

Mayor's Update

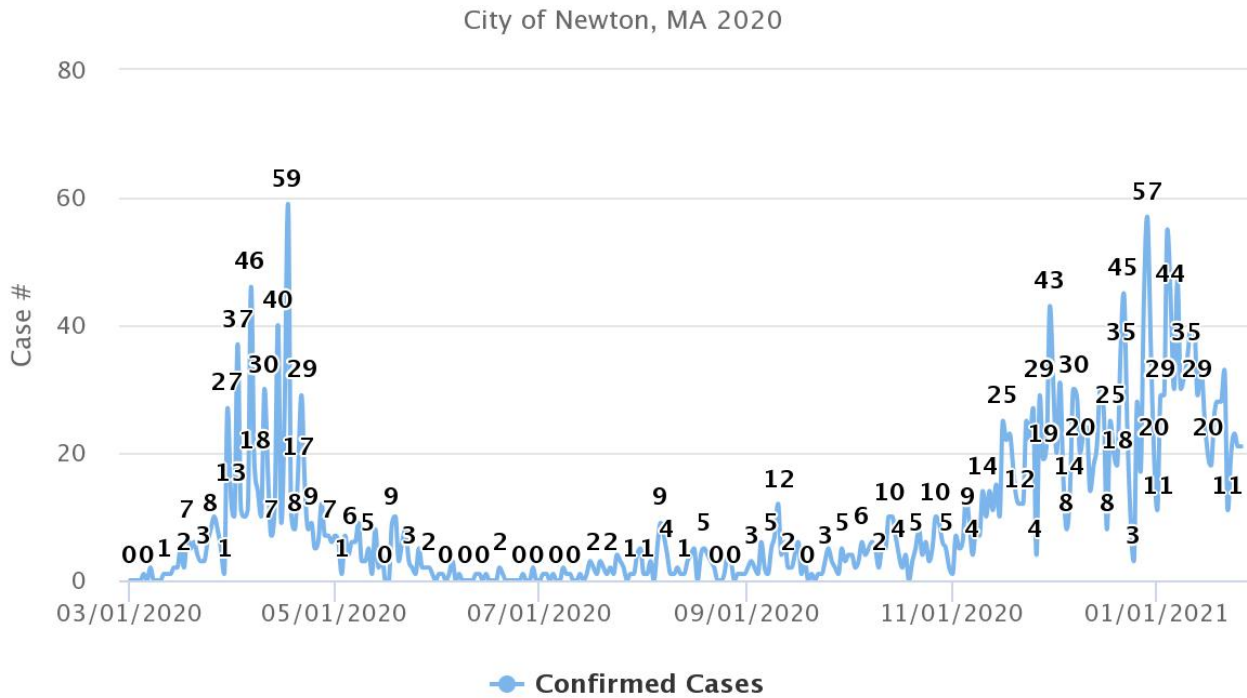
COVID-19 Updates and Losses

We're starting to see the number of people contracting COVID-19 heading slowly down after the surge we saw during and after the holiday season. We had 182 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Newton residents over the past six days (Jan. 21 – 27), bringing our cumulative total through yesterday to 3,099 people. Over the previous six days (Jan. 14 – 20), we had 204 cases.



Over the two-week tracking period from Jan. 10 – 23 used by the State for its reporting, Newton had 387 new positive cases compared to 485 during the previous two-week reporting period.

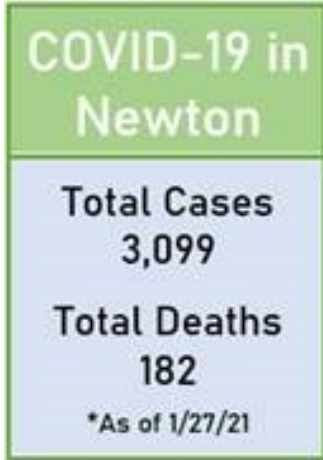
Newton COVID-19 Cases



Graph data through 1/26/2021

We continue to be in the State's yellow category along with our neighbors Brookline, Needham, Watertown, Wellesley and Weston. Boston, which had been red for several weeks, is now yellow, while Waltham continues to be red.

Our incidence rate in Newton dropped to 30.1 cases per 100,000, down from 37.8 reported during the previous two-week period, and 37.1 during the two weeks prior to that.



We also continued to see an improvement in our positivity rate in Newton. Of the 20,058 tests administered to Newton residents over the past two-week reporting period, 2.33% came back positive. It was 2.75% last week, and 2.96% during the previous reporting period. The statewide positivity rate is now 5.5% (with 1,224,945 tests performed in Massachusetts during the current two-week reporting period).

While I'm relieved our cases are diminishing, again this week I need to report that two more of our neighbors died with COVID-19. This brings our total through the past 10 months to 182 people. It is a startling number of people lost with untold waves of grief rippling through Newton and beyond.

Vaccines

People aged 75 and older will begin getting their vaccines on Monday as Phase 2 begins.

People in this age group tried to sign up for appointments beginning yesterday by clicking on the State [map](#) of locations at mass.gov/info. As anyone who tried to get an appointment knows, there were few available yesterday.

Thousands of new appointments became available early today when the State's high volume, large venue sites at Gillette Stadium, Fenway Park and the Double Tree Hotel in Danvers started booking appointments. Another mass vaccination site in our vicinity is expected to open next week at the Reggie Lewis Center in Boston.

These additional appointment slots also filled up quickly.

The Governor is recommending to keep checking the State website as new sites and appointments are being added.

Gov. Baker also said today that by next week a State call center would be up and running to help people make vaccine appointments by telephone.

If you live in Newton and are 75 years old and older who isn't comfortable using a computer or doesn't have a friend or family member able to help, call the Newton Senior Center at 617-796-1666 for help making an appointment. Leave your name and telephone number for a return phone call. Please be patient as our staff and volunteers are working very hard to provide timely assistance to everyone who calls.

On another related matter, we received many inquiries asking if our Newton Health and Human Services Department is holding a vaccination clinic for our older residents right now. Because of limited state vaccine doses, the State informed us on Sunday that local health departments would not be allocated enough vaccine for large public clinics at this time. Our Health and Human Services staff is experienced and prepared to give vaccines in a number of different ways; they are staying in close communication with the State regarding next steps and the availability of more vaccines.

For Newton-specific vaccine information and answers to some frequently asked questions, check our new webpage at newtonma.gov/vaccines.

While we wait to get the vaccine, medical experts encourage all of us (even those of us who have had a vaccine) to continue wearing masks, keep distancing from others, wash hands frequently and stay home if not feeling well.

KEY TIMES to Wash Your Hands



✓ Before

- Eating or preparing food
- Touching your face

✓ After

- Using the restroom
- Coughing or sneezing
- Leaving a public place
- Handling cloth face covering
- Changing a diaper
- Caring for someone sick
- Touching animals or pets

[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

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Newton Public School Cases

We had 16 people in the Newton Public Schools who tested positive for COVID-19 over the past week from Jan. 21 – 27, bringing the cumulative total to 221. This includes 7 staff members who are working in person, 4 students learning in person, and 3 Distance Learning Academy/Remote learning students. (Two people were recorded in last week's statistics.) The Newton dashboard with week by week data is available [here](#).

Assisting 7 Human Service Non-Profits

In the midst of the suffering from the pandemic, the City of Newton is able to once again support the delivery of vital services for our low- and moderate-income residents. We are allocating \$263,000 in federal Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funds to help our non-profit partners prevent, prepare for, and respond to the impacts of COVID-19.

With these special CARES Act funds, the City will support seven organizations (see the list below) whose programs provide stability across all ages and address urgent needs. These urgent needs include affordable childcare, food delivery to older residents, emergency assistance for utility bills, and specialized services to vulnerable populations, to name a few.

Cousens Fund
Family ACCESS of Newton
Friends of 2Life Communities
John M. Barry Boys & Girls Club of Newton
Newton Department of Senior Services

We're updating the webpage tonight so check for more information on these service programs tomorrow [here](#).

Apply for a Newton Small Business Recovery Grant

The Monday, Feb. 8, 5:00 p.m. deadline to apply for Round 2 of the Newton Small Business Recovery (SBR) Grant program is fast approaching.

The City of Newton has allocated an additional \$300,000 in CARES Act funds to provide financial assistance to businesses with less than 20 full-time equivalent employees. We will provide grants of \$10,000 and \$15,000, depending on the size of the business.

The primary goal of this program is to help brick and mortar businesses in Newton's commercial areas survive this economic downturn.

Minimum requirements for consideration include a demonstrated loss of at least 30% of gross revenue between 2019 and 2020 and a commitment to spend at least half of the grant amount on rent or mortgage. For more details or to apply, click [here](#). Questions? Contact Eve Tapper at 617-796-1145 or email SBR@newtonma.gov.



Photo: Wonderful to have a happy passing of the torch from Howie Sholkin to the newly elected Chair Gloria Garris at Newton Community Pride which makes possible so much including the Linda Plaut Festival of the Arts, NewtonSERVES, our July 4th fireworks and the Halloween Window Painting contest. (From the left, I'm with Sachiko Isihara, outgoing Chair Howie Sholkin, Adrienne Hartzell

Knudsen, City Councilor Vicki Danberg, Incoming Chair Gloria Garris, and Dana Hanson.)

Housing at Armory Moves Forward

The process to redevelop the West Newton Armory on Washington Street (right by the Trader Joe's) into affordable housing took a significant step

forward at the City Council's Real Property Reuse Committee meeting last night. After reviewing the final reports submitted by the Joint Advisory Planning Group and the City's affordable housing consultant, the Committee voted unanimously last night to recommend to the full City Council that I be authorized to purchase the Armory for one dollar from the Commonwealth for redevelopment into 100% permanently affordable housing.



This vote is a culmination of a nearly two year-long process from when the Commonwealth first approached the City with the opportunity to purchase the Armory for use as either 100% affordable housing or a municipal use.

To assist the City in deciding what to do, a Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG), comprised of a group of nine residents appointed by me and the City Council President, was formed in December 2019. After a year of investigation and study, the JAPG voted unanimously in November 2020 to recommend that the City move forward to pay the \$1 dollar to use the Armory for 100% affordable housing. (Read the JAPG's final report [here](#).)

The JAPG was assisted in its examination of the financial feasibility and conversion of the Armory into affordable housing by the housing consultant, Affirmative Investments. In its [report](#), the housing consultant found three viable hypothetical scenarios for redeveloping the property were financially feasible. Two of the scenarios envision preserving the front section of the Armory while replacing the rear drill shed with a new structure connected to the historic front façade. The third scenario envisions removing the existing Armory building entirely and building an entirely new building. The financial analyses show that any of these three scenarios can be built utilizing a combination of federal, state, and local funding sources.

In looking forward to our next steps, the City Council is expected to vote officially on the recommendation to purchase the Armory for 100% permanently affordable housing in February. The City's Planning Department will then continue to work with Affirmative Investments to draft a Request For Proposals (RFP) to solicit proposals from qualified developers to convert the Armory into affordable housing.

We anticipate the RFP will be released in the Spring, at which time the City may also assume ownership of the Armory from the State. I am so pleased that much needed affordable housing is closer to becoming a reality.

Newton's First Roundabout?

Our Newton Transportation team is working closely with MassDOT, the neighbors and City Councilors to design an improved intersection at Auburn Street and Commonwealth Avenue in Auburndale. (This intersection is close to the Marriott Hotel and the kayak boathouse.)

Interestingly, the project is an outgrowth of a MassDOT project to rehabilitate the bridge over the Charles River at Commonwealth Avenue on the border with Weston. ([Find more details at MassDOT Project 110980](#)) To make traffic flow smoothly during the bridge reconstruction, MassDOT needs to reconfigure the intersection of Auburn and Commonwealth Avenue. Our teams identified this as an opportunity; at the conclusion of the bridge reconstruction, instead of putting back the existing design for Auburn Street and Commonwealth Avenue, could we design and construct a better intersection?

After working with MassDOT to review multiple design alternatives, we are in agreement with MassDOT that constructing a modern roundabout will improve safety, connectivity and open space.

MassDOT will be paying all the costs for the design and construction of the roundabout project as part of its \$24 million bridge funding.

The new design will allow vehicles to move through the intersection now and in the future with minimal delays. Vehicles will not be required to stop at a traffic signal. At the same time, the roundabout ensures drivers travel at safe speeds by providing a natural deflection around the center island.

Pedestrians will be able to cross Commonwealth Avenue using crosswalks outfitted with pedestrian hybrid beacons (a.k.a., HAWK - High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk - Beacons). When pressed by a pedestrian, these beacons flash red lights requiring drivers to stop. Vehicle speeds will already be low due to the natural traffic calming effect of the roundabout, which improves stopping compliance by drivers at the beacons. People on bikes will be able to navigate around the exterior of the roundabout using bike accommodations.

This design supports our vision for the very special Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway which is widely used by runners, walkers and bicyclists. The design enhances the parkway character of the roadway and provides a welcoming gateway to the City. Additionally, the plan reduces the overall amount of pavement and reallocates it to new green space on the north side of the road.

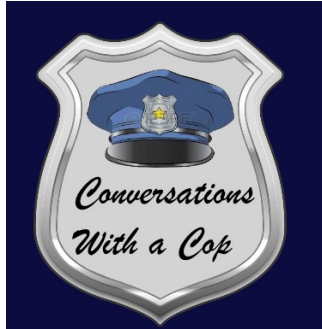


The project includes the construction of a new two-way shared use path for pedestrians and bicyclists on the north side of the road from the bridge over the Charles to the Marriott Hotel. This helps connect existing and planned paths.

The plan was well received by Newton residents at the public information session and City Council committee meeting earlier this month. The City Council is expected to vote on the project this coming Monday night.

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. Join Newton Police Officers and your neighbors for an online “Conversation with a Cop” on Wednesday, Feb. 17, 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. There is no formal agenda, but rather an opportunity to get to know Newton Police Officers, ask questions, and voice concerns. Register [here](#).

P.P.S. Join writer, producer and director Roberto Mighty for a virtual screening of his new 30 minute documentary, *Legacy of Love*, which was recently screened on WGBH-TV. The film, hosted by newscaster and Pastor Reverend Liz Walker, reveals the largely unknown story of Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott’s formative years in 1950’s Boston - where they met as students and fell in love. Mr. Mighty will take questions after the screening. Thanks go to the cosponsors, the Newton Free Library and the Newton Human Rights Commission. Register [here](#).



P.P.P.S. Do you have an older home that needs heating and cooling upgrades? Is your old heating system struggling during cold weather? (Please know it’s going to be particularly cold tonight and tomorrow.) Do you want to add central air conditioning? Learn about high-efficiency electric heat pumps at a free webinar hosted by Green Newton and Historic Newton. Zoom in on Thursday, February 4 at 7 p.m. by registering [here](#).



P.P.P.P.S. The weather is quite cold, but it’s still a great time to join Newton Safe Routes to School’s Winter Walk & Roll Week celebration from Feb. 8 – 12. Pick a day or two and walk or roll to school, a park or around your neighborhood. Get more information and download a packet of materials [here](#).



