

Thursday, April 22, 2021

Mayor's Update

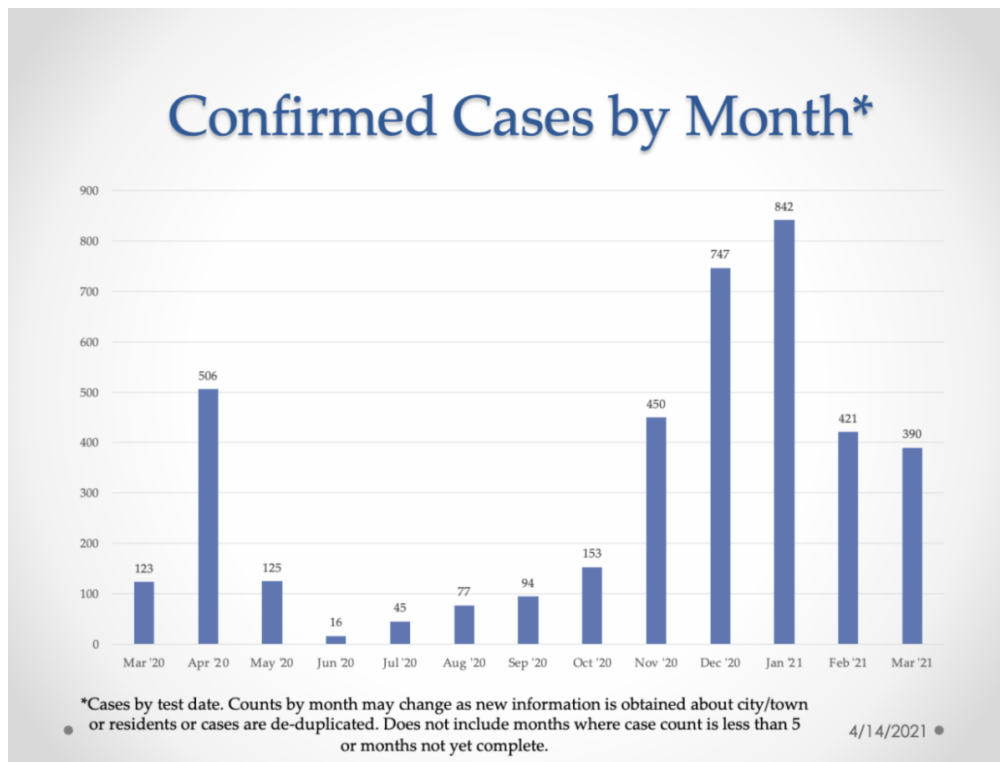


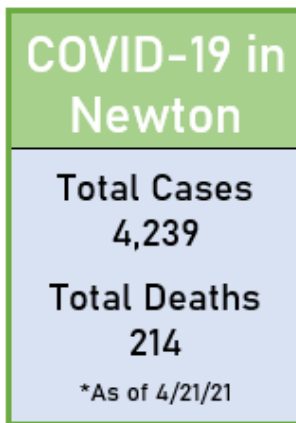
COVID-19 Updates and Losses

We had 84 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the past seven days from April 14 – 21, an increase of 18 over the 66 new cases we had over the previous seven days, and seven fewer than the 91 cases we had during the seven days prior to that. The new cases bring our cumulative total of Newtonians who have tested positive to 4,239.

The current case data in Newton shows we're in something of a holding pattern with cases going up by a few and then down, but staying well under 150 cases a week since late January/early February when we started to lower the curve. As comparison, we reported 253 for the seven days prior to Jan. 15, the day our first responders received their first vaccines here in Newton. The statewide numbers are showing encouraging signs. The seven-day average has fallen dramatically from more than 2,000 a day in late March and early April to 1,300.

Over the two-week tracking period used by the State from April 4 –17, Newton had 177 new cases compared to 212 during the previous two weeks, and 220 during the reporting period prior to that.





Our average daily incidence rate also shows steady progress during this two-week state reporting period during which we saw 13.8 cases per 100,000, fewer than the 16.5 we saw during the last reporting period, and the 17.1 cases per 100,000 we saw prior to that.

This week 0.56% of the 34,825 tests administered to Newton residents over the past two-week reporting period came back positive. Last week we reported that the positivity rate was 0.66% of the 34,997 tests performed. The statewide positivity rate over the past seven days is 2.00%, down from the 2.48% last week.

Cases among the Boston College community also continue to hold steady, accounting again for 13% of Newton's total number of new confirmed cases. BC data can be found [here](#).

Losses

Again this week, for the second week in a row, I am thankful that I can report we lost no one in Newton who died with COVID-19.

Newton Public School COVID-19 Data and Vaccination Update

It's school vacation week. We'll update these numbers again next week when schools are open and students are back in school.

Vaccination Update

This week's State vaccination information shows that 56,191 Newtonians, or 61% of our population, have had at least one dose.

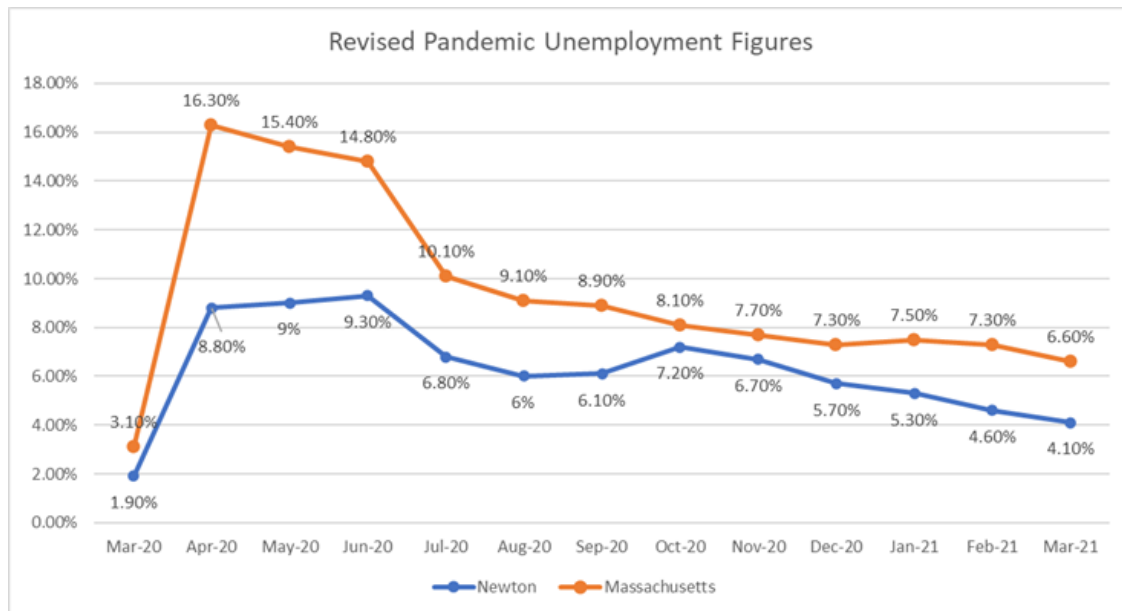
The state data also shows that 40% of Newton's population is now fully vaccinated with 21% partially vaccinated. (A week ago, we were at 35% and 20% respectively.)

Newtonians who are partially or fully vaccinated include 95%+ of those who are 75 years old or more, 95%+ of those 65-74 years old, 89% who are 50-64 years old, 75% who are 30-49 years old, 47% that are 20-29 years old, and 11% who are 0-19 years old. To see the detailed vaccination information for each city and town in Massachusetts by age, sex, race and ethnicity, and zip code, click [here](#).

As of Monday, anyone 16 years and older is eligible to get a vaccine appointment. Find a vaccination appointment or register to be notified when it's your turn at a mass vaccination site at vaxfinder.mass.gov.

Unemployment Rate Falling

The latest unemployment figures from the state show Newton's unemployment rate fell to 4.10% in March after a high of 9.30% in June 2020. In both cases, Newton's unemployment rate was lower than the statewide rate.



Update on the Gun Store

Why has the thought of a gun store opening in Newton struck such a nerve with so many of us?

The news of a firearms dealer wanting to open in Newton comes after years of so many mass shootings in so many places from schools, theaters, and concerts to grocery stores and business places. It comes after so many gun deaths reported on the news seemingly every day, ranging from a stray bullet killing a grandmother on a front porch to a teenager on the street to a convenience store clerk during a robbery. It comes in the wake of police officer involved shootings, so often involving people of color. It comes after the heartache of word that yet another person took their own life with a gun.

How are gun shops regulated here in Newton? How does that impact the proposal to open a gun shop at 709 Washington Street in Newtonville?

Newton has no zoning currently in place to regulate where a gun store can open. Newton, like most of our neighboring communities and the majority of Massachusetts communities, presently relies on the strict State regulations and federal regulations surrounding gun sales, and treats gun establishments like other retail establishments and allows them in business zones. (Our research, so far, has only found one of our near neighbors (Dedham) with zoning that limits where a firearms dealer can be located.)

According to the state database, licenses to businesses to sell firearms have been granted in the nearby communities of Boston, Waltham, Weston, Dedham, Concord, Natick and Framingham.

That said, communities, nationally for the most part, are beginning to enact stricter zoning around gun stores. We want to do that quickly as well.

In our specific example, I first learned that a proprietor had applied for a license to open this gun shop on Washington Street a few weeks ago. We asked our Interim Chief of Police and our Commissioner of Inspectional Services if it was possible to deny a license to operate at this location. This specific applicant met the qualifications for a license and the location is currently zoned for a retail store.

A few days ago, however, Newton's Inspectional Services Department issued a stop work order at the Washington Street location because renovations were being done without the necessary building permit. This stop work order is in effect until a building permit is issued. As of today, the proprietor has not yet applied for a building permit to resume work. (By state law, the Inspectional Services Department has 30 days to process an application for a building permit.)

In addition, with the City's Law, Planning, Inspectional Services and Police Department and in close collaboration with City Council President Susan Albright and members of the City Council, we are working to amend expeditiously the City's Zoning ordinance to limit firearms sales and related uses to certain zoning districts in the City. The revised zoning ordinance would also require businesses of firearms sales uses to be approved only by special permit by the City Council and will create specific special permit criteria, including a buffer zone between a firearms dealer and potentially residences, schools, parks and other sensitive locations. The City Council will be thinking through the zoning amendment and which zones to allow, the distance of the buffers and the types of uses to be buffered in the coming days.

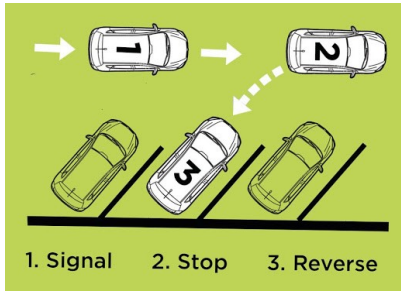
The proposed Firearm Business Use Zoning Amendment will be discussed for the first time by the City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee this coming Monday evening, April 26 at 8:45 pm. This first meeting is not a public hearing and comments for that evening are reserved for the City Councilors. The public hearing where comments on the proposed ordinance are welcome is scheduled for the Monday, May 10 Zoning and Planning committee meeting. (Want to Zoom in to these meetings? Find the Zoom link by going to newtonma.gov, scrolling down to City Council, and on the night of the meeting clicking on the left hand side "Electronic Posting Board" and looking for the City Council Zoning & Planning Committee Agenda. Open the agenda and the Zoom link will be right there.)

While we are continuing to research all our options, it appears that Constitutional protections would make it legally very difficult, if not impossible, not to identify at least a few locations where such an establishment might seek permission from the City Council to operate. I recognize that this will not be an easy conversation for our residents or the City Councilors but it has to be approached in a legally defensible manner.

Notably, the State Zoning Act, Chapter 40A, says that any approved zoning amendment will apply to any use/business that has not commenced prior to the publication of notice of the public hearing for the zoning amendment. The City Council is providing notice of the public hearing in the Boston Globe tomorrow, Friday, April 23. Since the proposed firearm dealer use has not yet opened at this location, it would be subject to the proposed zoning amendment (which would prohibit the business from operating in this location) should it be passed by the City Council.

As the decision making and the circumstances continue to evolve, sometimes quickly, we will be updating our website on an ongoing basis. Check the Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) page [here](#) for new information as it becomes available. We just updated it a few hours ago.

Temporary Changes on Homer Street (by the Library/City Hall)



Starting next Thursday, April 29, a portion of Homer Street will become one way to help patrons with parking during the reconstruction of the parking lot at the Newton Free Library. The work on the Library parking lot will increase the number of parking spaces, improve accessibility and drainage, and add solar canopies.



Please know that we're striping angled, on-street parking on Homer Street where drivers will back into the spaces. While we haven't had this type of parking in Newton before, this "reverse-angle" parking is considered safer. (Drivers can see both vehicles and bicycles better when exiting; drivers don't back into moving traffic; drivers and passengers when entering/exiting the car are positioned toward the sidewalk; many find it easier to back into an angled space than into a parallel space.) We'll be learning a new parking skill. Here's what it looks like in Washington, D.C.

MBTA Changes

The MBTA notified us that it will resume some service on the suspended Bus Route 52 in Newton which operates across the City, connecting Watertown with Dedham.

While this is encouraging news, we are still frustrated that this new schedule won't begin again until at least June 20, too late for our students who use the bus to get to school. In addition, the MBTA has not committed to returning the service to pre-pandemic levels, citing staffing shortages. We also have not heard when, or if, service on several of Newton's Express bus routes, which were also modified or eliminated during the pandemic, will be restored.

As I reported earlier, the MBTA also altered the commuter rail schedule through Newton, skipping the three Newton stops during several hours of the morning and afternoon due to operational challenges related to our single-platform stations. Earlier this month, the MBTA added a new bus service called "Newton Connection RailBus." The new bus, which is free, has stops at MBTA locations in Newton Highlands, Newtonville, West Newton, Auburndale, Riverside and Wellesley Farms and operates at specific times during the day when Commuter Rail trains pass through Newton without stopping.

The Newton Connection RailBus is intended to help connect people to the Green Line when the trains aren't stopping at our commuter rail stations. Additional information about the Newton Connection RailBus can be found on the MBTA webpage [here](#).

I'm grateful to Representatives Ruth Balser and Kay Khan and Senator Cindy Creem for being right at our side as we advocate for service here in Newton.

3 More Arrests

Last Friday, April 16, Newton Police arrested two additional men at their homes in Boston in connection with an ongoing investigation into a series of home burglaries in the City that occurred over the weekend of March 15 – 16. Earlier that day a first suspect, another Boston man, had been arrested.

The men were arraigned in Newton District Court on Tuesday on a variety of charges including receiving stolen property, identity fraud and larceny in a building. All three were released on bail.

The Newton Police Department's Warrant Unit and the Boston Police Department's Fugitive Task Force and Gang Unit made the arrests after an around the clock investigation by the Newton Police Detective Bureau. Newton Detectives are continuing their investigation into the series of home break-ins in March and again on April 9.

Last night, Newton Police also arrested a Newton man at his residence, charging him with receiving stolen property, breaking and entering in a building (nighttime) and into a vehicle/boat. This is the same person who earlier last week was arrested in connection with a burglary inside a garage here in Newton.

I know I speak for all of us when I say thank you to NPD.

NPD advises that we all continue to be careful. Lock our windows, doors and cars. If you have outdoor lights, please keep them on overnight and if you have motion detectors or a home alarm system, please enable them.

Anyone who may have information regarding the break-ins is asked to call the Newton Police Department Detective Bureau at 617-796-2104 or use the Police "tip line" at 617-796-2121.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Join Green Newton, City of Newton Forester Marc Welch and me at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 1 to plant trees as a beautiful, living memorial to



those we've lost in Newton to COVID-19. Green Newton's Environmental Youth Leaders have organized this sustainable **COVID-19 Tree Memorial** and purchased the trees with \$36,000 of generous donations. Help out with a mask on in front

of the Mason Rice Elementary School, 149 Pleasant Street, Newton Centre. Learn more at [GreenNewton](#).

P.P.S. Wow! Preservation Massachusetts just awarded **Adrienne Hartzell Knudsen and the Newton Cultural Alliance** the Paul & Niki Tsongas Award for their commitment to historic preservation in restoring the Nathaniel Allen House at 35 Webster Street in West Newton. Over the past eight years, the group has painstakingly brought the building back to life for use as an Arts & Cultural Center with funding help from Newton's Community Preservation Act. Thank you NCA for opening the doors to the new center for the hosts of this year's virtual 47th Annual **Mayor's Community Breakfast**. Register to Zoom into the community gathering on Wednesday, May 26 [here](#).



P.P.P.S. Thanks **Giuseppe Caruso** (8 ½ years old) for sending along this happy drawing celebrating today's Earth Day.



[Unsubscribe {recipient's email}](#).

[Update Profile](#) | [Customer Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by rf Fuller@newtonma.gov powered by



Try email marketing for free today!