

Mayor's Update



As we head into the holiday season, we're seeing new cases of COVID-19 in Newton ticking up. We had 72 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the past seven days between Nov. 11 and 17, seventeen more new cases than during the previous week. (Last week we had 55 new cases over the previous period.) The cumulative number of confirmed cases is now 5,644.

Thankfully I can again report no one in Newton died with COVID-19 over the past seven days.

Statewide, cases are rising even more rapidly. Yesterday's daily tally of confirmed cases statewide was 2,650, increasing by nearly 1,000 in two weeks from a daily tally on Nov. 3 of 1,697.

The average daily incidence rate in Newton over the State's two-week tracking period from Oct. 31 to Nov. 13 is 8.6 (per 100,000 population), an increase from last week's 6.9. The statewide incidence rate is 23 (per 100,000 population) over the same two-week tracking period.

Our positivity rate in Newton is also up slightly over this two-week tracking period, with 0.6% of the 22,050 tests performed positive. Last week the positivity rate in Newton was 0.4% of 23,381 tests performed. The statewide positivity rate is 2.26%.

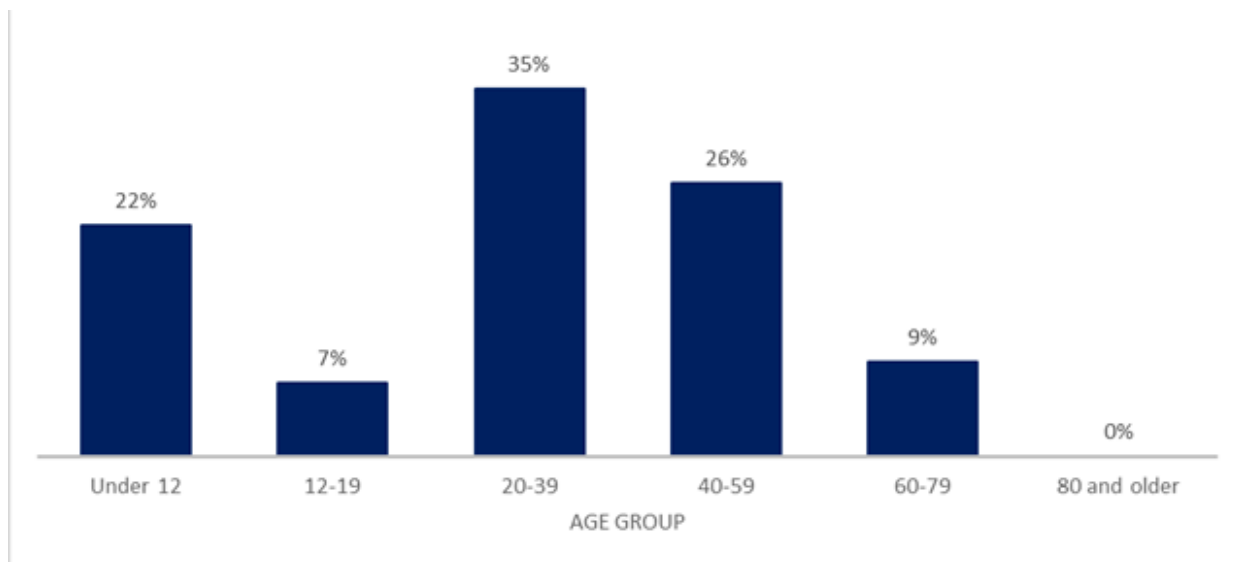
COVID-19 in Newton	
Total Cases	5,644
Total Deaths	219
*As of 11/17/21	

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) data also shows that as of Nov. 13, 1.3% of all fully vaccinated people in the Commonwealth have had a positive case. See the MDPH data [here](#).

Twelve percent (12%) of the 110 cases in Newton over the current two-week tracking period were students at one of Newton's institutions of higher education.

The ages of the people who tested positive in Newton in the two-week tracking period are lowest among the 12 to 19 year olds and those that are 60 years and older:

Percent of Cases in Newton Between Oct. 31 and Nov. 13



As of Tuesday, Nov. 16, Newton-Wellesley Hospital is caring for a total of 15 patients hospitalized with COVID-19, a slight increase. Last Tuesday nine patients with COVID were hospitalized at NWH.

Vaccines and Boosters

In the two weeks since vaccines became available for 5 to 11-year olds, 49% of Newton's 5 to 11-year-olds received a first dose.

A big thank you to our Health and Human Services Department, Newton Public Schools and Holzman Medical Group for partnering to put vaccine into the arms of 1,503 youngsters at clinics this past weekend and after school yesterday (and another 109 were signed up to be vaccinated this afternoon).

Massachusetts Department of Public Health data shows that more than 95% of Newton residents ages 12 to 15 *and* 30 and older are fully vaccinated, those ages 16 to 19 are 58% fully vaccinated, and those 20 to 29 are 68% fully vaccinated.

Gov. Charlie Baker today announced that everyone 18 years or older who received a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine at least 6 months ago or a Johnson & Johnson at least 2 months ago are eligible for a COVID-19 booster.

Young people ages 5 to 17 can get the Pfizer vaccine. Everyone 18 or older can get any of the three vaccines.

Vaccines and boosters are available from more than 1,000 locations across Massachusetts, including several in Newton. Find more information and locations in Newton at newtonma.gov/vaccines. Vaccine and booster appointments across the state can be found at vaxfinder.mass.gov.

Newton Public School COVID-19 Data

Eleven (11) cases of COVID-19 among NPS students and two (2) among staff members were reported to the Newton Health and Human Services Department between Nov. 11 and 17. This brings the cumulative total since school began on

Sept. 2 to 153. (As a reminder, when looking at NPS data, sometimes cases are added to previous weeks based on tests as they are reported/confirmed.)

Find more information on the Health and Human Services webpage [here](#), and at the NPS Testing Data Dashboard [here](#).

Property Tax Rates

The City Council on Wednesday set the property tax rates for the coming fiscal year. The residential tax rate will be \$10.52 and the commercial rate \$19.95, both per \$1,000 in assessed property value. (Last year, the tax rates were higher at \$10.76 and \$20.12 respectively.)

While tax rates are going down for next year, please know that property taxes will increase. Why?

The City is only allowed to increase the amount of money it raises through property taxes by 2.5% each year (net of New Growth). The Massachusetts General Laws mandate that assessed values represent “Full and Fair Cash Value” as of a particular date. For Fiscal Year 2022, the valuation date is January 1, 2021.

The increase (or decrease) in assessed values from the previous fiscal year does *not* impact the total tax increase that the City will raise. (The Mayor presents a budget to the City Council and the decision by the City Council on the budget determines whether the City increases the total amount of property taxes that we collect.) But the increase in assessed values in one class of properties (i.e., single family homes vs commercial) *does* impact the amount that an individual property owner will pay.

This year single family homes, which represent 90% of the City’s Total Assessed Valuation, increased by approximately 7% while commercial properties representing 10% of the total value increased by 2%. Together, the total assessed valuation of the properties in the city increased by 6.5%. The “tax rate” is based on a mathematical formula.

Total Revenue Required from Taxes = Tax Rate
Total Assessed Valuation

Because the Total Assessed Valuation for the City increased by 6.5%, significantly more than the allowable revenue increase of 2.5%, the “tax rate” will go down, even as our “tax bills” go up.

For example, the owner of a single-family home assessed at the median value in Newton of \$1,132,650 as of January 1, 2021 will pay \$553.68 more in property taxes for fiscal year 2022. The owner of a commercial property assessed at the median value in Newton of \$1,037,400 will pay \$272.67 more in property taxes.

What is the Residential Factor?

The City of Newton “splits” the tax rate, placing a bigger burden on commercial property owners instead of setting a single rate which would have had residential and commercial owners paying the same rate per \$1,000 of valuation.

Residential property values make up slightly over 90% of the assessed taxable value of all properties in the City, while commercial property values make up slightly less than 10%. In November of each year when the tax rate is set, the City Council adopts a “Residential Factor” and votes to “split” the tax rate, resulting in an intended shift from the residential taxpayers onto the commercial, industrial and personal property taxpayers.

The maximum allowable Residential Factor for the City of Newton is 175%, or 1.75 times the taxable value of all commercial properties. If a factor of 175% is adopted, the commercial class becomes responsible for 16.7% of the tax levy.

Because we know that based on higher increases in residential assessed valuations as compared to increases in commercial valuations there will be a slight shift of the tax burden to the residential sector, I recommended to the City Council that we return to the 175% shift.

In keeping with this recommendation, the City Council voted Wednesday night to shift 175% (1.75) of the tax burden to the commercial sector. The decision means owners of commercial, industrial and business personal property (whose property represents 9.5% of Newton’s taxable value) will be responsible for 16.7% of the total amount of taxes collected. Residential property owners (whose property represents 90.5% of Newton’s taxable value) will be responsible for 83.3% of the total taxes collected.

Still curious and want to learn more? Jim Shaughnessy, our Director of Assessment Administration, and his team put together a thorough booklet for the City Council prior to the property tax rate classification decision. Click [here](#) to link to it.

Sales Prices on the Rise

Additional interesting data is included in the booklet, including that median sales prices for residential properties have increased. For example, the median sale price for Newton’s single-family homes was \$1,017,500 in 2015; it rose in the next five years to \$1,296,500 in 2020 and again in 2021 (through September) to \$1,500,000.

The median sale prices for residential properties sold in Newton during the calendar year 2020 vary across the City. The most modest are in Nonantum at \$792,500 and the highest are in West Newton Hill at \$2,167,500. Only six single family homes sold for less than \$600,000. Six hundred and eighteen (618) single family properties sold for more than \$750,000 (93% of all sales) and 41% sold for than \$1.5 million.)

Newton’s inaugural Doubles Tennis Round Robin Open in October raised \$15,000 for the maintenance and improvements by Newton Parks, Recreation and Culture Department

at our 67 tennis courts. Thank you to Tom Friedman and Friends of Newton Tennis (FoNT) and all who played and donated.

(Photo: from left, with Newton's Superintendent of Maintenance Derek Mannion, City Councilor Holly Ryan, Newton's Recreation Program Manager Stephanie Lapham, Tom Friedman, Parks, Recreation and Culture Commissioner Nicole Banks, City Councilors Victoria Danberg & Alicia Bowman, and Newton's Assistant Superintendent of Grounds Maintenance Rob McClary.



Estimated Water Bills

A critical piece of infrastructure in our water system is our “meter transmission units.” These units transmit the data from the water meter to our billing system about the amount of water used in each of our homes and businesses. These units are located on an exterior wall of a property.

Just over 50% of these units have stopped working, requiring each of us to read the water meter in our basements and send them to City Hall or to use the estimated water meter readings.

During the 2010-2012 period, the City replaced all residential water meters and installed a meter reading transmission system that allows Newton’s Department of Public Works Utilities employees to remotely collect data for billing without entering homes. The system, with an estimated lifespan of 20 years, worked well until this past year when a significant number of the water meter transmission units (called “MTUs”) began to malfunction and not transmit readings. The MTU is a fixture located on the outside of homes and businesses that is connected to the meter inside and transmits data to the City’s billing software.



DPW staff is working with the meter transmission system manufacturer, Mueller Systems, to correct the problem at Mueller’s expense. Unfortunately, the pandemic has created supply chain problems that have backlogged shipment of replacement MTUs.

We continue to replace the MTUs as we receive them from Mueller. We have included the Law Department in an effort to take action to expedite delivery of the replacement MTUs.

[Receiving an Estimated Read](#)

In homes and businesses where the MTU has failed, the actual water meters have continued to accurately record water usage. With the MTU no longer transmitting the data on water usage, the City has needed to estimate water use for billing purposes and to request property owners to submit a photo of the meter's serial number and reading. Affected property owners have been sent letters outlining the problem, explaining how estimated readings are calculated, and how actual readings can be emailed or called in. Click [here](#) for that information.

The City is estimating consumption based on computer generated averages of four "like periods" over the past four years. We encourage everyone to read their meter and send in the actual meter reading to our Water Billing Department. We do apologize for the inconvenience.

If you get an estimated bill, please know (no surprise) everyone will eventually have to pay their actual bill. (It's easy to tell if it's an estimate as the water bill will be orange and clearly marked as an estimate.)



Do any of you remember this colorful mural at the former Horace Mann School at 687 Watertown Street? In the course of renovating the building for the Newton Early Childhood Program, Public Buildings Commissioner Josh Morse noticed a corner of the frame poking out from behind an old bulletin board. Further investigation revealed the tiles were hand-crafted by former Horace Mann 5th graders in the late 1990's. This week, the mural was removed intact and it's future home is under discussion.

Overnight Parking Ban

The citywide Overnight Parking Ban will go back into effect this winter on Wednesday, Dec. 1 through Thursday, March 31, 2022. During this period, parking on City streets is prohibited from 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.

I was able to lift the ban last winter to ease the burden on college students and family members home during the pandemic under the COVID-19 State of Emergency declared by Gov. Baker. The State of Emergency was lifted in June so that isn't an option for this winter. Any permanent changes to the parking ban need to go through the City Council.

Are you looking for a place to park your vehicles from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. from Dec. 1 through March 31? Free Municipal Parking Lot stickers are available to

residents from the Newton Police Department. You need a valid driver's license and vehicle registration (proof of residency is required if your car is not registered in Newton). Parking permits are given out on a first-come first-serve basis. Get more information [here](#).

Where are the municipal parking lots? Lexington/Melrose Streets (same lot - two entrances); Cherry/Elm Streets (same lot - two entrances); Chapel Street; Adams Street; Austin Street; Cypress Street; Langley Road; Pearl Street; Richardson Street; Pelham Street; Hartford Street; and Chestnut Street (angled spots at end of Chestnut St in Pettee Square).

Please know that if we have to declare a Snow Emergency, the municipal parking lots become unavailable. For most nights in the winter, though, they are an option. Feel free to let me and the City Council know your thoughts about the Overnight Parking Ban. Keep it? Shorten it? Eliminate it? What do you think? You can respond to me via this email and add on the City Councilors at citycouncil@newtonma.gov.

Newton's Commitment to Mental Health

Newton is stronger when we care for one another, especially for those experiencing struggles.

Working collaboratively and intently across our City departments and with a wide array of expert partners, we continue to provide care and services for those in need. We understand that promoting the health of our residents means a sustained and strategic commitment to mental health.

We are increasingly surrounded by people having mental health challenges and the need for human services so we have increased our staff and our partnerships. Six years ago, the Social Services division in Newton's Health and Human Services Department had just two full time staff. Today, we have four full time and one part time employees.

We also have an additional staff social worker who works specifically with older residents through our Newton Senior Services Department, and another social service professional, a jail diversion clinician, who works within the Newton Police Department.

We continue to invest in the mental health of our students with social workers, psychologists, and guidance counselors in our school department.

In addition to City resources, we rely significantly on many partners to support our community members. In particular, Riverside Community Care has been an essential partner allowing us to increase access to services for both acute and long-term mental health needs. This includes providing out-patient behavioral health services to Newton adults, children, and families at Riverside's Newton Outpatient Center and helping place any Newton resident who would benefit from seeing a clinician who speaks their native language, utilizing both clinicians at the Newton outpatient center and Riverside clinicians via tele-health. Riverside's Youth and Family Outreach Mental Health Services also provide clinical care of Newton's

children and home-based clinical services while providing outreach in our schools and the greater Newton community.

We are working with Riverside Emergency Services for a new emergency mental health clinician who will exclusively respond to mental health emergencies in Newton. School based mental health emergencies will be a priority, and the clinician will also respond to community based mental health related crises when appropriate. Our goal is to launch this new, additional service in early 2022.

We are also grateful to be working with a large number of other community partners. Three examples include Samaritans on suicide prevention services for youth, older adults, new mothers and other community members as well as the Barry Price Rehabilitation Center for mental health services for people with developmental disabilities and the William James Interface Referral Service for connection to mental health support providers.

We started a Community Crisis Intervention Team (CCIT) that is significantly helping us both systemically and with individuals to improve the prevention of and response to people in crisis. The Team is multi-disciplinary, including Newton's Police Chief and Director of Social Services as co-chairs, and senior staff from the state's Department of Mental Health, Newton-Wellesley Hospital, Newton Public Schools, Newton District Court, Newton Housing Authority, Advocates, and Fallon Ambulance company. This group meets monthly to review 911 emergency calls which involve mental health issues and substance use, investigates trends and challenges, brings forward best practices, and develops strategies for improved responses and outcomes in complex situations.

We are continuing our efforts to initiate Mental Health Court Sessions in Newton to establish new jail diversion options for appropriate individuals who are court involved and living with a mental illness. We are working closely with partners in the Newton District Court, Newton Probation, Newton Police, the Assistant District Attorney's Office, and Riverside Outpatient Center. We expect these sessions to launch in the new year.

In addition to all of these initiatives, Newton's Health and Human Services staff continues to support Newton residents of all ages who seek resources and referrals to community services. This includes mental health, legal services and substance use referrals as well as a host of other supports from food security, utility and housing assistance, to job training opportunities. We also assist with applications for these resources. Please call the HHS department at 617-796-1420 and ask to speak with someone in social services if you need assistance.

Nip Bottles Banned in Newton

Miniature "nip" bottles of alcohol will soon be a thing of the past at liquor stores in Newton.

Newton's Licensing Commission on Monday passed a ban on the sale of alcoholic beverages by retail establishments in containers less than or equal to 100



milliliters (also known as nips), effective June 30, 2021. The delay allows retailers time to sell their inventory.

The goal of the ban is to help curb littering of these small, single-use bottles.

This Thanksgiving, as I gather with my family, I will give thanks for so much that is good after a year of so much hurt including the Turkey Trot with lots of kids this Saturday at Zervas. *(Photo from 2019)*

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. Good luck to the **Newton North Girls Volleyball team** and the **Newton North Boys Soccer team** as they both play for Division 1 State Championships this Saturday, Nov. 20. The volleyball team will play in Wellesley at noon, and the soccer team will take to the pitch in Lynn at 4:00 p.m. Kudos to all the athletes who represented Newton this fall.



(Photo Credits: Top, Winslow Townson for the Boston Globe. Bottom, Chris Christo, MediaNews Group/Boston Herald.)

P.P.S. Brighten the holidays for all children with donated gifts. The City of Newton Health and Human Services Department is partnering with The Village Bank and the Newton Rotary for the 14th annual **Holiday Gift Drive**. Drop unwrapped gifts such as games, toys, electronics, sporting goods or gift cards from local merchants for children ages from newborn to 10 at any [Newton branch](#) of The Village Bank through Monday, Dec. 13.



P.P.P.S. A new cooperative style store run by artists whose work is available for sale is at Trio Newton on Washington Street in Newtonville. The **New Art @ Trio Newton** will be open for the next three weekends on Saturdays from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Sundays from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Check out the handmade jewelry, paintings, wearable textiles and sculptures. Find more information including a list of participating artists [here](#).

P.P.P.P.S. Do you know someone aged 13 to 21 interested in crime scene investigation, Police K-9 demonstrations, and criminal law? The **Newton Police Cadet Program** has an upcoming meeting on Wednesday, Dec. 1 from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. for young people interested in law enforcement. The meeting, and an Open House on Wednesday, Dec. 8, will be at the Community Room at Newton Police Headquarters, 1321 Washington Street in West Newton Square. Questions? Email NewtonPoliceCadets@gmail.com.

P.P.P.P.P.S. Join Newton's Human Rights Commissioners and me as we recognize those who have improved the quality of life in Newton by promoting greater understanding or by working to reduce discrimination. The virtual **Human Rights Awards** on Thursday, Dec. 2 at 6:00 p.m. will

honor the Indigenous People's Day Newton Committee, the organizer of the Juneteenth celebration Renande Loayza, the Executive Director of the Newton Food Pantry Regina Wu and Newton North and Newton South High School students Peter Dukakis, Martie Fairchild, Michael Farquharson, Rose Giroux, Olivia Helfrich-Tapia, Ellyssa Jeong, Tiana Lugo, Ashlynn Saint-Preux, and Natalie Taw for their commitment to human rights work. Register to "attend" [here](#).



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