

Thursday, Feb. 17, 2022

## Mayor's Update

We had 363 confirmed new cases of COVID-19 in Newton over the past seven days from Feb. 10 to 16. This is an increase from the 267 cases we saw during the previous seven days, and on par with the 365 confirmed cases we saw during the previous seven days.

Significantly, this increase can likely be traced in large part to Newton's institutions of higher education. During the State's two-week tracking period from Jan. 30 to Feb. 12, 67% of the positive Covid cases in Newton were among college or university students. If that percentage carried forward through yesterday, that would mean about 243 of Newton's 363 cases over the last week were among students living in Newton and attending a college or university.

Curious about what it means when we use the term "positive cases in institutions of higher learning"? The State tracks positive cases of students in colleges and universities who live in Newton. For the most part, these are students attending Boston College, Lasell University, UMass Mt. Ida, and Hebrew College who live in Newton. (In the case of Boston College, students who live on campus and their dorm is in Newton are included in Newton's data; if the dorm is in Boston, that student would be part of the Boston data.) In addition, this data includes college and university students who live in Newton and attend a university or college somewhere else. For example, if Brandeis students are living off campus here in Newton, they are also included in this Newton data.

This week's case numbers come as the data from the State's two-week tracking period (Jan. 30 – Feb.12) and from Newton-Wellesley Hospital continue to show the Omicron surge waning dramatically.

Newton-Wellesley Hospital, as of Tuesday, Feb. 15, reports they are caring for a total of 11 patients with COVID-19, none of whom are in the ICU. Last week the hospital reported 27 patients hospitalized with COVID-19, two of whom were in the ICU. (The preceding four weeks saw 40 patients with COVID as of Feb. 1, 48 patients as of Jan,25, 54 patients as of Jan. 11, 41 patients as of Jan. 4.)

NWH reports that COVID-19 hospitalization numbers have not been this low since before Thanksgiving, and that over the past four weeks "there has been a sharp decline in the number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19."

Approximately 30% of the patients hospitalized with COVID-19 as of Feb. 15 were admitted primarily for management of COVID-19, and the rest are hospitalized with other conditions but also have COVID-19.

The percentage of positive tests in Newton is 2.8% (of 24,200 tests performed), down from 3.6% last week and 4.7% the week prior. Statewide, the positivity rate is now 4.22%.

The daily incidence rate in Newton (which measures the number of positive cases per 100,000 population) is 47.3, better than last week's 62.5 and 100.8 during the week prior. Statewide, the incidence rate is now 36.5.

Another piece of data comes from the MWRA. They have collected wastewater (i.e., sewage) samples three to seven times a week since the start of the pandemic. The samples are analyzed by Biobot Analytics to detect from human waste the RNA from SARS-CoV-2. The chart below tracks the virus over the course of the pandemic. Notice the Omicron surge with a dramatic spike at the end of December into January, followed by the rapid decline this week of 98% from the peak.

### **MWRA Wastewater COVID-19 Tracking**

#### Deaths

Most heartening, for the first time since Dec. 16, I can report that we had no one in Newton die with COVID-19 this week.

#### Masks

As a reminder, our mask mandate for indoor public spaces ends at midnight tomorrow, Friday, Feb. 18.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health updated their guidance on face coverings on Tuesday:

- Fully vaccinated individuals with a weakened immune system or at an increased risk for severe disease because of age or an underlying medical condition, or who live with someone who is at risk, should continue to wear a mask inside public spaces.
- For individuals who are not fully vaccinated, it is important to continue to wear a face covering or mask to help prevent you from spreading COVID-19 to others.
- Individuals who are considered close contacts or who have tested positive must follow [isolation and quarantine guidance](#) which includes wearing a mask in public for 5 more days after leaving isolation or quarantine on day 5, regardless of vaccination status.
- Everyone, regardless of vaccine status, is required to wear a mask in certain settings across Massachusetts including public transportation and health care facilities.

While Newton's mandate requiring masks be worn in indoor public settings is ending, people may choose to continue wearing a mask for a number of reasons. In Newton, we support that choice.

## Newton Public Schools COVID-19 Data and Updates

During the past seven days from Feb. 10 to 16, the Newton Public Schools (NPS) had a total of 21 students who tested positive and 7 staff. Last week there were 58 positive student cases and 27 among staff. The week prior there were 99 positive student cases and 17 among staff.

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

Newton's Medical Advisory Committee met on Tuesday and their recommendation on the NPS current mask policy is expected to be shared publicly by the end of next week, Friday, Feb. 25. The School Committee (of which I am a member) will discuss the recommendation at its meeting on March 1.

In the meantime, as of yesterday, NPS no longer has a limit on the number of spectators who may attend indoor athletic competitions or fine arts performances. Everyone must be masked, but the auditoriums and gyms can be filled to full capacity.

Since the pandemic began in early 2020, the teachers, aides, custodians, administrators and staff that together help to educate and support our young people at Newton Public Schools have demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to public service, public health and public education.

On Friday, January 21, I announced that I had allocated approximately \$1 million in ARPA funds for one-time stipends for City-side employees in recognition of their extraordinary commitment to public service and public health.

Before I made that announcement, I let the leadership of the Newton Public Schools and the leadership of the Newton School Committee know that I am allocating an additional \$3 million in ARPA funds to NPS so they too could have the means to provide stipends to NPS employees and/or to support other educational purposes. The School Committee and the NPS Administration have been discussing the use of these funds for a number of weeks.

### **Updating our City Seal**

In the fall of 2020, I convened an Ad Hoc City Seal Working Group to take a look at our City Seal. I asked them to make recommendations about whether the image depicted is still relevant and meaningful today and whether there are graphics and/or words that would better portray the values, identity, and spirit of Newton.

While the Working Group in Newton was going through their process, a commission was also formed by the State Legislature to review and make recommendations on updating the State seal and motto.

## What Is Displayed on the Seal?

The seal depicts the English missionary John Eliot proselytizing to a group of Native people under an oak tree, exhorting them to convert to Christianity and adopt English customs. Beneath it is the word “Nonantum”; above are the words “Liberty and Union.” An outer ring displays the years of Newton’s founding, its incorporation as a town, and its incorporation as a city.

## What is the Recommendation?

The group is recommending an update to the current City Seal. The full report and a summary can be found [here](#).

The Working Group solicited input through community meetings and email. While they heard from those who want to preserve the original 150-year-old design, the overwhelming majority favored moving forward with a new design. Numerous respondents found the seal’s scene, depicting an English Puritan preaching to Native people the error of their ways, to no longer be in keeping with how Newtonians see themselves or want the world to see them today. In keeping with others, Maria Turner (Natick Nipmuc) wrote, *“I feel that it is important [that the seal] ...does not make a group of people feel **less than** when they look at it.”* The Working Group agreed.

In its summary of its recommendation, the Working Group wrote, “Pictured is a Colonial authority telling a people that their ways of living and worshiping are wrong. Certainly, most Newtonians would not want a symbol of cultural arrogance to represent their City made up of many faiths and cultures.”

The Working Group also made recommendations for what elements of the current seal to keep, to change and to add. They recommend that the Newton City Seal:

- **Retain** the circular shape, for its official and traditional feel.
- **Retain** much of the content of the outer rings, as a link to previous iterations of the seal.
- **Replace** the scene of John Eliot evangelizing Waban and other Indigenous people with a more suitable image.
- **Remove** the word “Nonantum,” chosen by John Eliot for the short-lived (five years) settlement of Native Christians, in part because it is easily confused with Newton’s village of Nonantum which is at another entirely different location.
- **Consolidate** the City’s founding dates to read “Founded in 1630 on Massachusetts land.” The Group feels that the years 1688 and 1873 are optional.
- **Retain or omit** the words “Liberty and Union,” depending on context of the final design.

In addition, the Group recommends that the overall design be simplified to allow for accurate reproduction in many formats (on vehicles, documents, trash cans, etc.).

What are the next steps?

The current City Seal is in our City Ordinance Section 1-8 ([here](#)). Updating the City Seal requires the City Council to vote to amend this Ordinance. I have requested City Council authorization to move forward with the City Seal Working Group's recommendation to update the City Seal.

I anticipate the City Council will want community input on this decision.

Once the City Council authorizes the process of updating the seal to move forward, we will do a Request for Proposal (RFP) for graphic design services. Upon receipt of proposals to the RFP, we will return to the City Council to request the funds to hire the selected graphic design firm.

Several potential designs for the seal would then be created using the Creative Brief (Appendix 1 in the Working Group's final report) as a general guide. The Creative Brief also includes a vision statement, design objectives and seal applications.

Through the design process I anticipate much opportunity for community input for refining and improving the design options before the City Council votes, as they have the ultimate authority on approving a final design.

Thanks go to Lisa Dady, the Director of Historic Newton, for heading up the Ad Hoc City Seal Working Group and to the committee members (listed [here](#)) for the hard work and hours spent reading emails and letters, listening to community members, historians and Indigenous leaders in Newton and from around the region, and for crafting the recommendations.

*Powered by its board, staff and volunteers, the Centre Street Food Pantry pivoted during the pandemic to serve three times the number of people than before, providing 756,000 pounds of food across 10,000 household visits. Find more info [here](#); stop by for food and/or offer to lend a hand.*

*(Photo: With Centre Street Food Pantry Executive Director Rose Saia and President Amy Less. Photo by Bruce Wilson.)*

## **Motor Vehicle Excise Taxes and Abatements**

More than 69,000 motor vehicle excise tax bills are issued in the City of Newton each calendar year.

The excise tax is calculated as \$25 per \$1,000 of a vehicle's Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) when new. The value, which is determined by the Registry of Motor Vehicles, is 90% of MSRP in year 1 of the vehicle, 60% in year 2, 40% in year 3, 25% in year 4 and 10% of the MSRP in year 5 and beyond.

For example, a \$40,000 new car would have an excise value of \$16,000 in year 3 (40%) and the amount of the excise tax would be \$16,000 x \$25/\$1,000 or \$400.

The excise tax bill must be paid within 30 days of receipt, or additional fines or interest may be accrued.

But, what happens if you pay your bill and then sell your car, trade it in or donate it to charity a few months into the new year? What if it's stolen or totaled in an accident?

You may be entitled to a refund (i.e., an abatement) of part of your payment.

Check out the answers to frequently asked questions and abatement applications which are available at [newtonma.gov/assessing](http://newtonma.gov/assessing).

In most cases, the Newton Assessing Department will need to know what happened to the vehicle and the license plate. Once an application is filed, the Assessing staff will calculate the abatement amount based on the date of the vehicle sale/trade/transfer and the date the license plate was transferred or cancelled, whichever is later. The turnaround time in the Assessors's Office is quite fast, usually two days, for refunds to be approved.

### **Consider Serving on a Board, Commission or Committee**

Do you have a particular interest or expertise and an interest for getting involved in City government? Consider serving on one of Newton's many boards, commissions or committees.

Any resident of the City of Newton can apply for consideration, although some boards or commissions may require particular types of expertise. We encourage applicants who are culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse to apply as we are consciously working to make our boards and commissions reflect the makeup of our community.

How do I apply for a board or commission?

Read about the many boards, commissions and committees and apply on-line [here](#). Prospective members are asked to attend a minimum of two meetings to familiarize themselves with the board/commission, following which an interview usually takes place prior to appointment. Sorry, we cannot guarantee an appointment (or reappointment). Certain boards, commissions and committees require an interview before the appropriate City Council committee and City Council approval before appointment.

Please note that although, a board, commission or committee may show openings online, prospective members/applicants may already be in the process of being selected.

### New Opportunity

The newest commission is the Newton Affordable Housing Trust. The Trust will be made up of seven Trustees including the Mayor, a City Council Member, a Community Preservation Committee member, and four Newton residents with backgrounds in affordable housing development and financing. The Commissioners will be appointed by the Mayor. Learn more [here](#).

### **State of the City**

Despite nearly two years of loss and of upheaval, I can say confidently that the state of our City is strong.

Together we've made our way through COVID-19 and the surges of two different variants as we shut down and reopened, got tested, vaccinated and boosted, wore our masks and took care of each other.

We got the job done. Together, we've come through stronger.

Join me this coming Tuesday night, Feb. 22 at 7:55 p.m. for the State of the City address. The zoom link for the address and the City Council meeting beginning at 7:45 is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88361145483>.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Spring clean-up is right around the corner. In Newton, that means it's all hands on deck for **NewtonSERVES** on Sunday, May 1. This year volunteers are needed to clean and improve parks, school grounds, open spaces and conservation lands. Interested in learning more about NewtonSERVES or becoming a project leader? Get more information [here](#). Project registration is at [newtonmarec.com](http://newtonmarec.com).

P.P.S. Join the City's Climate and Sustainability Team and Green Newton to learn about the benefits of **insulating and air sealing our homes** on Thursday, March 3 at 7:00 p.m. A Mass Save insulation expert will provide information about the comfort, cost, and climate benefits of insulating and air sealing homes and how to get started with a no-cost energy assessment. The webinar will be followed by a Q&A session. Register for 'The Key to a Cozy Home: The Why, How, and How Much of Insulation' [here](#).

P.P.P.S. Thanks to a new partnership between Newton Community Pride and Nancy Schön, the Newton artist responsible for the iconic

Make Way for Ducklings sculptures in Boston, three high school students will be awarded scholarships to pursue the arts in higher education. The **Nancy Quint Schön Arts Scholarships** will be given to a student from Newton North, one from Newton South, and one in the METCO program. Interested high school seniors should submit an essay, application and example of their creative work to their guidance departments by Friday, March 11. Find more info about the scholarships and an application [here](#).



---

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller | 1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, MA 02459

[Unsubscribe {recipient's email}](#)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by [rfuller@newtonma.gov](mailto:rfuller@newtonma.gov) powered by



Try email marketing for free today!