

Thursday, Jan. 27, 2022

Mayor's Update

Positive Cases

Over the past seven days from Jan. 20 to 26, 675 Newtonians tested positive and had their cases reported to the State, down from 969 last week and 1,156 two weeks ago.

As Gov. Baker said this afternoon the state has reached "the back side of the Omicron surge."

That said, 675 residents testing positive in one week is still a really large number. Plus, this data is only directionally correct as it doesn't capture all the positive cases found with at home antigen tests. (Even though all antigen tests taken by our residents are not reported into the state system, they are playing an important role in identifying the virus early so people will isolate and stop the spread. This is a welcome addition to our risk mitigation strategies of vaccination, masking and staying home when sick.)

Our positivity rate during the State's two-week tracking period from Jan. 9 to 22 is 6.7% (i.e., the percentage of the 29,106 Newton residents' tests that were positive). This percentage is down from the 11.2% reported last week, and the 13.3% the week prior. The State's positivity rate is now 15.3%, compared to last week's 20.6%.

The daily average incidence rate in Newton, which measures the number of cases per 100,000 population, is now 134.8, also down from the 172.2 last week, and the 166.3 during the prior week. The State's incidence rate is now 185.9, compared to 278.9 last week.

[Newton-Wellesley Hospital](#)

Newton-Wellesley Hospital, as of Tuesday, Jan. 25, reports they are caring for a total of 48 patients hospitalized with COVID-19, two (2) of whom are in the ICU. These numbers are the same as reported last week after a peak of 56 patients on Jan. 14.

The hospital also reports this week that approximately 40% of the 48 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 are hospitalized primarily for COVID-19. The majority were admitted primarily for another illness and then also found to have COVID-19.

Deaths

We lost three more Newtonians who died with COVID-19, another reminder that even as the Omicron surge appears to be abating, the virus continues to take a heavy toll. The deaths reported over the past seven days brings the number of those who died since the pandemic began to 233 residents.

Newton Public Schools COVID-19 Data

During the past seven days from Jan. 20 to 26, the Newton Public Schools (NPS) had a total of 199 positive student cases and 29 among staff. This is a decrease from the 318 positive student cases and 47 among staff last week, and the 441 among students and 63 among staff during the week prior to that.

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

Staying home when sick, testing, masking, vaccinating and boosting

The advice coming from the health experts continues to be stay home when you are sick, test yourself if you have symptoms, and protect yourself with a comfortable, high-quality mask.

Most importantly, get vaccinated and boosted.

Still need a vaccine or booster? Find a location at vaxfinder.mass.gov.

I am incredibly proud of our City of Newton employees who have 100% participation with our vaccination policy that went into effect earlier this month. If you missed the news, you can read details [here](#) about how our employees from every department

are either vaccinated, on an approved exemption, or are actively in the process of full vaccination or exemption.

As we near these final stages of this important process, we expect that, like our residents, 95% of our city side employees will be vaccinated. (FYI: The Newton Public School employees are also highly vaccinated and in compliance with the NPS vaccine policy.)

Nor'easter on the Way

We know a storm is heading our way. But the forecast is a little squirrely still and we're not exactly sure what Newton will face.

Predictions have ranged from a modest 6 inches starting Friday night in our area to a Nor'easter bringing heavy winds and 22 inches. The latest forecast from about a half hour ago is for 12 to 18 inches of snow. The good news is that forecasters predict the snow to be dry and light.

We're watching the forecast closely and preparing in case of the worst.

If we are going to need to call for a snow emergency, we'll send out another email tomorrow. We'll also post the most up to date information on our website, Newtonma.gov, during the day tomorrow (Friday).

New Design for NewCAL

The Newton Center for Active Living, NewCAL, project team has been hard at work incorporating the feedback received about design plans to build a new center at the 345 Walnut Street location of the existing senior center in Newtonville.

Two draft conceptual designs (pictured below) will be part of the next presentation at a community meeting on Thursday, Feb. 17. The design team will showcase how we incorporated the stained-glass windows and other historic elements from the existing building into the new design, as well as additional features that pay homage to the current senior center. The goal is to have a handsome building that complements the village and works well for all the many users.

Hundreds of residents, elected and appointed officials, older residents and others who will use the new center were involved in the decision on whether to preserve the existing building with an addition or to build a new facility.

The near unanimous decision was to design and construct a building that fits well in Newtonville and is designed exactly to meet the needs of the users for the next 100 years: age-friendly, accessible, laid out well, barrier-free, with a façade that welcomes our older residents and attracts new users.

The primary reasons given by the Council on Aging and the Design Review Committee when they voted unanimously to support new construction, and the reasons given by the overwhelming majority of the Public Facilities and Programs and Services Committees of the City Council, the Commission on Disability, and community members who have attended our meetings over the past few years as to why they supported new construction:

- The main floor of the existing building is six feet above grade; since it wasn't constructed originally to be all age friendly and accessible, it would require ramps, stairs, and lifts at the entrance to the facility if we retained the facade.
- The existing building is located in a position that would make an addition extend much further into the rear of the site which would bring an addition closer to the direct abutters. It would also mean we couldn't have a separate vehicular entrance and exit, requiring multi-point turns when leaving the parking lot, which is a real negative for users.
- Renovating the existing building would add years to the project schedule and would displace senior programming for a longer period during construction.
- The renovation/addition option requires a larger building site footprint, reducing green space, onsite parking, and other site amenities.
- The modifications to the existing building, required to make it age-friendly, welcoming, accessible, and barrier-free, would significantly modify the existing

façade so that the potential end product would not be something that most people would find attractive or appropriate.

- The renovation/addition is estimated to cost \$5 million to \$6 million more than the new construction option.

Join the NewCAL project team at the community meeting on Thursday, Feb. 17 at 6:30 p.m. to learn more about the plans. Register for the zoom meeting in advance by clicking [here](#).

City of Newton Receives Top Credit Rating

Moody's Investors Service once again affirmed the City's rating of 'Aaa,' the highest rating attainable. Our finances are rock solid as we managed the headwinds of the pandemic proactively and strategically. The rating agency cited the City's sizeable tax base, diverse economy, manageable debt profile, strong fiscal management, and stable financial position as reasons for their positive credit rating.

We received this top credit rating as we went to the market to issue a \$16.6 million 30-year general obligation bond.

The bond proceeds will be used to finance the Oak Hill Middle School addition (\$2.8M), the Newton Early Childhood Program final renovations at 687 Watertown Street (\$8.3M), final financing of the Cabot Elementary School (\$2.1M), Public Works' Construction Equipment (\$1.1M), and water system infrastructure improvements (\$3.0M).

Because of the Aaa bond rating, we received a very competitive average interest rate of 2.32% including a reduction in the total amount borrowed by an \$860,000 premium paid by the winning bidder (Raymond James & Associates).

Special thanks go to our CFO, Maureen Lemieux, who has captained our financial strategy for 12 years with shout outs to our Treasurer Ron Mendes and Comptroller Steve Curley.

"There is Never Enough Remembering"

Today, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, we remember, and grieve for, the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust as well as the countless other victims of Nazi persecution.

We also remember the survivors, people such as Izzy Arbeiter of Auburndale who passed away in October at 96. Izzy lived through the horror of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps. In a life filled with speaking about the *shoah* and powered by his message that, “There is never enough remembering,” he nonetheless radiated optimism and hope.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Despite the weather outside, it’s time to start thinking about summer camp. Newton Parks, Recreation and Culture will start their [online registration](#) for **summer day camps** next Wednesday, Feb. 2. Find information about camps offered for Newton children ages 3.5 to 16 as well as a link to helpful hints for online registration at newtonma.gov/camps.

P.P.S. Interested in trying your hand at ceramics? There are still some open spots for the new **Ceramics Workshop** at the Newton Senior Center, 345 Walnut Street, which starts next Thursday, Feb. 3 and runs for eight weeks at noon to 2:00 p.m. (\$170 which includes materials). Email iseidmann@newtonma.gov to sign up.

P.P.P.S. The Lunar New Year begins next week. Wishing everyone a healthy, happy and prosperous **Year of the Tiger**.



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