

Monday, Aug. 8, 2022

Mayor's Update



Moments ago, the Newton City Council voted unanimously (three councilors were absent and one Councilor voted against the site plan) to approve my request for full project funding for the Newton Center for Active Living, NewCAL, allowing us to move forward with speed and care to create an exceptional new facility with programs and services for our older residents and the community at large, starting in 2024 and for generations to come. We will build the new center at the site of the current Newton Senior Center at 345 Walnut Street in the heart of Newtonville.

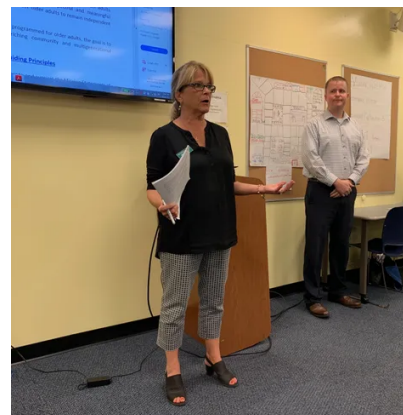
When I gave my Inaugural Address on January 1, 2018, I said, "Working together, let's make Newton an even better place for our older residents. They are the ones who built this great city, funded the school system with their tax dollars, and laid the foundation for the Newton we all love. I will launch a feasibility study this year for a top-notch Senior Center with a rich, all-encompassing program. Working together, we will make it happen."

Working together, we made it happen.

(Photo: Director of Senior Services Jayne Colino and Commissioner of Public Buildings Josh Morse at one of the first of more than 350 NewCAL meetings before getting to tonight.)

We assembled a team led by Director of Senior Services Jayne Colino and Commissioner of Public Buildings Josh Morse to help see this project through. They in turn built a core group of people who helped think deeply about the future building, anchored by the Council on Aging (COA) and older adults throughout Newton. This was

complemented by the hard work of City Councilors like President Susan Albright, and now former City Councilor John Rice. Marian Knapp, Donna Murphy and Joan Belle Isle spearheaded the efforts of the COA as Chairs along the way. The Design Review Committee, led by co-chairs Ellen Light and Peter Barrer, was helpful with advice from the beginning.



(Seniors showing their support in February for plans to build NewCAL at the site of the current Newton Senior Center.)



Most importantly, Newtonians rallied together to create something special. The collective advocacy at every step in the process made this all possible and every voice played an important role in getting us to this point.

As we continue to fine tune plans, we have another

important task. NewCAL, as we have affectionately been calling this project, was never intended to be the new center's "forever" name. Let's continue to work together to find the right name for this important City facility in which so many people will learn, exercise, sing, eat, create, find services and build community.

I've already made my nomination but we want to hear from you. Last year, we lost an incredible friend and pillar of our community, Audrey Cooper. A resident of Newton for seventy years, Audrey served as the beloved secretary at the Underwood Elementary School for twenty-seven of them. She established early childcare and afterschool programs at Family Access of Newton. She chaired the Board of Trustees of the Newton Free Library and Co-Chaired the steering committee to establish the Newton Senior Center in Newtonville. Audrey then served on the Center's Board as its first President. Could this new facility be named the "Cooper Center?" Let's see. We are open to other ideas. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and suggestions on naming and so many other important decisions as we move forward. Have a suggestion? Respond to this email.

We are on track to break ground early next year. Together, we will open this inclusive, welcoming, and universally accessible facility in 2024.

I owe so many my heartfelt thanks and gratitude. The passion and care throughout this process is just another of the countless reasons that make me grateful to serve as Mayor of Newton.

Moving Another Step Closer to Renovated Commuter Rail Stations

The State Legislature last week authorized \$85 million as part of the Transportation Bond Bill to rebuild our three MBTA commuter rail stations in Auburndale, West Newton and Newtonville. The work will be a gamechanger, improving frequency, accessibility and reliability of train service on the north side of Newton and beyond.



I am so grateful to State Sen. Cindy Creem and State Rep. Kay Khan for the opportunity to bond this funding and allowing us to take this important step forward.

The bond bill still needs the Governor's approval. Notably, Gov. Baker has previously given his support to this project.

Funding for the design was approved earlier and the work is well underway. The MBTA design will include two fully accessible, high-level side platforms as well as elevators and accessible pathways to each platform, at each of the three stations..

The estimated total construction cost for the three new stations is \$170 million and we are now working closely with Congressman Jake Auchincloss to apply for federal matching funds. This transformative project matches well with funding opportunities in President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) recently passed by Congress, so we are cautiously optimistic.

Get Questions Answered on the I-95 - MassPike Bridge Work

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) plans to replace and/or rehabilitate eight bridges and install more sound barriers at the MassPike/I-95 interchange at the border of Newton and Weston over the next five to six years.

Do you want to learn more, ask questions, or share concerns?

You'll have a chance to get some answers directly from MassDOT officials at a public hearing on Thursday, Aug. 18 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Attendees will have an opportunity to ask questions and offer comments as the current designs, project schedules and anticipated impacts are presented. Register for the virtual meeting [here](#).

The design plans for the five-phase, \$230 million project are now 25% complete. Construction is scheduled to begin next year, during 2023, and will be complete in 2027.

MassDOT Project Manager Valerie Kilduff stressed during a meeting last spring that while the bridges over the Charles River, the Worcester Mainline commuter rail tracks, and on ramps within the interchange itself are now safe, their conditions are deteriorating. Five of the bridges will be replaced, one will be rehabilitated, and two will have their superstructure replaced.

The work will also increase vertical clearance for freight movement under the bridges, improve seismic resiliency in the case of an earthquake, and improve roadway safety by adding adequate acceleration and deceleration lanes and wider shoulders.

Importantly for our Auburndale neighborhoods near the MassPike, the project also proposes new noise barriers to be erected on the westbound side of the MassPike between Woodland Road and the Charles River, and for a short portion of the north side of the ramp from I-95 North to the MassPike, close to Oakland Avenue. Eastbound, noise barriers are proposed between Charles Street and Woodland Road.

MassDOT's plans allow the three lanes of traffic to continue to be open during the entire construction period with the exception of two weekends when traffic will need to be cut to one lane. They will also work with Riverside and other potential building projects in the area to coordinate construction schedules and potential traffic impacts.

The City of Newton's Engineering, DPW and Planning teams will be in close contact with MassDOT as they move from the 25% to 100% designs. We'll take your feedback, advocate for Newtonians, and pay close attention to the impact on the Charles River and the trails as well.

Find out more about the project at mass.gov/newton-weston-bridge-replacement. Sign up for email updates about the project at MADOT/subscriber/new, email comments or questions to dot.feedback.highway@state.ma.us or by mail to Suite 6340, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116.

COVID-19 Case Update

We had 163 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the past 11 days from July 28 through yesterday, Aug. 7. This brings the number of confirmed cases in Newton since the start of the pandemic to 16,356. (As a reminder, these numbers are directionally correct, but don't reflect most of the cases found through rapid antigen home tests.)

The incidence rate in Newton for the State's two-week tracking period from July 17 through 30 is 6.6% (6.7% over the previous two weeks), and our positivity rate is currently 19.9 cases per 100,000 population (up slightly from 19.5).

This week's MWRA wastewater data also shows cases level systemwide. See more MWRA data [here](#).

We also had another week where no one in Newton died with COVID-19.

It's Mosquito, and Bat Season

Even during these hot, dry summer days, take precautions from mosquitoes that can cause illness.

Mosquitoes in our area have recently tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV) and the State



Department of Public Health has raised the risk in Newton to Moderate. (Monitor Newton's mosquito-borne disease risk level and the risk level in other Massachusetts communities [here](#).)

The risk level in Newton for Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), another mosquito borne illness, is currently listed as remote.

Here are some simple steps to protect yourself and your family from bites and the illnesses they can

cause:

- Use an [EPA-registered insect repellent](#) when outdoors.
- Avoid scheduling outdoor activities from dusk to dawn during peak mosquito activity.
- Remove standing water around your residence since mosquitos can breed in even small amounts of water.

Find more information about mosquitoes and mosquito-borne diseases [here](#).

Bats

Warm summer weather is also the time when bats may make their way into the living spaces of our homes.

Most bats are harmless, but a very small percentage may carry rabies – which makes any direct contact with a bat cause for action. Rabies is a very serious viral disease that can be prevented by getting vaccinated after exposure.



If a person or pet has had contact with a bat, capture the bat without damaging its head so it can be tested for rabies. [You can do this yourself](#), or call the non-emergency line at the Newton Police Department, 617-796-2100, to find out if an Animal Control Officer is available to capture the bat and transport it to a lab for testing. Private pest control companies also provide this service.

Find more information about rabies and bats [here](#).

Thank goodness this heat and humidity is expected to break soon. Looking forward to better weather by Wednesday.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Music, food, games, cultural shows, Bollywood dancing and more at **India Day in Newton**. Come on over to the Hyde Community Center (90 Lincoln Street in the Highlands) this Saturday, Aug. 13 from 5:00 to 7:30 p.m. and join the fun for free. (Rain date, Saturday, Aug. 21)



P.P.S The first day of school is fast approaching, and Newton Neighbors is partnering with the Village Bank and The Street to **support local kids in need** as they get ready for the new year. Consider donating a good-quality new or gently used backpack, lunchbox, water bottle, graphing calculator, notebook, pens and pencils or \$25 gift cards to Star Market or Target. Donations can be dropped at The OddFellows or Hummingbird Books at The Street Chestnut Hill, 33 Boylston Street, Village Bank locations in Newton (Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), and the Village Bank Corporate Office & Loan Center, 320 Needham Street, Suite 200. Donations can also be made through Amazon at [amazon.com/wishlist](https://www.amazon.com/wishlist). Questions? Email Newton Neighbors [here](#).



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