

Thursday, July 28, 2022

## Mayor's Update



We've all heard the sirens and seen an ambulance whiz by, lights flashing. Ever wonder how many calls Newton's ambulance service responds to each month?

Our contract with Transformative Healthcare/Fallon requires them to provide five ambulances in the City every day to respond to medical emergencies.

Last month (June 2022), Transformative Healthcare/Fallon responded to 844 calls and transported 576 people to a hospital. (Those who weren't taken to the hospital either refused transport or the medics determined transport wasn't necessary.)

May 2022 saw the highest number of calls so far this year, logging 925 responses to Newton residences and businesses. We had 827 calls in April (25 associated with the Boston Marathon), 772 in March, 668 in February, and 778 in January.

Ambulances respond to all kinds of emergencies. Between January to June 2022, these included mental health/substance use related calls (4.9% to 7.7% of calls), calls where medics administered Narcan (0.1% to 0.7% of calls), cardiac arrests (0.6% to 1.3% of calls), and calls where medics administered epinephrine for an allergic reaction (0% to 1.3% of calls).

Importantly, Newton Firefighters, 75 of whom are certified EMTs, also respond to almost all medical emergencies to help assess and mitigate the emergency.

When a call comes in to the 911 system, emergency telecommunicators (a.k.a., dispatchers) quickly ask a series of questions. In most medical emergencies, an ambulance, a fire company (Engine, Ladder or Rescue), and a police cruiser will be dispatched. In more severe emergency situations, the EMS Supervisor from Transformative Healthcare/Fallon will also be dispatched. (The Fire Department also carries extrication equipment on Ladder and Rescue trucks which would be used if the patient is stuck on, in or under something.)

The vast majority of ambulance transports go to Newton-Wellesley Hospital with Brigham & Women's, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) West, St. Elizabeth's, Mass General, Beth Israel Deaconess (BID) Needham, Children's Hospital and six others receiving some patients.

The City of Newton is linked to neighboring cities and towns and together we have a mutual aid system. In June, for example, Transformative Healthcare/Fallon provided 14 mutual aid responses.

We are so very grateful to the EMTs and paramedics from Transformative Healthcare/Fallon, supported by Newton dispatchers (the “first” first responders) and first responders (Newton Fire and Police), who answer our calls day and night every day of the year. (Stop by next Tuesday, Aug. 2, from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. at National Night Out to say thanks to our police officers and dispatchers, enjoy free food and music, and dunk the Police Chief at Captain Ryan Park in West Newton Square next to NPD headquarters, 1321 Washington Street.)

---

### **Vote by Mail, Vote Early In Person, Vote on Election Day**

All registered voters in Newton and across Massachusetts now have the option to cast a **Vote-by-mail** ballot and **vote early**, by mail or in-person, in all elections.

The next election is the State primary on Tuesday, Sept. 6, the day after Labor Day and the first day of school for students K-12 in Newton.

Voters should have received a ballot application by mail from Sec. of State Bill Galvin’s office last week. Didn’t get your application? You can download one [here](#).

To vote early by mail, fill out the application then drop it off at one of the two secure ballot drop boxes outside the entrance to Newton City Hall, *or* mail it to the Newton City Clerk’s Office, City Hall, 1000 Commonwealth Ave., 02459, fax to 617-796-1214, *or* scan the application and e-mail to [elections@newtonma.gov](mailto:elections@newtonma.gov), using the subject line: 2022 Vote by Mail Ballot Application.

Applications for mail-in ballots *must* have a signature that is visible and signed “in substantially the same manner as a handwritten signature.” (Applications with typed signatures will not be accepted.)

The deadline to apply for a ballot to vote by mail in the Sept. 6 Primary is 5 p.m., Monday, August 29.

The City Clerk’s office will process applications and mail out ballots for the primary starting on Monday, Aug. 1.

Completed ballots can be mailed back to the Newton City Clerk’s Office in the envelope provided, hand delivered to the City Clerk’s office, or dropped in one of the two drop boxes at City Hall. Ballots must be received by 8:00 p.m. when polls close on election day to be counted.

Ballots *cannot* be dropped off at a polling place on Election Day.

The deadline to register to vote in the Sept. 6 State Primary is 5:00 p.m., Saturday, August 27.

Not sure whether your's registered? Find your status [here](#). Not registered? Register online [here](#).

### Early, In-Person Voting

In-person early voting for the Sept. 6 Primary begins at Newton City Hall on Saturday, August 27 and continues through Friday, September 2. More details found [here](#).

Polls will be open on election days across Newton from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Find your polling location [here](#).

---

### **Recycle Textiles: Easy and Convenient**

Have you noticed the blue clothing/textile collection bins in front of some of our elementary schools? Newton Public Schools placed the bins to help make donating, reusing and recycling unwanted clothing, shoes, linens and textiles easy and convenient.

We are being proactive because in three months, on Nov. 1, textiles in Massachusetts can no longer be disposed of in trash and in our blue bins.

Newton Public Schools (NPS) is partnering with [Helpsy](#) to collect whatever we can wear, sleep in, or dry ourselves off with. This includes anything made from wool, silk, linen, cotton, polyester, leather, vinyl, hemp and rayon. Find a full list of accepted items [here](#).

Textiles and shoes that can be reused or recycled account for approximately 5% of our waste in Massachusetts. Donating rather than tossing away textiles helps us decrease the amount of trash we bury in landfills or burn in waste combustors. In addition, did you know that cotton is the most pesticide-dependent crop in the world, taking 1/3 of a pound of pesticides to make one t-shirt? It's much better for the planet to recycle.

As a bonus, our donations will also generate a modest amount of revenue for Newton's schools as Helpsy shares its revenues.

School principals and the School Facilities staff worked with the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department (PRC), which is responsible for snow removal at the schools, to locate bins in places that are easy to access and service, but do not interfere with school operations or block visibility for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers. Schools will be fine-tuning bin locations over the summer.

So far, bins have been located at 12 schools, and four to five more are in the works. Newton joins 110 other communities across Massachusetts that collect textiles at schools.

Helpsy will empty the bins regularly and collect the donated materials during non-school pickup and dropoff hours. They are responsible for ensuring that the bins are in good condition and serviced regularly. The NPS Facilities staff will be the primary point of contact for any concerns or issues related to the bins (damage, vandalism, need for a pick-up). Call 617-559-9000 or email [community@newton.k12.ma.us](mailto:community@newton.k12.ma.us).

Newton DPW also works with Helpsy to offer [on-demand curbside pickup](#) of textiles. (Click [here](#) to schedule a home pick-up.) We also have Helpsy, Salvation Army, and American Red Cross drop-off collection bins for textiles at our Resource Recovery Center at 115 Rumford Avenue.

Find answers to frequently asked questions [here](#).

---

## COVID-19 Case Update

Newton had 125 confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the past eight days from July 20 through July 27, and 138 confirmed cases during the prior eight days. (As a reminder, these numbers are directionally correct, but don't reflect most of the new cases found through rapid antigen home tests.)

As of Tuesday, July 26, Newton-Wellesley Hospital is caring for 17 patients who are hospitalized with COVID-19, none of whom are being cared for in the ICU. The hospital reports that the volume of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 has remained roughly stable when comparing this week to last week.

The incidence rate in Newton for the State's two-week tracking period from July 10 to 23 is 6.7% (6.6% two weeks ago), and our positivity rate is currently 19.2 cases per 100,000 population (down from 23.4).

As we can see from the MWRA wastewater data, COVID-19 is holding steady in our region. The latest data chart shows the pattern since the winter peak abated in February with the various dips and peaks. Click [here](#) to see the MWRA data.

### MWRA Wastewater Data

With the ongoing presence of COVID, we continue to feel the toll it takes. Over the past two weeks, we lost another neighbor in Newton who died with COVID-19. We've now lost 206 Newtonians.

### CDC Community Level

Middlesex County where Newton is located is in the CDC's "medium" category for our community level of COVID-19. The level is based on hospital beds being

used, hospital admissions and the total number of new COVID-19 cases. A medium designation means that people who are at [high risk](#) for severe illness should speak with their healthcare provider about whether to wear a mask and take other precautions. Find more information at [CDC.gov/communitylevel](https://www.cdc.gov/communitylevel).

### [Check for Extended Expiration on COVID-19 Home Antigen Tests](#)

Many of us have COVID-19 rapid antigen tests at home. Did you know that the expiration dates for many COVID-19 antigen tests have been extended beyond the date on the box? Before you toss tests that have passed the expired date on the box, visit the [FDA's website](#) to check if your test's expiration date was extended. (For example, the BinaxNOW tests have been extended from 12 to 15 months and the iHealth ones from 9 to 12 months.)

An extended expiration date means the manufacturer provided data showing that the shelf-life is longer than was known when the test was first authorized. For more information about how the expiration date is determined and why it may be extended, see the [At-Home COVID-19 Tests: FAQs](#).

### [Free COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Tests](#)

Looking for free COVID-19 antigen tests? [Free COVID-19 tests](#) from the Federal Government are still available. Every household in the United States is eligible for 3 sets of four at-home tests. Also, find information [here](#) about how to be reimbursed by insurance for at-home tests.

### **Monkeypox: A Message from Newton's Health and Human Services Staff**

On Saturday, July 23, 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the ongoing multi-country outbreak of monkeypox to be a [public health emergency of international concern](#).

Since early May 2022, the WHO and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as state and local health departments, have been tracking an outbreak of monkeypox that has spread across multiple countries, including the United States, that don't normally have cases of monkeypox. As of July 27, 2022, [20,638 cases have been confirmed worldwide](#), including 20,311 in countries that have not historically reported monkeypox. As of July 27, 2022, [4,639 cases have been confirmed in the US](#), including 113 in Massachusetts.

### [What is Monkeypox?](#)

Monkeypox is part of the same family of viruses as smallpox, with similar, but milder symptoms. The symptoms include rash, fever, headache, muscle aches, swollen lymph nodes, chills, and exhaustion. Infections with the type of virus identified in this outbreak – the West African type – are rarely fatal, according to the CDC.

### [How is Monkeypox spread?](#)

The monkeypox [virus spreads mostly through close, intimate, often skin-to-skin prolonged contact](#) with someone who has monkeypox. It can also spread through touching items (such as clothing or linens) that previously touched the infectious rash or body fluids. Monkeypox can be spread from the onset of symptoms until the rash is fully healed and a fresh layer of skin has formed. The illness usually lasts two to four weeks.

While the risk to the general public is low at this time, talk to your healthcare provider if you develop symptoms of monkeypox, even if you don't think you had contact with someone who the virus.

### Monkeypox Vaccines

Vaccines can help protect against monkeypox illness when properly administered before or soon after exposure. In this country, there is currently a limited supply of [monkeypox vaccine](#). Massachusetts is following the CDC eligibility criteria which currently prioritize known contacts and those who are most at risk of exposure to an individual with monkeypox. More information about monkeypox vaccination in Massachusetts can be found [here](#).

Find more information and answers to frequently asked questions at [CDC.gov/poxvirus](https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus).

---

## **Making Progress on Fully Funding Pensions**

As an Alderman and then City Councilor, I delved deeply into Newton's significant unfunded obligations for our retirees. With a lot of help from nine savvy residents, I authored a primer on our challenges with retiree benefits in 2014. Afterwards, I worked with then Mayor Setti Warren, Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux and City Councilor and Chair of the Finance Committee Lenny Gentile to help shape a long-term financial strategy to fund these promises we've made to our employees. As Mayor, I have prioritized this commitment.

Now, for the first time since the Great Recession of 2008, the City of Newton's funding for our pensions has finally reached more than 60%. Achieving this funded ratio is a direct result of many years of laser-like focus on this critical unfunded liability by both me and the City Council.

Prior to the 2008 downturn in the economy, the City had achieved a total funded actuarial accrued pension liability of approximately 67%. However, because of the dramatic drop in the value of the stock market experienced by the fund in the years of the Great Recession, combined with the increased life expectancy of Americans, the total funded actuarial accrued liability fell to a low of 50.8%.

State law dictates which retirees from cities and towns in Massachusetts are eligible for pensions. State law also requires cities and towns to pre-fund pension obligations for current employees and to fully fund previous, accumulated pension obligations by 2040.

Pensions are monthly payments to our retirees from an investment fund to which both the employee and the City of Newton have contributed. Our pension plan covers more than 3,500 retired employees, current active employees, inactive participants and beneficiaries. (Notably, the teachers of the Newton Public Schools are part of the Massachusetts Teachers Retirement System rather than the City of Newton Retirement plan. However, other school employees (aides, custodians, secretaries, administrators, etc.) are part of ours with school employees making up more than 40% of the active employees in it.)

The most current pension valuation for the City of Newton is for January 1, 2022. As of that date, the City of Newton has a \$301 million pension unfunded liability. The valuation shows we have enough money in a fund to cover 61% of these pension obligations, assuming future investment return on assets averages 6.9% per year. Notably, the investment return assumption of 6.9% is lower than the 7.25% used during the past few years and the 8.0% before that. The 6.9% rate of return assumption also strikes a balance between the returns from our 10-year, 15-year, and 15-year net of highest and lowest years (7.63%, 6.03%, and 6.69% respectively). (Our assumption will continue to be reviewed by the Newton Contributory Retirement Board.)

#### City of Newton Pension System Annual Returns

10 Year Average Rate of Return = 7.63%

15 Year Average Rate of Return = 6.03%

15 Year Average Rate of Return - Net of Highest and Lowest Year = 6.69%

Our funding policy is on schedule, despite the pandemic.

Our strategy is for the City to increase appropriations to the pension fund by 9.6% annually for another eight years so that we can fully fund it by 2030. This is a significant commitment as the Fiscal Year 2023 appropriation was \$40.8 million and it grows to \$77 million by FY2030.

This isn't easy, but it is necessary.

These unfunded liabilities for retiree benefits matter. Newton's employees, like all Massachusetts public employees, do *not* pay into, nor do they receive, Social Security in their retirement. The funding gaps also matter because as a greater portion of Newton's budget is needed to fund commitments to retirees that were made years ago, funds available for current services are impacted.

This strategy also sets us up to tackle our even larger unfunded liability for retiree healthcare insurance (a.k.a., Other Post-Employment Benefits (or OPEB) in the following fifteen years from 2030 to 2045.

More specifically, once the City has fully funded our pension obligations in Fiscal Year 2030, we will then be able to reduce our pension appropriation dramatically to the "normal cost" for current employees. The "normal cost" is the annual cost of setting aside in advance pension benefits for the current employees. Much of the costs we are facing currently are for the pension of former employees who have

retired; the City of Newton did not set aside sufficient funds in the past for their pensions.

City of Newton at Normal Cost Funding beginning FY2031  
(\$ Millions)

Once we have fully funded our pension liability in FY2030, we will be in a position to tackle our other, even larger, unfunded long-term retiree obligation – retiree health insurance or OPEB. To be more specific, with the projected full funding of the Newton pension fund in FY2030, the City will repurpose \$50 million in pension liability appropriations to the OPEB Trust Fund. This is a viable, sustainable financial strategy to fully fund all of the City's retiree costs by FY2045.

We are facing our retiree benefits challenge by proactively managing tax revenues, operating expenditures, capital investments and retiree benefit expenses while maintaining a strong financial position and a Aaa credit rating.

---

### **New Library Children's Room**

Check out our freshly renovated and expanded Children's Room with new furniture, a new learning/activity center, a much-improved program space (and, importantly, accessible family restrooms) at the Newton Free Library. It opens Thursday, August 4th.

Join us for the official ribbon cutting on Thursday, Aug. 4 at 9:30 a.m. or stop by later for a full day of fun for our youngsters:

- A [Scavenger Hunt](#) to explore the new room
- Morning stories for kids 3 and under at [10:30 a.m.](#) or [11:15 a.m.](#)
- Afternoon face painting, balloons and treats
- Afternoon [story and activity program](#) for 4 and 5 year-olds
- An evening puppet show with [Caravan Puppets presenting Tale](#)

I'm thrilled we were able to complete the Children's Room so quickly using \$2 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. This project is important as our little ones need a place to gather, socialize, learn and have fun with other children after the isolation of the pandemic.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

---



P.S. Interested in joining one of the best fire departments in the country? Newton Fire Chief Greg Gentile and members Newton Fire Department are hosting an open house at Newton Fire Station 3 (31 Willow Street, Newton Centre) on Saturday, Aug. 13 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Applications to take [2022 Firefighter Exam](#) are available for another month (through Wednesday, Aug. 30). Find more information about the Firefighter Exam process [here](#).

P.P.S. Get your rackets ready – the renovated tennis courts at Newton North High School will be open tomorrow, Friday, July 29.



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

[Unsubscribe jmulvey@newtonma.gov](mailto:jmulvey@newtonma.gov)

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

Sent by rf Fuller@newtonma.gov powered by



Try email marketing for free today!