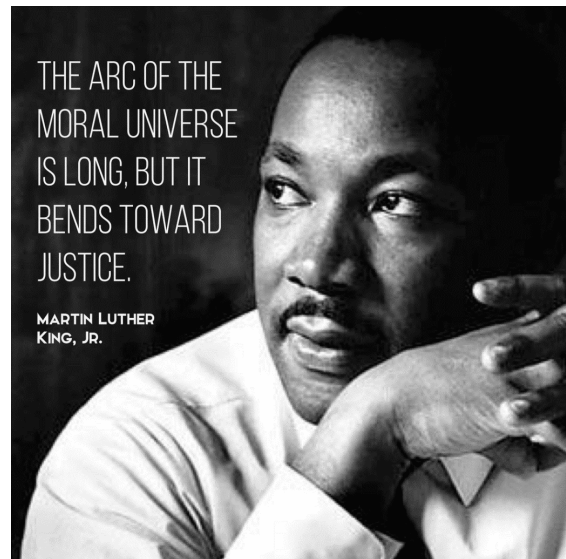


Social Services at 617-796-1420 to work with city staff on which resources may be the best fit for you.

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## MLK Day Celebration

Join us online this Monday morning, Jan. 18, at 9:30 a.m. for Newton's 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Martin Luther King Day Community Celebration. Register for the free virtual celebration at [bit.ly/mlknewton2021](https://bit.ly/mlknewton2021). Working with the Foundation for Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Harmony (The Harmony Foundation) and the Newton Interfaith Clergy Association, we've created an online community celebration of Rev. King's life and legacy. We've included music, reflections, Newton Public School student voices and a "Spotlight" feature on Myrtle Baptist Church. Listen to "racial justice voices" in a roundtable discussion with people from the Newton Police Reform Task Force, Families Organizing for Racial Justice (FORJ), the Newton Human Rights Commission, the Newton Coalition of Black Residents, and Storytellers. Reverend Alicia Johnson of the Myrtle Baptist Church will lead the discussion.



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## Round Two of Newton's Small Business Recovery Grant Program

More financial assistance is on the way to support our small business community that has struggled so much throughout the many months of this pandemic. We launched Newton's Small Business Recovery (SBR) Grant Program initially in May 2020 and provided \$300,000 in assistance to 27 businesses from among the 100+ applications.

This second round of the Program funded by \$300,000 in federal supplemental Community Development Block Grant funding, will assist the particularly hard-hit small brick and mortar businesses in our village centers and commercial corridors. Grant awards will range from \$10,000 for microenterprises (five employees or fewer, including the owner) to \$15,000 for small businesses with 5+ to 20 employees. These awards for emergency funding can help pay for commercial rent or mortgage, wages, loss of inventory, and other demonstrated costs.

Round Two of the Program is now accepting applications. The application deadline is Monday, February 8 at 5:00 p.m. For information on the Program and to access the link to the online application, visit: [www.newtonma.gov/SBR](http://www.newtonma.gov/SBR)

Need more information or have questions about the SBR Program? Email us at [sbr@newtonma.gov](mailto:sbr@newtonma.gov).

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## 15 Minute Pickup/Takeout Parking Spaces

Last month, we began piloting a new program to allow businesses to apply for a parking meter space in front of their business to be reserved for 15 minute short-term

parking. Our goal is to help us, their customers, stop quickly and conveniently for pickup and takeout and thus help our small businesses survive the pandemic. We have fourteen locations across the city with these short-term parking spaces and they're working well. We decided to extend the pilot to the end of the State of Emergency as declared by the Governor. In the meantime, we're exploring whether to allow short-term spaces permanently to help us in the recovery and then rebound stages. (Newton hasn't had short-term spaces previously.)

To request a short-term space, complete the application by clicking [here](#). (FYI: Businesses do need to get the okay in writing from their immediate abutting neighbors.) Questions? Contact Newton's Economic Development Director Devra Bailin at [dbailin@newtonma.gov](mailto:dbailin@newtonma.gov).

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*Grace White, a senior at Newton South High School, is making history. Grace is the first female from Newton to earn Eagle Scout, the highest rank in Scouting. Grace officially joined the Scouts two years ago when the program first welcomed girls. She is following in the steps of her Dad who is a Scoutmaster. For her Eagle Scout project, Grace built an outdoor classroom space for the summer camp program and outdoor activities in Nahanton Park. On behalf of all the residents of Newton, Parks, Recreation and Culture Commissioner Nicole Banks and I presented Grace with a commendation. Bravo Grace!*

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## **State-of-the-Art Online Permitting and Property Info System Coming**

We're leaping forward to a state-of-the-art online system that will improve City operations for residents, contractors and businesses trying to obtain various permits and licenses and to get information on properties.

The City Council this week approved \$1.1 million to begin implementing a transformational citywide permitting and information management system this year. We selected OpenGov after a competitive RFP process. This first-ever citywide system will integrate all permits, licenses and information about properties into one comprehensive system and database. (OpenGov is currently used by 83 municipalities in Massachusetts.) The funds will pay for OpenGov's software and professional services, a project leader and an assistant for the critical 18-month implementation period, hardware and inspectional devices, and data conversion and cleanup work.

What will the system do? Contractors and residents will be able to apply online for

permits and licenses and easily track the progress of their application. City staff will be able to better coordinate inspections and project approvals. All of us will be able to research properties more easily and comprehensively.

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## **Roads, Sidewalks, Bike Lanes and More: Listen In and Speak Up**

### Redesign of Hammond Pond Parkway

Interested in plans to make Hammond Pond Parkway work well for drivers as well as bicyclists and pedestrians? Staff from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (which “owns” Hammond Pond Parkway) will give an overview of a redesign of the section from Beacon Street to The Street near Rt. 9, answer questions and listen to ideas. Join the Zoom meeting on Thursday, Jan. 21, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. by registering to attend [here](#).

### Upgrade of Needham Street

Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) staff (which currently “owns” Needham Street in Newton which connects to Highland Avenue in Needham) will present a revised construction schedule and updated information about utility work. Join the Zoom meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 3, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Details on how to join the meeting will be posted on the project website [here](#) and sent via email for those signed up for updates. Sign up for project updates [here](#),

As a reminder, work began at the Needham end of the project last summer on improvements for motorists, cyclists, public transit users and pedestrians. Plans include better turn lanes, continuous sidewalks, new crosswalks, state of the art traffic signals, better bus stops, raised bus lanes and renovations to the existing bridge over the Charles River.

Questions or concerns about the Needham Street project? Email the MassDOT Project Team [here](#).

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## **Voting in the City Council Special Election, Tuesday, March 16**

There is a March 16 Special Election to fill two City Council seats left vacant by the election of U.S. Rep. Jake Auchincloss who represented Ward 2, and the death of Councilor Jay Ciccone who represented Ward 1.



Both seats are at-large, meaning candidates are elected by voters from across the entire City. Candidates for these seats have until Tuesday, Jan. 26 to submit nomination papers. So far, three candidates for each seat (i.e., six people altogether) have asked for nomination papers.

As in the November Election, you can vote by mail, vote early in person, or vote in person on election day.

### Vote by Mail

To vote by mail, take two steps. First, apply to get a ballot. Second, fill out the ballot

and return it.

Applications are now available to vote by mail. Find the application to vote by mail [here](#).

The completed application can be mailed back to the Newton City Clerk's Office, or dropped in either of the two designated, secure drop boxes in front of City Hall. Ballot applications must be received by Wednesday, March 10.

Once you receive your ballot in the mail, fill it out, sign it and return it in the envelope provided. The ballot can be mailed back to the City Clerk's Office, or dropped in either of the two secure, drop boxes in front of City Hall. Ballots must be received by the Clerk's Office by the close of polls at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, March 16.

### Early In-Person Voting

Polls at City Hall will be open for early voting on Monday, March 8 through Friday, March 12, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Vote at your polling location on Election Day from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Not sure where you vote? Find your polling location [here](#).

Warmly,

Ruthanne

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P.S. Join Strategy Matters, the firm working with the Newton Police Reform Task Force, to review the results of a community survey on the role of police in Newton. RSVP [here](#) for the virtual meeting on Tuesday, January 19 from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

P.P.S.. Like so many in our community, the pandemic hit Newton's artists hard. During these long winter days and nights, keep the *arts in our hearts* and support our local artists and arts groups. They will help us heal – and they need us to help them survive. Take a look at the Newton Arts Calendar [here](#).

