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Thursday, July 14, 2022

Mayor's Update



Big Steps Forward on NewCAL and Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School

Plans for a new senior center took a major step forward last night as two City Council Committees voted unanimously (with one abstention) to endorse plans and to approve property acquisition to replace the current senior center in Newtonville with a new, sustainable, state of the art center for our older residents and community.

The City Council's Programs and Services Committee approved the acquisition of an abutting home at 47 Walnut Place and the Public Facilities Committee approved the site plan for the brand new Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) at the site of the current Newton Senior Center at 345 Walnut Street.

(Photo: Rendering of the new senior center.)

After more than four years of planning, we are on track to begin construction next spring.



Our Design Review Committee and the City Council's Finance Committee will be weighing in during the next few weeks and then it goes to the full City Council for a final vote on land acquisition, project funding and building plans on Aug. 8.

Lincoln-Eliot

The City Council on Monday unanimously approved the site plan and full project funding for the renovated building with an addition for the Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School at 150 Jackson Road.

With this formal approval from the City Council, we're moving forward with construction design development so we can break ground on the new elementary school in approximately a year.

Thanks to the Newton Public Schools team, Jayne Colino and the Senior Services team, and Commissioner of Public Buildings Josh Morse and the City building team for doing an outstanding job getting us to this point on the two projects. Josh and the team will continue to work with the Lincoln-Eliot community, the Council on Aging and the senior community, the Design Review Committee and the City Council over the next year as we finalize the design for both of these transformational projects.

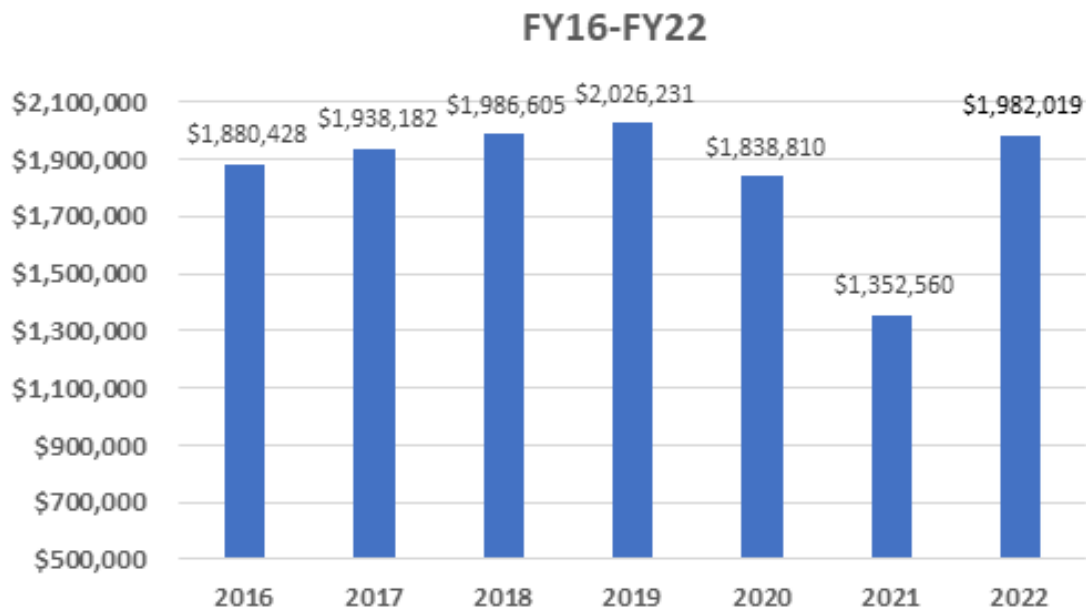
Newton Restaurants Bouncing Back

The City of Newton has an excise tax on sales of restaurant meals. The rate is 0.75% of the restaurant's gross receipts from meal sales. These local taxes give us a clear indication of the health of our restaurants and of our villages as restaurants are a significant driver of foot traffic.

We just received the final quarter of Fiscal Year 2022 meals taxes and they are terrific. (The fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30.) Newton's restaurants are on the rebound after a devastating drop in customers in FY2021. Revenues during the past fiscal year from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022 are very nearly at pre-pandemic levels.

City of Newton Meals Tax Revenues by Quarter/Year

FY	September	December	March	June	Totals
2016	\$ 485,059	\$ 457,315	\$ 469,769	\$ 468,285	\$ 1,880,428
2017	\$ 507,422	\$ 485,020	\$ 469,197	\$ 476,543	\$ 1,938,182
2018	\$ 508,998	\$ 496,835	\$ 473,394	\$ 507,378	\$ 1,986,605
2019	\$ 523,081	\$ 514,083	\$ 489,358	\$ 499,709	\$ 2,026,231
2020	\$ 549,142	\$ 531,176	\$ 506,907	\$ 251,585	\$ 1,838,810
2021	\$ 297,758	\$ 357,939	\$ 322,876	\$373,987	\$ 1,352,560
2022	\$ 476,064	\$ 527,440	\$ 472,715	\$ 505,800	\$ 1,982,019



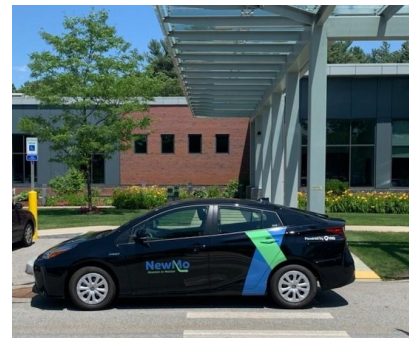
That says a lot about our restaurants – the old standards like Paddy’s and O’Hara’s (Karl O’Hara) , Cabot’s (Joe Prestejohn), Knotty Pine (Tula Kourtis), Sweet Tomatoes (Hedy Jarras), Oak Hill Pizza (Banny Firat) and Village Café (Tony Mirogiannis), newer ones such as Mida (Douglass Williams), Sycamore and Little Big Diner (Dave Punch), and Thistle & Leek (Kate and Trevor Smith), and the brand new ones like Che! Empanada (Alba Alvarez-Cote) which had its grand opening last Friday. Outdoor dining is again in full swing. Eat local and support great people like Seana Gaherin (Dunn-Gaherin’s), Dessy Rushe (Olivia’s) and Adrienne Martin (Café Martin).

Celebrate NewMo’s Anniversary with a Free Ride

After more than 62,000 rides and 3,100 unique riders, Newton in Motion (NewMo) is going strong on its third anniversary providing transportation for people of all ages across all of Newton.

A lot has happened in the last 36 months, but one thing’s for sure — people need public transit that is efficient, accessible, and sustainable and NewMo drivers and riders have helped us bring that vision to life in Newton.

To celebrate NewMo’s 3rd anniversary and to say thank you for being part of our journey, we’re letting everyone have their next ride *from* anywhere in Newton *to* anywhere in Newton for free through the end of this month. The free ride will be automatically applied when you request your next ride through July 31.



Haven’t tried NewMo yet? It’s simple – download the App (search *NewMo Newton* in your App Store) and book a \$2 ride Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. The App will tell you where to meet your driver, usually at a nearby

corner to minimize detours. If you don't have a smartphone, sign-up and book rides by calling 617-655-8019.

Find more information at newtonma.gov/Newmo.

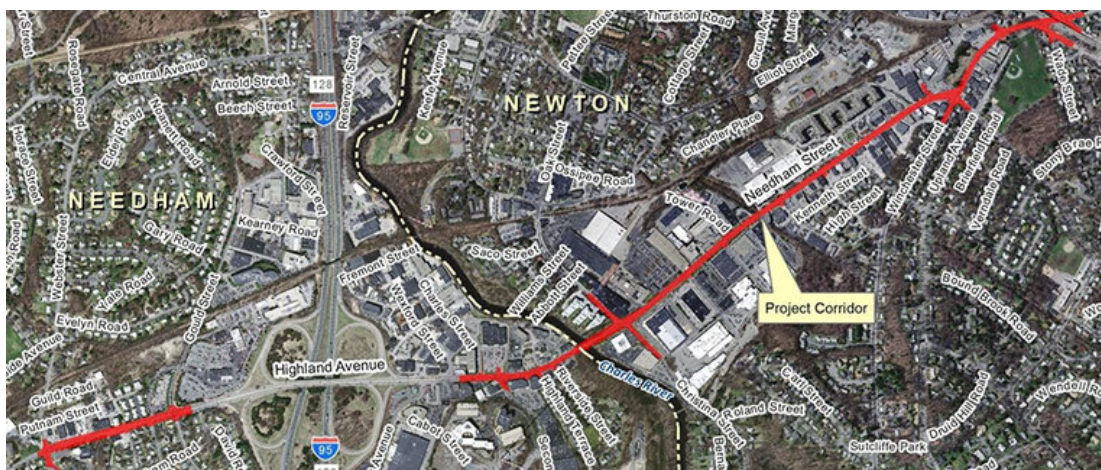
Thankfully no people or pets were home when the fire started at a home on Gray Cliff Road just outside of Newton Centre late Friday night, and no firefighters were injured fighting the blaze that had already engulfed the home when the first engines arrived. The State Fire Marshal's Office is still investigating the cause of the four alarm fire. We're



grateful for the mutual aid from so many other fire departments both at the fire itself and covering our stations; thanks go to every single community that borders Newton (Watertown, Waltham, Wellesley, Brookline, Weston, Boston, and Needham) as well as Cambridge and Dedham.

Update on Needham Street Improvements

Everyone who has driven, biked or walked on Needham Street has seen the construction that began this spring in Newton on the \$31 million Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) project to improve the 1.7-mile length of the street.



The road work on the surface comes after reconstruction of everything under the roads (e.g., water and sewer pipes). The replacement of the water mains under Needham Street from the intersection of Oak and Christina Streets to Winchester Street and on Winchester from Needham Street to Centre Street is now complete and the new watermain is active and in service.

MassDOT crews are now working on the bridge over the Charles River at the west end of Needham Street at the border with Needham.

The work requires Verizon to relocate an existing duct bank on the bridge over the Charles River. To accomplish this, **the bridge will be fully closed for eight hours from 8:00 p.m. on Monday, July 18 to 4:00 a.m. the following morning.** This closure requires all vehicles to detour.

Police details will ensure safety and facilitate this traffic change, and electronic signs (officially known as Variable Message Boards) will be in place in advance of the work, displaying the most up-to-date information.

Additionally, the sidewalk on the north side of the bridge will be closed to pedestrians, and a detour using the south side of the bridge will be in place throughout this work.

The three weeks of overnight work that began on Monday, June 27 is nearly complete. During this time one alternating lane of traffic has been open across the bridge during work hours from 8:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m.

As is typical, the schedule for this work and all the work on this major infrastructure project is weather dependent, and plans could change quickly without advance notice.

This MassDOT project spans the entire length of Needham Street and, along with replacing the watermains and bridge, includes:

- Creating exclusive turn lanes, installing all new traffic signal equipment, adding lanes west of interchanges, and realigning the intersection at Needham and Charlemont Streets.
- Adding 5-foot wide raised bike lanes and shared use paths.

- Adding bus stops.
- Adding continuous sidewalks and designated crosswalks.
- Improving storm water infrastructure.

With 28,000 vehicles traveling along this corridor daily, we're working with MassDOT to try and minimize traffic issues as much as possible during the construction. Work will take place primarily on weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with the important caveat that we will not have lane closures during peak traffic hours (6:00 to 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 to 7:00 p.m.).

Driveways as well as pedestrian and bicycle access will be maintained at all times, so customers and employees will always continue to have access to all the stores, restaurants and businesses along this critical street.

We've got two more years of construction ahead of us. Learn more about the project at mass.gov/needhamstreet and sign up to get email updates about the project [here](#).

Slowing Drivers Down

We know speeding through our neighborhood streets is a problem. Our Department of Public Works is piloting speed cushions to slow drivers down.

DPW installed two sets of speed cushions on Grant Avenue between Beacon Street and Commonwealth Avenue near Newton Centre as a pilot traffic calming effort.

Each set of speed cushions include four individual rubber cushions across the roadway that are designed to slow vehicles to 20 miles per hour (mph). Gaps between the speed cushions align with the wheelbases of Newton Fire Department's Ladder Trucks so they can pass through the speed cushions without slowing down, thus allowing quick emergency responses.

This segment of Grant Avenue was identified as a high priority for traffic calming in our 2019 Traffic Calming Evaluation and Prioritization Report and was subsequently chosen for the speed cushion trial in discussion with the Newton Fire Department, the Newton Police Department, and the Public Facilities Committee of the Newton City Council.



The rubber speed cushions are temporary. They need to be removed during the winter to allow snow plowing operations. The cost of the cushions is approximately \$15,000 per location but

require considerable DPW staff time for proper installation (and additional time for the removal/reinstallation before and after each winter).

If the devices prove to be effective for slowing speeds and do not damage the road surface, the City will be able to use them for targeted locations across the City.

Interested in having your street be put on the list for traffic calming? Fill out the Traffic Council form at newtonma.gov/trafficcouncil.

COVID-19 Case Data

Newton had 245 confirmed new cases of COVID-19 over the past 13 days since we last reported data through June 29. Over the 13 days prior to that, we had 280 new confirmed cases. (A reminder that these numbers are directionally correct, but don't reflect most of the new cases found through rapid antigen home tests.)

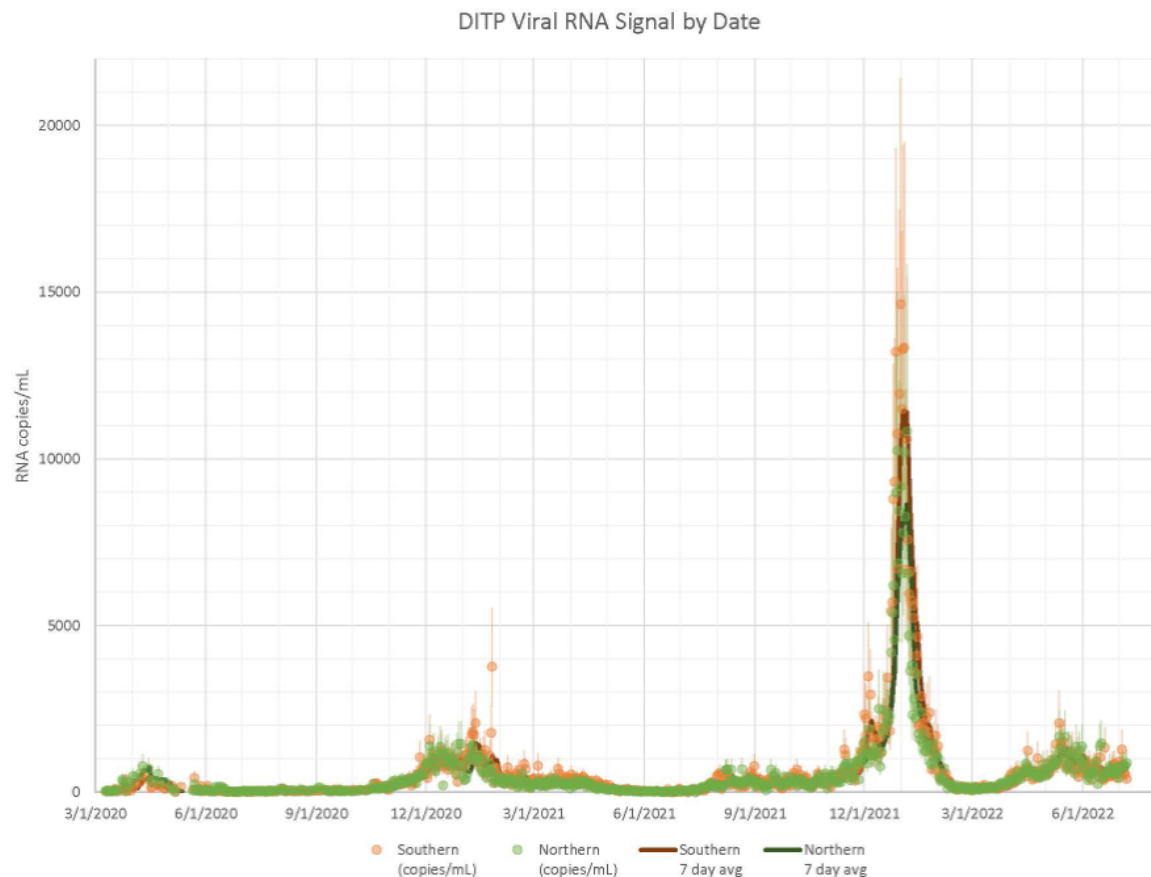
Newton-Wellesley Hospital is caring for a total of 15 patients who are hospitalized with COVID-19, two of whom are in the ICU, as of Tuesday, July 12. Following the July 4th holiday, Newton-Wellesley saw a slight increase in the number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19, however they report the number of patients requiring care in the ICU remains much lower than during earlier waves.

Newton's most recent incidence rate is 6.6% of tests performed, and our positivity rate is 23.4 cases per 100,000 population. These numbers will be updated by the State Department of Public Health this evening.

The latest MWRA wastewater data from Tuesday, July 12, again shows another slight increase in the amount of COVID-19 detected. Click [here](#) to see the data.

MWRA COVID-19 Wastewater Data

Biotbot Data - samples submitted through 07/08/2022



In a grim reminder that COVID-19 is still with us, we lost another Newtonian over the past week who died with COVID-19. This brings the total to 205 of our neighbors who have died with this virus since the pandemic began.

The CDC raised the [COVID-19 Community Level](#) in Middlesex County (where Newton is located) from Low to Medium last week. This means the CDC now recommends people at a high risk for severe illness speak with their healthcare provider about whether or not to wear a mask and take other precautions.

Interested in learning more about the Omicron variant BA.5? White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha and fellow Newtonian CDC Director Rochelle Wilensky, along with Dr. Anthony Fauci, spoke on Tuesday about what we know about this variant and others that may come along. They discuss the importance of vaccines and up-to-date boosters for saving lives and that each of us should have had at least one in 2022. They go on to emphasize the availability and effectiveness of treatments, including paxlovid. They recommend testing before or after attending a large indoor gathering or visiting a high risk immunocompromised person. Wearing a high quality mask in indoor spaces is an effective tool as community spread increases. Finally, improving ventilation (e.g., air purifiers) in indoor spaces helps. Watch the video [here](#).

Scam Alert

Residents in Newton and other area communities are targets of a nationwide scam by thieves “phishing” for personal information including credit card and bank account numbers. The Newton Police never sends this kind of message. If you get this message, do not click on the link or submit any personal information.

Text Message
Today 2:52 PM

Dear Ellen, Newton MA Police Department shirt \$10 OFF ready to order now rebrand.ly/iosxt1h

Open House at the Armory, July 25

See the latest design updates for the West Newton Armory’s transformation into 43 apartments for permanently affordable, intergenerational family housing at an open house at the Armory, 1135 Washington Street, West Newton, on Monday, July 25 from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

(Photo: Latest rendering of the Armory's transformation into affordable housing.)



Meet the people from the Metro West Collaborative Development and

Civico Development teams who are leading the efforts, see the updated project design, and learn more about the project’s funding and approval process. Metro West and Civico will also be offering tours of the Armory at 4:30 pm and 5:30 pm. For more event details, click [here](#) and click [here](#) for more information on the Armory project.



The [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) debuts its three-digit hotline number, 988, this Saturday, July 16. Much like people in an emergency dial 911 to get help from first responders, people in suicidal crises or emotional distress will now be able to dial 988 and get free, confidential emotional support. The Lifeline’s regular number, 1-800-273-8255, will continue to operate as well.

Help Us Keep Recycling Right

Back in 2018, we asked for help in cleaning up our recycling – and you delivered.

The City of Newton went from having 18% of our recycling contaminated to 9% after a robust education campaign that included inspectors checking recycling bins.

Why is this important? Our contract with Waste Management includes fines if our recycling is more than 10% contaminated with things that shouldn't be included in the recycling bins.

What are some of the things that should NOT go in our recycling bins? Plastic bags, tissues and paper napkins, plastic utensils, black plastic takeout food trays, food & beverage cartons, styrofoam, shredded paper, wood, clothing and textiles, and medicine bottles.

With your help, the City of Newton has not paid one penny in fines because of contaminated recycling since February 2019.

Let's keep it that way.

We're continuing the education campaign we started last summer. With the help of volunteers, we'll be applying large permanent decals on our recycling bins, designed by the [MassDEP Recycle Smart campaign](#), to remind us of what materials are okay to go in the green carts.

We're looking for volunteers interested in recycling education and waste reduction, and they must pass a background check.

Interested in walking a neighborhood route now through mid-October in the morning once a week if the weather is good? Volunteers will be putting stickers on recycling carts, lifting cart lids and documenting observations to help us make improvements? (NOTE: The primary goal is not enforcement; there will not be any fines. However, we will issue letters for egregious contamination issues.) If you are interested, please fill in your information in this [survey](#) and email questions to us at recycling@newtonma.gov.

Swearing In of Newton Fire Chief

Join us for the swearing-in of Newton Fire Chief Greg Gentile as well as deputy chiefs, captains and lieutenants who have been promoted and new firefighters. We will gather under a tent on the front lawn of City Hall on Tuesday, July 19 at 10:00 a.m.

We have an exceptional fire department, one of the few in Massachusetts and in the country that have earned an ISO fire rating of Class 1. These fine, well trained firefighters along with excellent equipment and sufficient staffing help us every day of the year (including last Friday night).

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. The **87th Annual St. Mary of Carmen Society Festival**, a.k.a. Festa, started last night and continues the rest of this week through Sunday, July 17. Come to Pellegrini Park, 11 Hawthorn Street in Nonantum (5 -11 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and 4-11 p.m. on Sunday). Enjoy music every night, plenty of food, amusement rides and games, a procession through the streets of Nonantum with the North End Marching Band on Sunday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. and the candlelight procession to Our Lady's Church Sunday night at 10:00 p.m. Find information [here](#).

(Photo: With Arri Proia at Festa last night.)

P.P.S. Music from blues to baroque, classical guitar to R&B, and opera to jazz is coming to Newton next weekend from Friday, July 22 through Sunday, July 24 for the **7th Annual Linda Plaut Festival of the Arts**. Enjoy 20 performances on 4 stages (Newton Centre, Newton Highlands, Waban, West Newton) over the 3 days. Thanks go to Newton Community Pride and Festival Chair Chris Pitts for putting this weekend of music together. Find the full schedule of performances and information on performers at NewtonCommunityPride.org.



P.P.P.S. Interested in helping out at the polls and earning some money? **The City of Newton is hiring poll workers** for elections this fall for early primary voting from Saturday, Aug. 27 to Friday, Sept. 2, the State Primary on Tuesday, Sept. 6, the early state election



voting from Saturday, Oct. 22 to Friday, Nov 4, and state election day, Tuesday, Nov. 8. Contact Jennifer Heredia by email at jheredia@newtonma.gov or call her at 617-796-1205 (Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.). Applications can be filled out online at newtonma.gov/elections.

P.P.P.P.S. Our Parks, Recreation and Culture team is looking for your feedback on plans for an outdoor performance pavilion in Newton Centre. The power of music, theatre and dance in public spaces to provide comfort, healing, and a sense of togetherness has become increasingly evident in the last 2+ years, and your feedback will provide valuable insights for our design. surveymonkey.com/r/3VR2DDQ

P.P.P.P.S. [Newton Community Education](#) (NCE) offers so many great programs, including weeklong travel adventures in Cuba in November 2022 and in Costa Rica in January 2023. For more information click [here](#) or contact NCE at travel@newtoncommunityed.org.



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

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