

# Mayor's Update

## COVID-19 Updates and Losses

### Vaccines

Vaccination distribution will be a group effort with many providers needed as supplies increase and more people becomes eligible according the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) criteria.

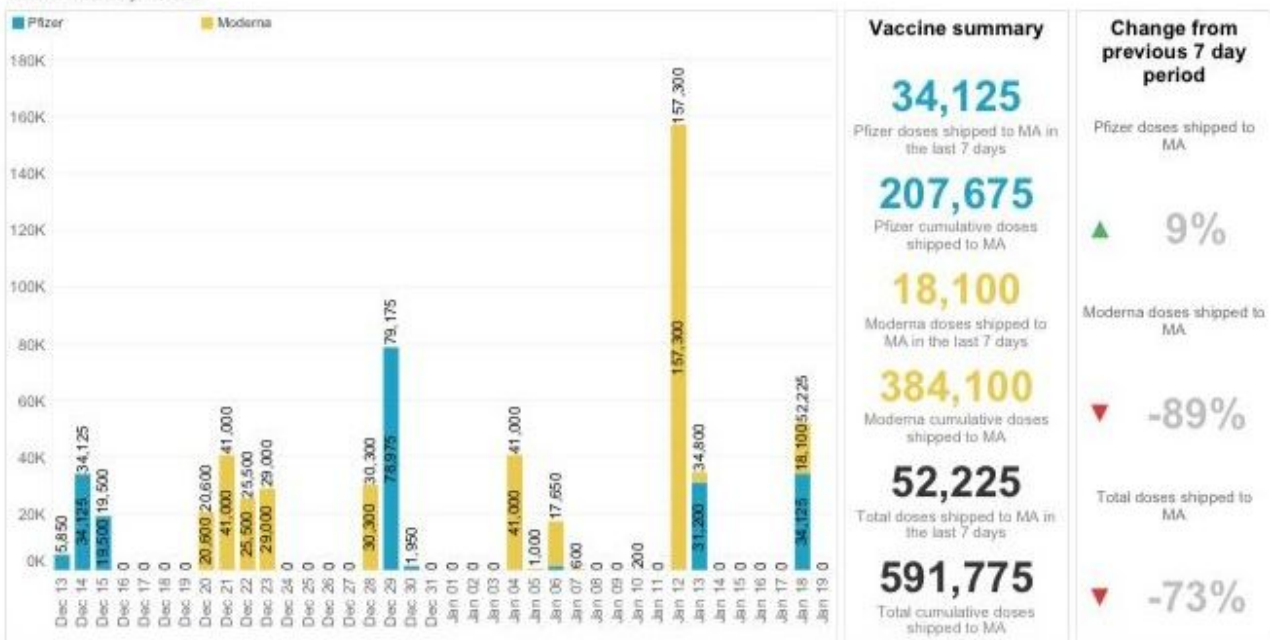


Newton HHS is one of the providers. This week we're finishing up the first round of vaccinations for our first responders. We're also beginning to vaccinate some people living and working in Newton's group home settings that meet the specific State criteria for congregate care programs and haven't set up alternative arrangements.

Dr. Paul Biddinger, who heads the State Vaccine Advisory Board, mentioned in a Zoom meeting this morning that vaccine shipments to Massachusetts have so far been lumpy (as the chart below illustrates) and unpredictable. (Click on the chart itself to see the State's Weekly COVID-19 Vaccination Report.)

## Doses of COVID-19 vaccine shipped to Massachusetts

Data as of January 19, 2021



Note: Due to inputting and processing, it may take 24-48 hours or more for shipping or administration data to appear in MHS. MHS data are available for analysis one calendar day after they are reported to the MHS. Date refers to the date that vaccine was shipped to Massachusetts. Some federal facilities in MA receive vaccine from a separate federal distribution system and would not be included here. Vaccine is shipped intermittently, dates are not displayed if no vaccine was shipped. Some federal facilities in MA receive vaccine from a separate federal distribution system and would not be included here. Data on doses shipped does not include shipment data from the Federal Pharmacy Partnership for Long-term Care Program.

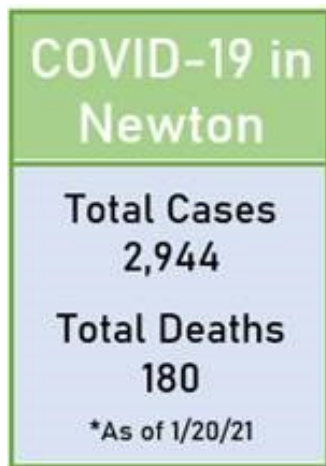
We know how frustrated all of us are about the spotty information for the Phase II vaccinations.

Here's what we know. We expect that the vaccine will be distributed in many places, including at pharmacies, doctors' offices, state sites and by Newton's HHS staff. Information keeps changing and the state is updating it at least twice a week. Click [here](#) for the state information.

I will share Newton-specific information about vaccine availability and distribute as soon as I have it.

For now, people who expect to receive a vaccine during the early steps of the next phase (older adults aged 75-plus, people with two or more conditions that put them at risk for COVID-19 complications, and residents & staff of low income and affordable senior housing) have the uncomfortable situation of trying to wait patiently for more information.

Our goal continues to be to get the vaccine distributed effectively, efficiently and quickly to help keep all of us, our families and our community be safe and healthy, let our businesses be open, and allow us to resume our normal lives. Please know that our HHS staff is just as eager to provide the COVID-19 vaccine as so many of us are to receive it.



### Newton Cases and Losses

We had 204 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Newton residents over the past six days (Jan. 14 – 20), bringing our cumulative total to 2,944. Over the previous seven days (Jan. 6 – 13) we had 253 new cases.

Over the two-week tracking period from Jan. 3 – Jan. 16 used by the State for its reporting period, Newton had 485 new positive cases, compared to 476 during the previous two weeks.

We continue to be in the State's yellow category along with our neighboring communities of Brookline, Needham, Watertown, Wellesley and Weston. Boston and Waltham continue to be red.

The incidence rate in Newton increased very slightly to 37.8 cases per 100,000 people, up from 37.1 reported during the previous two-week period, and 20.5 reported during the two weeks prior to that one.

We saw a slight improvement in our positivity rate in Newton. Of the 20,332 tests administered to Newton residents over the past two-week reporting period, 2.75% came back positive. During the previous two weeks Newton's positivity rate was 2.96%.

This week, again, I need to report another three of our neighbors died with COVID-19, bringing our total to 180 people. The drumbeat of loss has continued ringing in our ears. Honor each of our 180 neighbors and those who mourn their loss by wearing masks, physically distancing, and doing our part, for each other, to keep our neighbors safe until we can return to normal life.

### Some State Restrictions Changed

Statewide, the case numbers and hospitalizations have been a bit better recently.

Since earlier this month, the statewide positivity rate which is now at 5.8% is down 33%, the 7-day average number of positive cases is down 30%, and the number of hospitalizations is down 10%.

Gov. Charlie Baker referenced these indicators in announcing his decision today to lift the statewide Stay at Home Advisory for the hours from 10:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. effective Monday morning, Jan. 25.

In addition, the Governor also lifted the Early Closing Order that required certain businesses to close at 9:30 p.m.; it's effective on the same day, Monday, Jan. 25, meaning restaurants, health clubs, movie theaters and other businesses can operate past 9:30 p.m.

Restrictions limiting occupancy to 25% will remain in effect until Monday, Feb. 8 for stores, libraries, health clubs, places of worship and other "customer-facing" operations. Restrictions limiting indoor gatherings to 10 people and outdoor gatherings and events to 25 are also staying in place until Monday, Feb. 8.

### Newton Public School Cases

We had 17 people in the Newton Public Schools who tested positive for COVID-19 over the past week, bringing the cumulative total number of cases to 205. The update through yesterday includes reports of 6 cases among students learning in person, 1 among staff working in person, and 7 Distance Learning Academy/Remote learning students. The Newton dashboard with data by week is available [here](#).

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### **What's Happening with Crime and Traffic Incidents?**

The Newton Police Department just finished compiling their annual report. While Newton is quite a safe city, and during the pandemic crime fell in almost all categories, we still have serious incidents. (FYI: Newton was listed as the third safest city in the United States for families in 2020 and the second safest in 2019 by safewise.com.)

The number of violent crimes decreased from a total of 57 in 2019 to 44 in 2020, and included very serious situations: 4 rapes, 32 aggravated assaults, and 8 robberies.

The total number of burglaries declined by 32%, with residential burglaries going from 62 incidents in 2019 to 39 in 2020 and commercial burglaries declining very slightly from 13 to 12. (Burglaries involve illegal entry.)

Arrests went from 253 in 2019 to 199 in 2020.

Particularly notable is the decline in traffic incidents, likely due in large part to people staying home and driving less because of the pandemic. The number of total car crashes fell by 560, or 42%, from 1,322 in 2019 to 762 in 2020. According to NPD data, pedestrian crashes declined from 34 in 2019 to 15 in 2020, and bicycle crashes from 31 in 2019 to 23 in 2020. Operating under the influence incidents went from 50 in 2019 to 26 last year.

Some types of crimes increased, however. Motor vehicle theft increased from 11 in 2019 to 15 in 2020. We saw an increase in car break-ins from 108 to 116. While the number of car break-ins increased in 2020 from the year before, the trend over the

past decade shows a remarkable decline from 523 in 2010 and 150 in 2015 to the 116 in 2020.

We also saw an increase over the past year in the number of hate crimes and hate incidents. Hate crimes are defined as crimes motivated by bias, while hate incidents are bias related incidents that are not associated with a crime. The total of this combined category increased from 20 in 2019 to 30 in 2020, the same amount we experienced in 2018.

### Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents in Newton

2020	30
2019	20
2018	30
2017	27
2016	25

The 30 total hate crimes and incidents in 2020 includes 26 bias incidents (14 in 2019), 3 suspicious incidents (1 in 2019), 1 destruction of property (0 in 2019) and 0 hate crimes (4 in 2019).

The Newton Police Department's Civil Rights Officer and the Community Service Bureau officers actively follow up on each and every one of these bias related crimes and incidents.

See the full report [here](#).

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*(The new Engine 2 arrived at its new home at Newton Fire Station 2 in West Newton on Jan. 15. NPD will officially put it into service at the end of the month. The new engine means we continue to achieve our goal of making sure there is no apparatus in the NFD older than 15 years.)*



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### **Newton's Home and Condo Sales Numbers Stable**

The pandemic is wreaking economic havoc in many sectors but not in Newton's home and condominium sales.

Year-end single-family home sales data from Newton compiled by the Massachusetts Association of Realtors



shows dismal sales during the peak of the COVID-19 spring surge and into the summer. Then the market rebounded sharply in September through December. By year end, sales for 2020 were essentially on par with 2018 and 2019.

The data shows 575 single family home sales closed in 2020, just five fewer than in 2019 and six fewer than in 2018.

In contrast, statewide overall sales increased by 2.6% in 2020.

May was the slowest month for single family home sales in Newton in 2020 with 28 closed sales, down 61.1% from the previous May. The boom hit in September, which saw 61 closed sales for an increase of 84% over 2019, with the strong sales continuing through the end of the year.

The data for single family homes also shows that in Newton they sold faster in 2020, with an average of 49 days on the market, compared to 56 in 2019. (The average was 48 days in 2018.)

The percentage of original list price received on single family homes went up slightly in 2020, with homeowners getting 97.5% of their asking price. In 2019 Newton single family homes sold at 96.2% of their asking price, and in 2018 at 97.8%.

The number of condominium sales in Newton also ended 2020 essentially on par with 2019. The data shows 302 units were closed in 2020 and 297 in 2019. Both years are higher than 2018, which saw 266 closed sales.

The percentage of original list price received by condominium owners was 96.9% in Newton in 2020. (The percentage of asking price received was 97% in 2019 and 98.5% in 2018.)

Condo sales in Newton did take longer to sell in 2019 and 2020 than in 2018, according to the data. The average number of days on the market in 2020 was 56, in 2019 it was 57, and in 2018 condos sold on average in 39 days.

We'll give an update on sales prices in the coming months.

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## **Dana-Farber Cancer Institute Opening in Newton**

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute is expanding its world class oncology services in Newton with a new 140,000 square foot, state-of-art outpatient facility. It's located in the Life Time Center at 300 Boylston Street/Rt. 9 (formerly the Atrium Mall).

The first patients will be seen at the new facility next Thursday, Jan. 28.

At the new facility, Dana-Farber, in partnership with Brigham and Women's Hospital, will provide multidisciplinary care. The services include breast oncology, gastrointestinal oncology, genitourinary oncology, gynecologic oncology, thoracic oncology, palliative and psychosocial oncology, survivorship, imaging, clinical trials, genetic testing and genetics and prevention services, nutrition, and oncology social workers and financial counselors.

Known as Dana-Farber – Chestnut Hill, the facility will have 61 infusion chairs and 49 exam rooms as well as consult rooms. It will occupy the top two floors of the building.

I'm thrilled that Dana-Farber chose Newton for its expansion.

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## **Grant Opportunities for Human Services Non-Profits**

Annually, the City of Newton receives Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. We're soliciting applications for these grant funds through a Request for Proposals (RFP).

**Human Service RFP:** The City of Newton intends to allocate \$295,000 of its CDBG dollars to fund human service activities that focus on supporting and enhancing the lives of vulnerable low- and moderate-income Newton residents across the lifespan. Applicants must be a certified 501(c)(3) organization or municipal entity.

**Emergency Solutions Grant RFP:** The City of Newton intends to allocate \$152,625 of its ESG dollars to fund activities that prevent homelessness and enable homeless individuals and families to move toward permanent housing. Eligible activities include shelter operations, case management, rental assistance and financial assistance. Applicants must be a certified 501(c)(3) organization.

Applications are available online [here](#) and are due back by Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

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## **Two Special Department Heads Retiring**

After years of dedicated and capable service to the City of Newton, two special department heads are retiring, City Clerk & Clerk of the Council David Olson and Collector & Treasurer Rosemarie Woods.

### David Olson

David Olson has overseen four City elections, two Presidential elections, statewide elections, special elections, a recount and elections during this pandemic when mail-in ballots were allowed for the first time.

On top of that, David leads the efforts to maintain the City's public records. This includes birth, marriage and death certificates, dog licenses, the City Census and residents' voter status. Plus, as the Clerk of the City Council, he oversees meeting postings, agendas and minutes.

As City Clerk, David has the pleasure of performing weddings. David estimates he has married about 100 couples a year, or altogether perhaps 1,600 City Hall ceremonies. If the view from my window on many Friday afternoons over the past 10 months is any indication, he has performed a lot more than that during this pandemic. We've had a small respite during these difficult months for all of us in the Mayor's Office spying an excited, beaming couple standing by the pond with David, always calm and professional.

David began his twenty years working for the City of Newton originally as Director of the Jackson Homestead. He became the City Clerk sixteen years ago, and the responsibility for running elections was added to the Clerk's Office in 2013.

I first met David when serving as Vice Chair for the Citizen Advisory Committee in 2008. As a resident, an Alderman, a Councilor and the Mayor, his willingness to share his vast knowledge of the intricacies of Robert's Rules of Order, how to get things done and where to find information and all the arcana of procedures, protocols and our City's Charter always seemed endless. I'm grateful for David's insight, helpfulness and friendship.

David's last day on the job here in Newton is Friday, Feb. 5.

Under Newton's City Charter, the City Clerk position reports to the City Council. City Council President Susan Albright and Vice President Rick Lipof are working with Newton Human Resources Director Michelle Pizzi O'Brien on the process for hiring a new City Clerk. What big shoes to fill!

### Rosemarie Woods

Rosemarie Woods began working for the City of Newton in 2009 starting as the Office Manager in the Treasury Department. She brought to Newton many years of financial, credit and accounts receivable experience and knowledge. This knowledge and experience served her and all of us well as she took on responsibility for managing the staff of the Treasury Department, performing the full range of administrative and operational duties of the City of Newton's treasury and collection function.

With hard work and management acumen, Rosemarie modernized the billing, collection, and reporting of all real estate and motor vehicle excise revenue as well as utility billing, parking violations and other municipal revenues.

It is no wonder that when our former Treasurer decided to retire, I knew that I didn't need to look further than to Rosemarie Woods as his successor. As the head of the Treasury Department, Rosemarie has been a strong and skillful administrator. She works effectively not only with the Treasury staff, but also with people across all our city departments. From cash management to issuing debt to working with banks and financial institutions. she handles it all beautifully.

Rosemarie has worked tirelessly in this position of responsibility and trust, always maintaining the highest ethical standards, using good judgment, and acting professionally. Her last day is March 5.

I hope for both good health and happiness as they begin their next chapter and I thank them for their extraordinary service to all of us.

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### **Even as We Hurt, We Hoped**

Let me close with some of the profound words crafted by National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman that she recited in yesterday's inauguration:

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true.

That even as we grieved, we grew.  
That even as we hurt, we hoped.  
That even as we tired, we tried.  
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious.  
Not because we will never again know defeat, but because we will never again sow  
division.

Watch her recitation of *The Hill We Climb* [here](#).

Warmly,

Ruthanne

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P.S. Want to eat farm fresh, locally grown produce from June through October? Newton Community Farm (303 Nahanton Street) is taking enrollment for the Summer Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program. Pick up produce weekly at a cost of \$690 or on alternate weeks for \$372. Find all the details [here](#).

P.P.S. Enjoy Newton North graduate and pop singer-songwriter Kaylee Federmann. She is helping us kick off a new series of Parlor Performances by our Newton Cultural Development department. Tune in on Wednesday, Jan. 27, from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. Federmann is studying at the Berklee College of Music and is about to release her new single “Her Song” in mid-February. The performances will be filmed at the Parlor Room at Newton Cultural Center in Newton Centre. Enjoy them as they are streamed on Newton Cultural Development’s [Facebook Page](#). Thanks go to the sponsor of the series, *Newton Community Pride*, which builds community and volunteerism through year-round arts, cultural, and beatification programs for all to enjoy. Find more details about Newton Cultural Development’s Parlor Performances [here](#).

