

Mayor's Update

COVID-19 Updates and Losses

This week we continue to see a decline in the number of people testing positive for COVID-19 in Newton since the holiday surge. Numbers are going in the right direction, but with 182 new confirmed cases over the past 6 days (Jan. 28 – Feb. 3), the number of people testing positive each week is still significantly higher than last June when we only saw 18 confirmed new cases during that entire month.

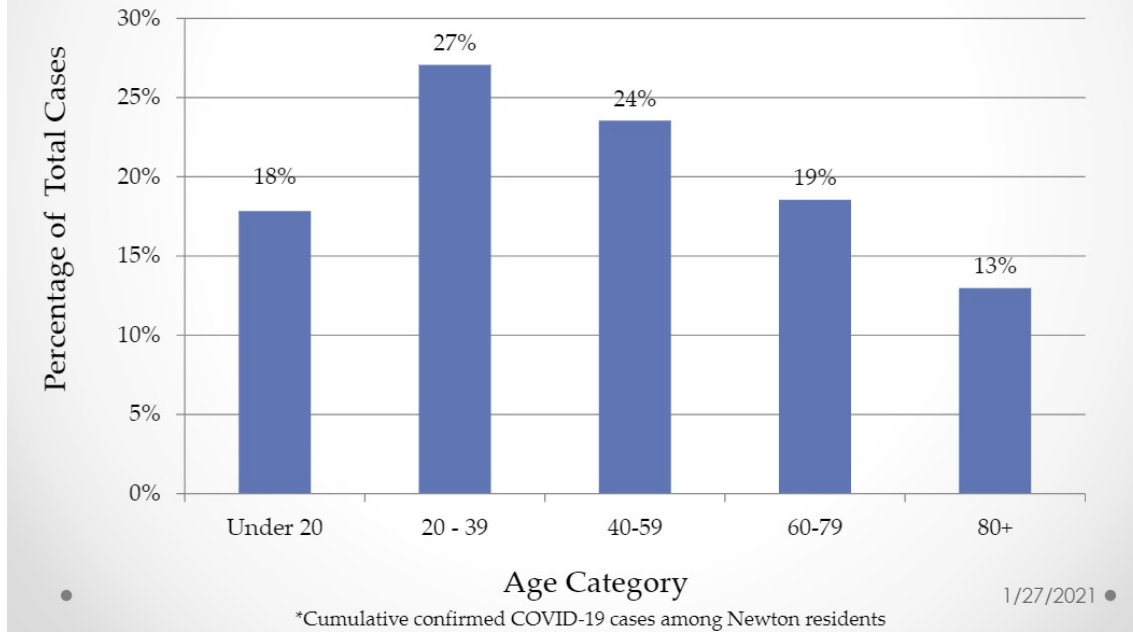


We need to continue to follow the protocols from the health experts. Wear face masks. Physically distance. Wash hands frequently. Stay home when not feeling well.

The 182 new cases brings our cumulative total of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 in Newton to 3,228. The 182 new cases compares with 387 new cases during the previous six days, and 485 during the six days prior to that, an encouraging decline.

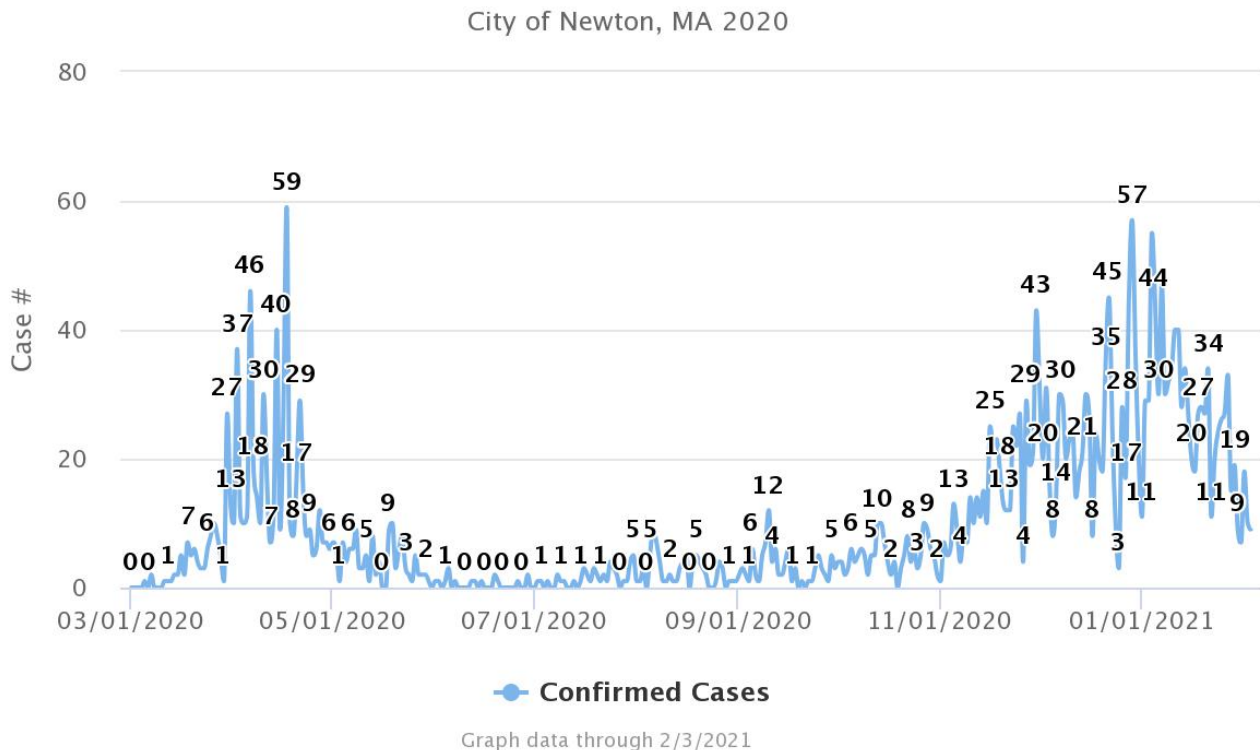
Our case totals include Boston College students who live in Newton, whether on or off campus. Last week, the Boston College website showed 61 positive COVID-19 cases among undergraduates and 75 altogether at the university. So far this week, they are posting an additional 16 cases. Notably, between Feb 2 and 3 there were 17 new cases reported among Newton residents. Of those, 10 were part of the Boston College community. This is concerning. Boston College reports its case data [here](#).

Cases* by Age Category



Over the two-week tracking period from Jan. 17 to Jan. 30 used by the State for its reporting, Newton had 322 new positive cases compared to 387 during the previous two-week reporting period.

Newton COVID-19 Cases



Our incidence rate in Newton dropped to 25.1 cases per 100,000, down from 30.1 reported during the previous two-week period, and 37.8 during the two weeks prior to that.

COVID-19 in Newton

Total Cases
3,228

Total Deaths
188

*As of 2/3/21

Our positivity rate also is improving. Of the 31,526 tests administered to Newton residents over the past two-week reporting period, 1.22% came back positive. It was 2.33% last week, and 2.75% during the previous reporting period. The statewide positivity rate is now 4.32% (with 1,299,378 tests performed in Massachusetts during the current two-week reporting period). The statewide positivity rate was 5.5% during the last reporting period.

While our case numbers are moving in the right direction, there is no let up in the somber reality that COVID-19 can be fatal. We learned of another six of our neighbors who died with COVID-19 this week, bringing the total to 188

mothers, fathers, family members, friends and neighbors who are now being mourned in Newton.

Vaccines

People aged 75 and older are now getting their vaccines along with first responders and healthcare workers as Phase 2 of the State's vaccine rollout began on Monday.

There's good news for those of us whose physicians are part of Mass General Brigham or Beth Israel Lahey.

Beth Israel Lahey is opening a clinic for its patients at the former Boston Sports Club in the Wells Avenue Office Park in Newton, and Mass General Brigham is opening one next door in Needham at Trip Advisor for their patients. These clinics are only for people whose physicians are at these hospitals and these healthcare providers are contacting their eligible patients directly about appointments. Find more information about the Beth Israel Lahey Health vaccination program [here](#), and more about the Mass General Brigham vaccination program [here](#).

There are a number of places that are open to everyone to get vaccines in and around Newton. Here's the current list. Keep checking our website [here](#) as more sites keep opening and more vaccine doses are becoming available:

- Newton: Holtzman Medical Group [Mt. Ida Campus \(UMass Amherst\)](#)
- Newton: [CVS, 978 Boylston St.](#)
- Newton: [Wegmans, 200 Boylston St.](#)
- Needham: [Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates-Atrius Health](#)
- Boston: [Fenway Park](#)
- Boston: [Reggie Lewis Center](#) (check registration criteria - some clinics require Boston residency)
- Foxborough: [Gillette Stadium](#)

You can check the state map [here](#). You can also find locations using your zip code [here](#), and you can download a list of vaccination sites [here](#).

The folks in our Senior Center are available to help if you are having difficulty navigating the State's vaccination system. Over the last week, they've been in touch with hundreds of Newton residents. Please give them a call at 617-796-1666, and be sure to leave a message with your contact information.

Our Newton's Health and Human Services staff are staying in close communication

with the State regarding next steps and the availability of more vaccine in the future. Because of limited vaccine doses from the state at this time, our Health and Human Services Department is not opening a vaccination clinic for our older residents in the first group of Phase 2.

Wondering when you might be eligible for a vaccine? Find out [here](#).

With the Super Bowl this Sunday, it may be tempting to get together with friends to cheer for (or against) Tom Brady. Let's resist that temptation and stick with our household members.

Newton Public Schools Cases

We had 15 people in the Newton Public Schools who tested positive for COVID-19 over the past week from Jan. 28 – Feb. 3, bringing the cumulative total to 236. This includes 6 staff members who are working in person and 4 students learning in person. The Newton dashboard with week by week data is available [here](#).

School Update

NPS is now providing voluntary weekly COVID-19 testing for in-person teachers and staff.

The Working Group looking at surveillance testing options will provide an update on testing for in-person students, teachers and staff at the School Committee meeting this Monday, Feb. 8, at 7:00 p.m. The Zoom meeting information is available at newton.k12.ma.us.

The District Planning Team is also moving forward with plans for a full reopening of the Newton Public Schools in September, and at the possibility of expanding in-person learning this spring.

This team is being assisted by an Ad Hoc Medical Advisory Task Force made up of public health and infectious disease experts who will advise on health and safety related issues. I'm happy to report that Dr. Jodi Larson, Internal Medicine, Chief Quality and Experience Officer, Newton Wellesley Hospital, has joined the task force. Find the list of medical experts in my Update from Jan. 26 [here](#).



A New Countryside School?

The City of Newton and the Newton Public Schools continue to plan for the renovation and renewal of our school buildings.

As part of this process, we often look for financial help from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). In recent years we have worked very successfully with the MSBA on the Angier and Cabot Elementary Schools to design and build excellent educational facilities on budget.

The first step in the MSBA process is indicating that the City of Newton and NPS are

interested in rebuilding. We did just that for both the Franklin and Countryside Elementary Schools a year ago. These [Statements of Interests](#) were submitted with the unanimous support of the City Council and School Committee to the MSBA through their CORE grant program. The MSBA CORE grant program provides funding for municipalities throughout the Commonwealth who are seeking to complete renovations and rebuilds of schools.

The City and NPS are pleased that the MSBA has selected the Countryside Elementary School to move forward in its process in the next step which is called a “Senior Study.”

During a MSBA Senior Study, a team of architects and engineers from the MSBA conduct a site visit to review the information contained in the Statement. They evaluate the physical condition of the school, whether there is overcrowding and what future enrollment projections indicate, site considerations and the ability of the facility to support the anticipated educational program.

This step does not mean that Countryside has, or will be, selected to be partially funded by the MSBA, but it moves us one step closer to that potential outcome.

The results of the Senior Study and a decision by the MSBA to move forward to the following step, the Eligibility Phase, in the May – July 2021 timeframe. During that period Newton would be expected to establish a building committee, set design enrollment, and execute the MSBA’s standard Feasibility Study Agreement.

If Countryside is selected to move forward with the MSBA, the process will take many years of planning and study as well as decisions about funding sources before construction would begin.

While the pandemic has created many challenges, it also provides opportunities to work on long range capital plans such as this. We know that Countryside is only one of many capital needs in Newton, and we look forward to working with the City Council, School Committee, and the community as we continue to invest in our buildings and infrastructure.

Revising Riverside?

Remember the mixed-use housing, retail and commercial development at Riverside that was approved unanimously by the City Council last October?

It’s back.

Because of the significant changes in the economy, Mark Development is asking the City Council for changes to its approved plans for the 13-acre site at the Riverside T Station parking lot and former Indigo Hotel along Grove Street in Lower Falls/Auburndale.

Mark Development wants to replace the proposed hotel and adjacent office building at the site of the former Hotel Indigo with a life sciences/laboratory center, reduce the number of apartment units by 27 (from 582 to 555), and eliminate 17,033 square feet of ground-floor commercial space.

The timing of the proposed amendments raises interesting questions. Since the

approval in October, a new City ordinance went into effect raising the percentage of affordable housing units required in a development of this size from 17.5% to 20%. If it is determined that the requested amendments to the Special Permit fall under this new requirement, the number of affordable units at Riverside would increase from 103 (17.5% of 582) to 110 (20% of 555).

That's not the only issue yet to be determined.

Last month, Gov. Baker signed into law "An Act Enabling Partnerships for Growth." This new law makes an important change affecting zoning changes and Newton's Special Permit process. Until this law was passed, zoning changes and Special Permits required a two-thirds vote of the City Council – or 16 of the 24 Councilors. Under this new law, a simple majority can pass a zoning change, meaning just 13 of the 24 Councilors are required to vote yes.

It's still to be determined whether Mark Development's request for amendments to their Special Permit will fall under this new law, or whether it will be grandfathered. Read a memo prepared by Assistant City Solicitor Jonah Temple about the new state law [here](#).

The planned revisions at Riverside do not alter the plans for the other 10 buildings in the development or for the parking garage, the proposed new exit ramp from I-95 northbound into the site, or other infrastructure improvements.

The \$7.2 million in mitigation funding required in the Special Permit is also not expected to be affected by the proposed amendments. The funds include \$1.5 million for Williams School improvements, \$3 million for the Riverside/Charles River trail network, \$1.3 for neighborhood improvements and \$1.4 million to upgrade the City's sewer system.

The revised project is anticipated to be before the City Council Land Use Committee in April.

Riverside is a large and complex development that received a thorough review before being approved by the City Council. The changes in jobs, housing and traffic will have to be carefully considered again by the City Council.

Policing

This week our Newton Police Reform Task Force briefed me, the Interim Chief and Executive Officer of the Newton Police Department, and the City Council on their draft recommendations on policing in our City. A final report is coming by the end of the month.

I formed the [Newton Police Reform Task Force](#) last July in the midst of our country's and our City's reckoning with systematic racism after the killing of George Floyd under the knee of a Minneapolis Police Officer and the deaths of other Black men and women. I tasked our twelve members with undertaking a holistic assessment of the Newton Police Department and making recommendations on policies, procedures, practices and the overall strategic direction for policing in Newton.

Over the past seven months, the Task Force reached out to and heard from community members during Zoom public forums and listening sessions, through

surveys and in focus groups. They heard from members of the Newton Police Department and listened to stakeholders and experts in the fields of racial justice and policing.

As the Newton Police Reform Task Force undertook their assessment, I'm grateful that a second, internal group of members of the Newton Police Department (sworn officers and civilians) worked in parallel to propose changes.

Both sets of these recommendations are coming forward just as we are moving ahead with hiring a new Chief of the Newton Police Department to lead the next chapter of this strong Department's future. Applications are due by the end of the day tomorrow.

Our new Chief will lead our efforts to continuously improve and to deliver fair, just, respectful, safe and effective policing. We want to better train our officers in anti-bias and anti-racist practices, mental health crisis intervention and community policing. We want the make up of our department to better reflect the diversity of our community, and to continue to build trust and respect between our residents, our elected officials and our officers.

The Newton Reform Task Force has provided very good ideas in their draft. Some initiatives we are already working on, others we will lean into and set into motion in the coming weeks and months, and a few will take more time to study, better understand and fund. Virtually all the proposed changes will take a partnership with the Newton Police unions to move forward.

I want to briefly outline a few of the Task Force's initial draft recommendations. But, first, I want to echo something Chair Sonja Spears said last night that I find particularly important: When talking about systematic racism, we are not singling out the Newton Police Department, and we are not talking about any individual acts of racism. Rather, we are acknowledging the way the systems of advantage based on race still impact us across our nation, and here in Newton as well.

So how does the Task Force recommend we move the Newton Police Department forward? The Task Force's draft recommendations include:

- Improve relationships between our community and our police with mechanisms for dialogue and accountability and commitments to NPD personnel health and wellness, including improvements to the NPD facilities.
- Enhance training to build cultural competency with vulnerable populations, to increase the expertise of first responders to mental health crises, to bolster de-escalation techniques, and to address bias, structural and systematic racism.
- Ensure racial, ethnic and gender diversity among NPD personnel and leadership with changes to recruiting and hiring, with consideration to leaving the civil service system.
- Implement a culture change initiative within the NPD focused on cultivating its customer service orientation, reinforcing its "guardian mindset," improving procedural justice and problem-oriented policing, continuing to improve bias-free policing, and supporting mutual accountability.
- Refine the scope of the Newton Police Department which might include a

different approach to crisis situations and non-police responses to various violations (e.g., leaf blowers).

The Task Force is recommending significant work on the police headquarters complex in West Newton Square. I set my sights on exactly this in my first year as Mayor with an RFP to landowners who might be willing to “swap” a suitable location for a police headquarters for the historic current building. While there were no workable options at that time, a renovated or new headquarters will be put on our Capital Improvement Plan, even as we fund repairs and upgrades in the existing buildings in the meantime.

I met with the internal NPD Police Review Committee yesterday for a briefing on their draft recommendations. I’m struck by the overlap between their ideas and those of the Task Force. The NPD Committee members are equally excited about more support for NPD, doubling down on a culture of continuous improvement, facility renewals, new ways to respond to mental health calls, and more community connections. They point to changes in schedules, wellness programs and rotations & promotions as important to support NPDs officers and civilians alike. They want better technology, ranging from GPS systems to cell phones, and the use of social media to body cameras. They eagerly await leadership from a new Chief. They ask for more appreciation, understanding and trust, including from me.

I am grateful for the time and thoughtfulness of both groups and look forward to their final reports. We will work together on the next chapter of policing in Newton to fulfill our mission of fair, just, respectful, safe and effective policing.

Thinking About Replacing Your Car?

The [Newton Climate Action Plan](#) has bold and important targets for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

To achieve our goal of carbon neutrality over the next 10 years, we’ve figured out that 33% of us need to purchase electric vehicles as our next car.

Why? Twenty-five percent of Newton’s GHG emissions come from transportation. As Mayor, I’ve switched our City of Newton sedan fleet over to electric.

Interested in switching to an electric vehicle? Find more information about making the switch through the Newton EV Task Force [here](#).



You’ll find that with available credits, EVs come at all price points and most now have ranges of 250 miles or more, with fast charging stations emerging everywhere. Electric vehicles require less time and money to maintain compared to gas engine cars, and they can be really fun to drive.

Teardowns

A for sale sign goes up on your street, and the question might be not who's moving in, but what's going to be built and how much will the new house cost.

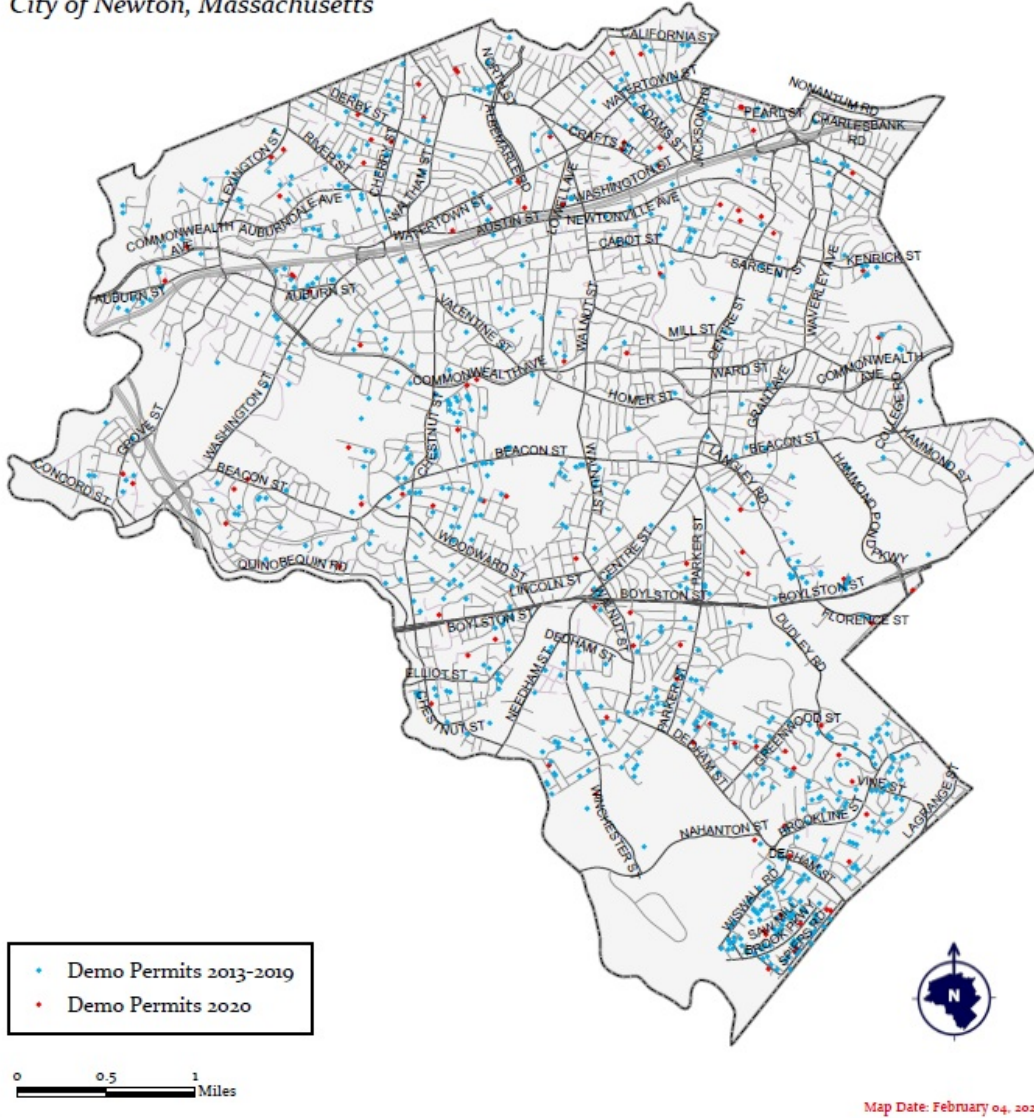
Data for the last eight years shows that citywide, we are consistently experiencing about 100 demolitions a year. (In 2020, the exact number of demolitions was 99.) This is about half a percent of the approximately 20,000 single, two and three family homes in Newton or 4% of all our housing stock over eight years.

Across Newton, homes that were built during the same period and fit into the aesthetic of that particular neighborhood, are being demolished, oftentimes in favor of new, bigger and more expensive homes that too often don't match the street's style.

As the map below shows, Ward 8 – Oak Hill and Oak Hill Park have had a significantly disproportionate share of the teardowns. While only 16% of the City's approximately 20,000 single-family, 2 and 3-family residential homes are located here, approximately 35% of demolitions have occurred in Ward 8 over the past eight years. (Click on the map to see a larger version.)

Demolition Permits 2013-2020

City of Newton, Massachusetts



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS
Mayor - Ruthanne Fuller

The information on this map is from the Newton Geographic Information System (GIS). The City of Newton cannot guarantee the accuracy of this information. Each user of this map is responsible for determining its suitability for his or her intended purpose. City departments will not necessarily approve applications based solely on GIS data.

Ward 5 and its Newton Highlands and Upper Falls neighborhoods have experienced the second greatest percentage of demolitions at 18%, despite only having 15% of Newton's residential housing stock. Wards 7 (mostly Chestnut Hill) and Ward 2 (mostly Newtonville) have had the lowest demolition rates.

The demolition of homes is generally allowed in Massachusetts and Newton. (Homes in our historic districts or homes with special designations may need additional approvals before being razed.) Property owners, who sometimes are developers, need to meet Newton's existing zoning requirements for the new house, or obtain a special permit from the City Council to exceed those requirements.

In Newton, our current zoning ordinances often don't contain the types of specifics that prevent "McMansions" or homes that are out of character with existing designs to be built. This is one of the issues being discussed by the City Council's Zoning & Planning Committee with the help of our Planning & Development Department as part of the zoning redesign effort.

State of the City

Even after a year of hurt, of loss and of upheaval, I can report that the state of the City is strong, resilient and good. Together we've leaned in, we've stayed home, worn our masks, and month after month after month made sacrifices to get to this place when we can start to feel optimism.

Join me this coming Wednesday night, Feb. 10, at 7:00 p.m. as I give the annual State of the City Address and outline where Newton is heading in 2021. The Zoom link is: us02web.zoom.us/j/88425708332pwd=bDhEMXIYMcRtVjMwUjVCTmtnYUZtUT09, the passcode is: 917074, and the Webinar ID is: 884 2570 8332.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Meet hours-old Jeremiah Frances Fuller, our second grandchild and the second son of our son David and his wife Roey. Jeremiah was born this morning in Chicago - everyone is healthy and my husband Joe and I are over the moon.



And indulge me this happy grandmother moment - this is Jeremiah's 2 1/2-year -old brother Henry. He calls me MayMay:

The image shows the cover of the book "Solving Disproportionality and Achieving Equity" by Edward Fergus. The cover features a photograph of Dr. Edward Fergus, a man in a grey blazer and glasses, standing in front of a window with a city skyline view. Below the photo is a graphic of three stylized human figures in green, standing on blocks of varying heights, with a tree branch above them. The text on the cover includes the title "SOLVING DISPROPORTIONALITY AND ACHIEVING EQUITY" and the subtitle "A Leader's Guide to Using Data to Change Hearts and Minds".

This program is part of:

OVERDUE

Confronting Race and Racism in Newton and is sponsored by the Newton Schools Foundation.

P.P.S. Join us for a discussion of the opportunities and obstacles that face us as we strive to be a more equitable and just school district. The program will be led by Dr. Edward Fergus, author of *Solving Disproportionality and Achieving Equity* and will include leaders from the Newton Public Schools. This is part of our Overdue: Confronting Race & Racism series. Zoom in on Wednesday, Feb. 24, at 7:00 p.m. Please register [here](#).

P.P.P.S. Are you a small business owner in Newton? The deadline to apply for a Small Business Recovery Grant from the City is this Monday, Feb. 8. Go to newtonma.gov/SBR to get started with the application. Questions? Contact Eve Tapper by leaving a voice message at 617-796-1145 or by sending an email to



Newton Out Doors

P.P.P.P.S. Feeling creative? Want to create public art on a recycled wooden door? Newton Out Doors is opening its door to you. A temporary outdoor installation of recycled wooden doors decorated with artwork by artists will be

installed and exhibited from May through November, 2021. Artists are invited to submit applications by Sunday, Feb. 28 to participate in this juried initiative. Find info and the application [here](#).

