

Friday, Jan. 21, 2022

## Mayor's Update

Today, 100% of the City of Newton's 884 permanent municipal employees joined the employees of the Newton Public Schools and are complying with our vaccination policy. This policy had a final deadline of Friday, Jan. 14, 2021.

The City of Newton vaccine policy requires City side employees to provide proof of vaccination or be exempted for sincerely held religious beliefs or medical reasons. Exempt employees are required to wear a mask while on the job and undergo weekly COVID-19 testing provided by the City of Newton.



Vaccines are our best defense against this pandemic and this requirement helps protect our employees and their families as well as the people we serve, including those with serious underlying health conditions and children under 5 who are not yet eligible for vaccination.

Over the past several months, our teams in Health and Human Services, Human Resources and the City Solicitor's Department joined with all our City department staff to answer the questions of our employees and our City union leaders. I purposely encouraged this process to happen quietly to allow for collaborative and respectful two-way discussions to reach a point where, as of the deadline, we had full participation from our employees.

I am so pleased that no City side employees are on paid administrative leave pending disciplinary action and only two non-union employees chose not to comply with the vaccine requirement and were separated from their employment with the City. In addition, approximately four employees opted to resign or retire because of our policy.

Of our 884 permanent municipal employees, 790 are vaccinated and in compliance; forty-three (43) employees are in the process of being fully vaccinated or have a pending exemption request; fifty-one (51) employees had their exemption request reviewed and approved.

Once the pending employees come into full compliance, we expect that 95% of our City employees will be vaccinated, thus matching the extraordinarily high vaccination rate of our residents.

We stayed in close touch with all the leaders of our unions who worked with us to protect the health of their members and our community. They consistently showed their commitment to public service and public health. All but one of our unions chose to sign a memorandum of agreement on the vaccine requirement, including the Newton Municipal Nurses Association, the International Association of Firefighters Local 863, the Newton Police Superior Officers Association, AFSCME Council 93 Local 3092-3092B City Hall Associates and Inspectors, Local 2443 Foreman, Local 1703 Engineers and Local 2913 Parking Control/Traffic Supervisors, and the Teamsters Local 25.

One of our unions, the Newton Police Association, chose not to join the other unions in signing agreements with the City on the vaccine requirement.

I am grateful to all of our union leadership who spent many hours and days talking about this important workplace safety initiative. It was important to me as Mayor to include our unions in conversations about the impact of this policy.

I am also grateful to the individual members of all our unions who worked with the Human Resources Department to show proof of vaccinations or apply for exemptions. I am proud of each and every one of these people as they are the reason we have reached 100% participation.

In recognition of their commitment to public service and public health, we are providing a one-time stipend to every permanent employee in the unions that signed agreements with the City as well as our permanent non-union employees. Those who worked through the most challenging months of the pandemic will receive a stipend of \$1,500. Employees who joined our team more recently will receive \$500. The stipends total approximately \$1M and will be funded with the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) monies. I wish I could extend this stipend to all permanent city employees. However, the collective bargaining laws do not allow the City to do so for the members of the one union which did not enter into an agreement with the City.

Again, I am so grateful to our employees. During the 22 months of this pandemic, they have been committed and caring, working in person if their job required or pivoting to working from home. They worked long hours under trying circumstances while balancing the needs of their own families with the needs of Newtonians.