

Monday, Oct. 4, 2021

Mayor's Update



This evening Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux, Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo and I presented to the City Council our Long-Range Financial Forecast & Five-Year Financial Plan and the Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan for the City of Newton.

The following are my comments:

A year ago, when we gathered on “zoom,” I presented the Long-Range Financial Plan, Five-Year Financial Forecast, and Capital Improvement Plan for the City of Newton in a very uncertain environment.

At that time, 137 people in Newton, 215,000 in the United States, and 1 million people worldwide had died with COVID-19. The death toll has now grown to 217 Newtonians, more than 700,000 across our country, and more than four and one-half million people worldwide.

Not just the health but also the financial wherewithal of so many people, businesses, non-profits, cities, and states were severely compromised. Countless restaurants and retailers had closed their doors. Entire industries, ranging from travel, hotels and tourism, sports and performing arts, and higher education were ravaged.

One year ago, so many people in Newton were suffering. The impact of COVID-19 upended teaching and learning and the social and emotional health of our children. Residents were laid off or furloughed. People were struggling with food insecurity, and having trouble paying their rent or mortgage. Almost all of us felt helpless, anxious, and isolated at some point.

Climate Change, systemic racism, socio-economic inequality, the health of our democracy, and the impacts of COVID-19 were weighing heavily on us, and still do a year later.

The highly contagious “Delta” variant is still hurting our reopening and recovery process and has morphed into, in the words of Newton’s own Rochelle Walensky, “the pandemic of the unvaccinated.”

Across the country, we also are facing labor shortages, supply chain disruptions, cost escalations and cyber insecurity.



While this has been a tremendously challenging time in all of our lives, as we gather together tonight, October 4, 2021, we actually have good reason for optimism.

Our scientists delivered highly effective and safe vaccines.

Federal and state legislators initially acted with unprecedented speed to funnel much needed financial aid to those who were suffering, and to cities and towns, including Newton.

We are delivering our essential services: teaching our students in-person full-time, picking up the trash and recycling, paving the streets, running our elections, supporting our restaurants and retailers, keeping our promises on retirement benefits to our employees, responding to emergencies, and keeping us safe.



We are supporting the vulnerable.

We are recovering because we have been assiduously investing in Newton: rebuilding our schools (we cut the ribbon at Cabot just two years ago), paving our roads and improving our villages (check out West Newton Square and Newtonville), preserving our green spaces (go for a walk in Webster Woods), and addressing climate change (sign up for 100% green electricity through Newton Power Choice).

Our team has made sure that the City of Newton is rock solid financially and we have developed a Long-Range Financial Plan that shows us the path forward. The investments outlined in the Financial

Plan and detailed in the Capital Improvement Plan will help our people, our villages and our City not just recover but thrive.

This past spring, our financial strength allowed me to announce that we would re-start several important capital projects put on hold during the pandemic. The Library Children's Room expansion and the renovation of the former Horace Mann into the permanent new home for our Early Childhood Program are now under construction.

With the important news from the Massachusetts School Building Authority that the Countryside Elementary School was accepted into its Eligibility Phase, I have committed ARPA funds to do our feasibility study.

We have also resumed full feasibility and design work for the Lincoln-Eliot School at 150 Jackson Road. We are beginning to engage with the Franklin, Ward/Underwood, and Horace Mann Elementary School communities as we resume planning for those school buildings. As you can see, we have a lot of exciting work ahead on our aging school buildings.

We are also recommitted this year to full funding of our Transportation Network Improvement Program to keep making progress on our roads, bike lanes,

sidewalks and traffic calming efforts across the City.

Thankfully, with the leadership of Commissioner Jim McGonagle and Deputy Commissioner Shawna Sullivan in DPW, our paving condition index continues to improve as we pave miles and miles of roads each year; but again, we have a lot of work still in front of us. This includes making our streets safer and smoother for those walking, riding or rolling. Notably, we committed ARPA funds to assist us in creating a first-ever Bike/Pedestrian Plan for the City next year.



The Capital Improvement Plan clearly shows our strong commitment to making major improvements under the leadership of Commissioner Nicole Banks and Deputy Commissioner Marc Welch, of Parks, Recreation and Culture to our recreational resources, from Gath Pool to athletic fields and to trails and accessibility improvements in our parks and conservation lands.



Newton South Field Map

We also added funding to the CIP to replace the two artificial turf fields at Newton South and another at Newton North as they reach end-of-life. We previously added a project for field lights at North and are now adding another for Newton South's Brandeis Field. With the change to later start times at the high schools, and the durability of these turf field surfaces, we want lighting to maximize playing time for both our school athletes and our youth league teams.

While capital investments are critical to make progress on athletic fields, I also greatly increased annual grounds and athletic field maintenance funding, more than tripling the monies dedicated to fields in the FY2022 Budget.

As we saw during the pandemic, residents of Newton love, and heavily use, our parks and open spaces. I am creating a Trails Advisory Committee, a first for the City, to improve coordination between all the wonderful groups dedicated to trails on parks and conservation lands. I am also using ARPA funds to take care of our expanding tree canopy.

The pandemic showed us how essential arts, culture and community is for nourishing our souls while bringing customers to our village centers. Like the Hyde

Center's fabulous performance stage in Newton Highlands, perhaps we can create a pavilion with the help of Paula Gannon, our Director of Cultural Development, at the Newton Centre "Bowl." I have set aside ARPA funds to conduct a feasibility study of such a pavilion.

COVID-19 made us appreciate the importance of ventilation systems. Over the last year we made \$5 million of investments in every school and every classroom. Our school ventilation work is considered the gold standard. We are continuing this work, including our Police Headquarters, City Hall, and Fire Stations #1 and #2.



Just a few weeks ago, the City's inventory of buildings rose from 84 to 85. We bought the West Newton Armory from the Commonwealth for \$1 to transform it into 100% affordable housing. We look forward to sharing with the community the 7 proposals from non-profits hoping to partner with the City on this exciting project.

The Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) is moving along very nicely, and our older residents are excited. We have decided on the place – Newtonville – and on a new building. Design work is moving forward with kudos to Senior Services Director Jayne Colino, Public Buildings Commissioner Josh Morse and Deputy Commissioner Alex Valcarce.

Let me go into more detail about the \$63 million that the City is receiving from the American Rescue Plan Act, otherwise known as ARPA.

I have learned a lot from listening sessions and emails. Our City Councilors and School Committee members weighed in. Residents, community groups, business owners and the heads of non-profits have spoken up. Many people sent along thoughtful emails to ARPAinput@newtonma.gov.

While I will continue to ask for input as some of the investment decisions of necessity will be made over the next few years, we have clearly made a number of decisions already which will help get these funds invested and make a difference right now.

Here are the principles that are guiding our decisions:

First, help those most impacted by the pandemic. This includes people with limited resources, those who are unemployed, our youngest and oldest residents. Focus on diversity, equity and inclusion; invest in helping those needing mental health or other medical resources; ensure access to the internet; and use the funds for outdoor spaces (including trees) and recreational opportunities as during the pandemic they

proved vital to physical and mental health as well as shared opportunities for community, friendship and happiness.

Tonight, I want to share that following continued reports of low-income Newton households still struggling with the economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis, I have made the decision to use \$1 million of the City's ARPA funds to launch a new emergency housing & utility assistance program as a stop gap for those households in need, as they continue to seek additional resources available from the state.



Second, help with the recovery and rebuilding of our villages and commercial corridors and our businesses and non-profits; improve our streets, sidewalks and village centers; and invest in arts, culture and community activities. This includes our *Newton Hires* program linking employers to employees.

Third, support the operations of the Newton Public Schools and the

City in the face of increased needs of our students and residents and revenue losses. Ensure that all our students and staff have the resources they need for achieving of our goals of academic excellence, educational equity, and social and emotional health and wellness.

Fourth, ensure we seed those initiatives that will help Newtonians and our City not just stabilize and recover but permanently be more resilient, livable, vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable; use our ARPA investments strategically so as to complement those of State and Federal programs.

We have been granted a unique opportunity with these ARPA funds to help our community recover and to shape the future of this good City.

A word of caution: the financial forecast helped us look at all the initiatives we would like to do and then pause and prioritize.

Even with the ARPA funds, our Five-Year Financial Forecast transparently shows a gap in each year between revenues and expenses, a gap that our past financial forecasts have also shown. These gaps must be and will be addressed each year just as we did with our FY2022 operating budget. The City of Newton will continue to always have a balanced budget and every taxpayer dollar will be invested prudently.

I want to close with two final thoughts.

First, gratitude. Thank you to all our employees – City and School – as well as our City Councilors and School Committee members. While coping with your own challenges and those of your families, you have been selfless public servants.

I am grateful to Maureen Lemieux, our CFO, who not only led our work on the Long-Range Plan and Forecast but also simultaneously did so much more, including monitoring our revenues and expenditures and ensuring we took advantage of FEMA, CARES, ARPA and other funding sources. Likewise, Jonathan Yeo, our COO, prepared the CIP and oversaw operations in a pandemic. Hattie Kerwin Derrick, our Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion, is moving us forward with meaningful diversity, equity and inclusion efforts as we double down on institutionalizing our core values of respect, diversity, and acceptance leavened with a commitment to compassion, equity and inclusion.

Second, our common wealth.

We Newtonians are passionate. It's one of our strengths. We speak up for our children, our neighbors, our villages, and our planet. As I said a year ago, my commitment to you is:

- To hear all these voices and then speak up for the commonweal,
- To understand our individual needs and then to mold them into actions for the common good, and,
- To bring heart and head, compassion and empathy, managerial know-how and financial acumen to this time of uncertainty to build our common wealth.

As your Mayor, as your public servant, I submit this Long-Range Financial Plan, Five-Year Forecast and Capital Improvement Plan in that spirit.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

Click [here](#) to read the entire Long-Range Financial Plan and Five-Year Forecast.

Click [here](#) to read the Capital Improvement Plan.

Click [here](#) to read Jonathan Yeo's Five-Year Capital Plan PowerPoint presentation.

Click [here](#) to read Maureen Lemieux's Long-Range Financial Plan PowerPoint presentation.



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