

Mayor's Update



COVID-19 Updates and Losses

This week we had 53 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 during the week of April 22 – 28. This is good news as this is the fewest number of new cases we've seen since the 50 we reported back on Nov. 13. It's also 34 fewer than the 84 we saw last week and the 66 the week prior. Our cumulative total now stands at 4,292.

Over the two-week tracking period used by the State from April 11 – 24, Newton had 130 new cases compared to 177 during the previous two weeks, and 212 during the reporting period prior to that.

The news continues to be hopeful when we look at this week's average daily incidence rate which again shows steady progress. During this two-week State reporting period we saw 10.1 cases per 100,000, fewer than the 13.8 we saw during the last reporting period, and the 16.5 we saw prior to that.

COVID-19 in Newton
Total Cases 4,292
Total Deaths 214
*As of 4/28/21

Our positivity rate is 0.46% which is the percentage of the 30,719 tests administered over the past two weeks which came back positive. Last week we reported 0.56% of the 34,825 tests as positive, and during the reporting period prior to that the positivity rate was 0.66% of 34,997 tests performed.

Cases among the Boston College community accounted for 19% of Newton's confirmed new cases during this reporting period. Updated BC data can be found [here](#).

I applaud Boston College for joining Lasell University in acting to control the spread of COVID-19 by requiring students taking classes or residing on their campuses to be vaccinated before the start of the next school year.

We can see the impact vaccines are having on curbing the spread. As Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky said this week, "We've made stunning progress." Cases, and most importantly, the number of people who are dying with COVID-19 is falling.

Losses

For the third week in a row, I am again thankful and relieved to report we lost no one in Newton who died with COVID-19.

New State Guidelines

As cases and hospitalizations continue to decline in Massachusetts, Gov. Baker on Tuesday outlined a timeline for opening back up.

Notably, the State's outdoor mask mandate will be eased tomorrow. If you are outdoors and can maintain 6-feet of physical distancing, you're no longer mandated to wear a mask.

Read more about reopening [here](#).

Newton Public School COVID-19 Data

Between April 15 – 28, 27 additional people in the Newton Public Schools community tested positive, bringing the cumulative total to 409 people since September 14, 2020. This includes 26 students learning in person and 1 staff member working in person.

The dashboard with week by week school data from the pooled testing program is available [here](#) and the overall school data is [here](#).

Vaccination Update

This week's State vaccination information shows that 60,759 Newtonians, or 66% of our population, have had at least one dose.

The state data also shows that 45% of Newton's population is now fully vaccinated with 21% partially vaccinated. (A week ago, we were at 45% 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, 93% who are 50-64 years old, 85% who are 30-49 years old, 55% that are 20-29 years old, and 14% 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](#).

Last Friday, the CDC and the FDA recommended that use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine resume after a temporary pause. For more information on vaccine safety and answers to frequently asked questions, visit [cdc.gov/vaccinesafety](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety). Please contact your health care provider if you have questions about whether the J&J vaccine is right for you.

Newton's Health and Human Services staff resumed its homebound vaccination program using the J&J vaccine. People who are homebound and are interested in a COVID-19 vaccination home visit can call 617-796-1420 or email health@newtonma.gov to be screened for eligibility. We sometimes have extra doses available from our homebound vaccination program that need to be used within a short timeframe. Anyone 18 years or older can sign up [here](#) to be on our waitlist. The doses will be given at City Hall and you will have to arrange your own transportation and come relatively quickly.

We want to make finding a vaccine as easy and convenient as possible. A list of direct links for local clinics, including the Holtzman Medical Group at Mount Ida and Keyes Drug in Auburndale, are available at newtonma.gov/covidvaccine. You may also be able to receive a vaccine through your primary care provider.

Appointments can also be found at vaxfinder.mass.gov.

You can pre-register to book an appointment at a mass vaccination site at mass.gov/vaccine or directly at vaccinesignup.mass.gov. Appointments will be offered based on availability and added on a rolling basis.

If you need assistance booking an appointment, please call Newton's COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduling Assistance Hotline at 617-796-1666. You'll be asked to leave a message with your information to receive a return phone call.

Stopping Gun Stores in Newton

On Monday night, the City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee began deliberations on how to regulate through local zoning where firearms could be sold in Newton.

The City Council began wrestling with a number of issues, including whether the City can ban the sale of guns altogether in Newton and, if not, how the Council can exercise its power to regulate sales. The City's attorneys are advising us regarding how the City can regulate guns sales while being mindful of the Second Amendment to the Constitution. Watch the discussion from the Monday City Council meeting on NewTV [here](#).

The City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee will continue its discussion on May 10 when the public will also have an opportunity to speak about this issue. (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.)

In the meantime, what have we learned about how this unfolded?

Interim Police Chief Howard Mintz received an application on behalf of Newton Firearms dated January 27 for a License to Sell Firearms, to Perform Services as a Gunsmith, and to Sell Ammunition at 709 Washington Street.

While Interim Chief Mintz received the letter at the end of January, the Newton Police Department needed to wait for state and federal review before fully processing the application.

An updated application and notification that a Federal Firearms License was granted arrived at NPD on March 17.

During the week of March 29, NPD moved forward the paperwork on the application and I first learned that a gun store was proposed for Washington Street. Internal

discussions began focused on the approval process for firearm sales licenses and what powers and options we have as a City.

On Friday, April 16, I, along with City Council President Susan Albright and the entire City Council, with help from the Law and Planning Departments, finished developing zoning amendments which were formally docketed with the City Council. The proposed amendments will limit the dealers to certain zoning districts, require special permit approval from the City Council (2/3 vote needed to pass), and will include buffers between a store and sensitive locations.

The following Monday, April 20, the City's Inspectional Services Department discovered that the proprietor had begun construction without obtaining the required building permit and issued a stop work order.

As of today, the proprietor has not applied for the appropriate building permit. Since the proposed firearm dealer use has not yet opened at this location, should the City Council pass the proposed zoning amendments, the business would be prohibited from operating at the current prospective location.

Update on Development Projects

I received an interesting email from a resident asking that we provide an update on the more significant developments in the City. We often include information about developments during the approval process and then move on so an update definitely seems in order.

Completed Developments

28 Austin Street: The City Council approved a special permit for this mixed-use development on Austin Street in Newtonville across from the Star Market in 2015. Residents began moving into the 68 apartments (33 of which are permanently affordable) in September 2019, and Caffe Nero and the toy store Henry Bear's Park are open for business on the ground floor. Check out the seating area on the plaza area in between Starbucks and Caffe Nero at Bram Way and enjoy a coffee, ice cream cone or snack from one of Newtonville's many great options.

Trio: The City Council approved a special permit in 2017 for this mixed-use development at the corner of Washington and Walnut Streets. It is now built and open for residents and businesses. The 140 apartments (35 permanently affordable) are being rented, and The Barn shoe store (which relocated from further down Washington Street) is now open along with a CVS. Three restaurants are expected to open in the near future including in June a second location for the owners of Boston's Mida restaurant.

Developments with Approved Special Permits from the City Council

Northland: The City Council approved a special permit and zoning to allow housing, restaurants, shops, offices and a splash park to be built at the end of Needham Street at Oak Street (i.e., the location for many years of Marshalls, AAA and

Paulette's Ballet Studio) in 2019. Voters in March 2020 affirmed the City Council's vote in a referendum election.

The development will include 14 buildings varying in height from three to eight stories with a total of 800 apartments (140 permanently affordable), along with restaurants, shops and offices.

Northland is moving forward right now with demolition and creating more detailed design plans and construction documents. The City's Urban Design Commission just finished their review of the designs. Interested in what they found? Click [here](#).

Riverside: The City Council approved the Riverside project with a unanimous vote last October 2020.

The developers of this mixed-use project at the Riverside MBTA parking lot (which includes the adjacent former Indigo Hotel) are back in front of the City Council right now requesting an amendment to the previously approved Zoning and Special Permit. Located on Grove Street right by I-95 and the Mass Pike, the developer, Mark Development, wants to replace the approved hotel with a life science building and repurpose a planned office building to a life science laboratory and research facility. Combined, the two proposed buildings would provide 362,000 square feet of laboratory and research space.

While the amended project would include a reduction in overall housing units from 582 to 550, the number of affordable units would increase from 103 to 111. Additionally, the developer is proposing to retain the same number of more deeply affordable units (44 units at 50% of the area median income (AMI) and 44 units at 80% AMI). The new proposal includes height changes to two buildings (one building increases in height, another decreases) while the number of parking spaces increases from 2,032 to 2,267.

Find out more about Riverside [here](#).

Approved 40B Developments

40B developments fall under the State's Chapter 40B law, enacted in 1969, which allows developments that include a certain percentage of affordable housing units to bypass most local zoning restrictions in communities that do not meet the law's criteria. (Newton has not yet met the threshold to bypass the law.) 40B projects go to the Zoning Board of Appeals for approval rather than the City Council.

Riverdale: The Zoning Board of Appeals unanimously approved this 40B development of 204 apartments (51 permanently affordable at or below 80% AMI) in June 2020 to be built in Nonantum at the end of Riverdale Avenue, off California Street and along the Charles River, next to Forte Park. This development also includes some ground-floor commercial and community space and includes funding to upgrade lighting and landscaping at Forte Park and transportation-related improvements including pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements in the area. It is anticipated that the demolition of the existing building will begin in the next month.

Dunstan East: This 40B was approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals in July 2020 for a development of three buildings and 234 apartments (59 permanently affordable at or below 80% AMI) along the north side of Washington Street between Dunstan Street and Kempton Place/Armory Street, just outside of West Newton Square.

The developer, Mark Development, is now back before the Zoning Board of Appeals to amend the project since they acquired an adjacent piece of property. The new plan would move one of the buildings closer to Washington Street and make it larger, and increase both the number of housing units to 302 (76 permanently affordable) and the number of parking spaces.

Haywood House: The Newton Housing Authority has a building permit and will soon begin construction of 55 permanently affordable apartments for people 62 years and older at JFK Circle in Nonantum. This 40B project was approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals in 2018. The City is supporting this project with \$875,000 of federal Community Development Block Grant funds (CDBG) and \$3 million of Community Preservation Act funds (CPA). This building is named in honor of the extraordinary Rev. Howard Haywood, Newton resident, advocate for affordable housing, Newton Housing Authority Commissioner and Reverend at the Myrtle Baptist Church.

Golda Meir House: 2Life Communities is in the process of getting its building permit to begin construction of 68 apartments (60 permanently affordable), expanding its community on Stanton Avenue in close proximity to the Woodland MBTA station and Newton-Wellesley Hospital. This 40B project was approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals in December 2018. The City is supporting this project through \$255,000 of federal HOME Investment Partnerships funds (HOME) and \$4.5 million of Community Preservation Act funds (CPA).

Pending Project

This past Tuesday, the City Council Land Use Committee gave a favorable recommendation for both a rezoning and special permit to build 25 units (5 of which would be permanently affordable). The development at 1149-1151 Walnut Street is diagonally across from the Newton Highlands Green Line stop. It includes commercial space on the ground floor.

The project will be taken up by the full City Council on Monday evening.

Possible New Project

2LifeCommunities is expected to come forward soon with a proposal for “Opus Newton” next to their Coleman House on the Leventhal Sidman JCC campus at Winchester and Nahanton Streets (near the Newton Community Farm and the Wells Office Park). The concept is a novel one for a housing community within the financial reach of those “in the middle.” Opus is hoping to appeal to older residents who don’t qualify for subsidized housing but can’t comfortably afford more upscale options. 2LifeCommunities is expecting to propose approximately 175 one- and two-bedroom apartments.

Oak Hill Middle School Bus Tragedy, 20 Years Later

On Tuesday evening we came together as a community with Elaine and Bill Alpert on the 20th anniversary of the Oak Hill Middle School bus crash that took the lives of their son Steve Glidden and classmates Kayla Rosenberg, Greg Chan and Melissa Leung.



Loss. Meaning. Tears. Smiles. Grief. Hope.

All these years later, their memories continue to live in the good that is passed on and given away by those who will always carry them in their hearts.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Our Newton Fire Department helped avoid a **Critter Catastrophe** on Monday. A vigilant passerby alerted the Newton Fire Department (NFD) of a critter in trouble on the top of a lamppost overlooking eastbound traffic on the MassPike. NFD dispatched an aerial ladder truck to assist the State Police and the State Environmental Police. Newton Firefighters Bruce Tarasuik and Paul Bobos safely placed the raccoon in a box for the descent. Once on the ground, they let the raccoon run free back to safety. Thanks NFD for taking care of all of Newton's residents. Watch a video of the rescue filmed by WHDH 7 News Boston [here](#).

P.P.S. **NewtonSERVES** is this Sunday and due to COVID-19 protocols, no walk-in volunteers will be accepted. Kudos to the 450 volunteers who will clear, clean, and buff up 36 beloved Newton outdoor spaces including schools, libraries, parks, ponds, commons, and playing fields.

P.P.P.S. Join a youth-moderated discussion on Jennifer De Leon's teen debut ***Don't Ask Me Where***

I'm From. The book explores the challenges Liliana Cruz, a Boston teen from an immigrant family who is accepted into the METCO program, faces as she struggles with finding her identity and confronts micro-aggressions and racism at her new, predominantly white suburban school. Register [here](#) for the Tuesday, May 4 program from 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.



P.P.P.S. In these trying times, it's more important than ever to keep the **conversation around mental health** going. Newton's Department of Health and Human Services, Samaritans, and Families for Depression Awareness are offering a free program that will focus on suicide prevention, recognizing depression and bipolar depression. [Register here](#) for the webinar on Thursday, May 6 at 6:30 p.m.



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