

Mayor's Update



Disappointing News from MBTA

The City of Newton was officially notified by MBTA officials that their grant application for construction funding of our three commuter rail stations in Auburndale, West Newton and Newtonville was not included in the latest round of federal All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP) grant awards.

This is disappointing news for the people of Newton and beyond who rely on the Framingham/Worcester commuter rail line. The news is a particular blow to people with disabilities as these three stations are impossible for people with physical disabilities to access due to numerous, steep stairs.

The cost of the design work for the three stations is fully funded and the MBTA is approaching the 75% design phase.

The grant would have funded up to 80% or \$132 million of the \$170 million cost of construction to replace the three stations featuring fully accessible, high-level side platforms, elevators and accessible pathways to each platform.

These new stations will be a gamechanger for commuters living or working in Newton, improving frequency, accessibility and reliability on this crucial line that connects Worcester with Boston and may even extend to the Berkshires.

Congressman Jake Auchincloss has been working to include \$7 million for the construction in the omnibus appropriations bill winding through Congress this week. This federal bill will be debated and hopefully finalized, with the project funding, before the end of the year.

I will work with Congressman Auchincloss, our delegation at the State House and City Councilors to support the MBTA in reapplying for the next round of federal station accessibility grants. This is my top priority for funding from the State and I will continue to work with the MBTA and with incoming Gov. Healey and her administration to fund construction of these vital commuter rail stations.

Check Fraud

The Newton Police Department is continuing to see a significant jump in the number of reports of fraudulent checks and they believe the thefts are primarily due to "mailbox fishing."

What is mailbox fishing? Thieves gain access to U.S. Post Office Mailboxes and steal mail. They then comb through the letters looking for checks and other forms of money or personal information. They use a solvent to wash the original writing off the check so they can easily alter the dollar amount and payee. Next, they typically ask a middleman to deposit the check on their behalf in exchange for a cut of the stolen funds.

Victims of this scam can end up losing hundreds, if not thousands of dollars. In addition, they face the real hassle of closing bank accounts and reopening new ones.

How can you protect yourself?

- Use security pens with specially formulated gel ink that embeds itself to the paper fibers to help prevent against check washing and document fraud.
- Pay bills electronically. For example, the City of Newton offers secure, online payment on our website at newtonma.gov for City bills. (Sign up to make your payments online [here](#)). Prefer to pay with a check? The payment drop box in the front circle at City Hall (1000 Commonwealth Avenue) is video monitored 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Payments can also be made in person at the Treasury Department on the first floor of City Hall during business hours, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- Keep check stock and any blank checks in a safe place.
- Never sign checks in advance while leaving the amount and payee blank.
- Use mail boxes inside United States Postal Service Offices.
- Check your accounts to make sure checks written are cashed for the intended amounts.

If you become a victim of mail theft or check fraud, report the incident to Newton Police at 617-796-2100. Be mindful, however, that these crimes are exceptionally difficult to solve.

The kids are loving the new playground at the Horace Mann Elementary School.



My thanks to the Horace Mann community for their creative input, and to the Newton Parks, Recreation and Culture and Public Buildings Departments for getting the work done for the students to enjoy. The much-needed new playground was possible with \$250,000 in federal ARPA funds that I designated for the structures as our children had such a rough time during the pandemic.

Heavy Rain & Strong Winds on the Way

The forecast indicates we'll be getting about 1.5 to 2 inches of rain on Friday with strong gusts of wind of 50 miles per hour or more much of the day.

Temperatures will then plummet late Friday and into the weekend as clear and cold weather heads our way. Watch out for black ice.

Had the cold come in sooner, we'd have been looking at a foot and a half to two feet of snow and a very white Christmas.

Urban Forrester Marc Welch is anticipating tree damage and will have crews in place and ready to respond to any downed branches, limbs or trees.

If you lose power, please call Eversource at 1-800-592-2000 or online [here](#). (Eversource also has a mobile app, Eversource Energy, that can be downloaded for free from Google Play or the App Store.)

If you see a downed power line or pole, please report it to Eversource at 800-592-2000 and stay away from the hazard until officials make the area safe for everyone. With many of us traveling for the holiday weekend, please remember to never drive near, under or over a downed power line.

As always, in an emergency, call 911.

If you need assistance during the storm, please call City of Newton Customer Service at 617-796-1000 or use the 311 app on your smart phone or computer.

If any stormwater grates near your home or business are clogged with leaves, please help us out by clearing them today. Our DPW crews are working hard to do that as well.

Meet
Waban's
newest
neighbor!
This
caterpillar by
renowned
Newton
sculptor
Nancy Schön
is "living" in
Waban
Common (on
Beacon



Street across from the Angier Elementary School) thanks to a generous donation through our community partners at Waban Commons Inc., a non-profit dedicated to this public green space. The caterpillar weighs in at 1,180 pounds, so a lot of coordination from City staff in the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department and DPW with the artist was needed to get the adorable lepidoptera nestled safely into its new home.

Holiday Wellness

It feels like all of us know someone under the weather. Whether the flu, RSV or COVID-19, respiratory infections are hitting our region hard.

MWRA tracking shows COVID-19 in wastewater has jumped since November 1 (see the latest chart [here](#)), and the [CDC community tracker](#) now rates Middlesex County as Medium and advises people at high risk of getting very sick to wear a mask when indoors in public.

With the holidays here, is it safe to gather indoors with friends and extended family?

Yes, according to Newton's Dr. Ashish Jha, the White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator. He notes that we're at the point where it's safe to get together in groups, but "you still have things to do."

Those things include testing, treatment and getting the updated booster, Jha told ABC's "This Week" on Sunday. (Remember, though, if you're not feeling well, stay home.)

Booster appointments are easy to find in Newton at vaxfinder.mass.gov. Find more information on how to stay healthy [here](#).

If you're experiencing symptoms including fever or chills, cough, body or muscle aches, the Newton Health and Human Services Department recommends getting

tested for flu and COVID-19 (information on free COVID tests below) and talk with your healthcare provider about treatment options.

Learn more about how to tell the difference between COVID and flu [here](#).

Traveling? No matter your destination, [learn some tips](#) that can help you have a healthy and safe holiday travel season.

Free COVID-19 Rapid Tests

Looking for free COVID-19 antigen tests? [Order free COVID-19 tests](#) from the Federal Government. Every household in the US is *again* eligible for four at-home tests.

Need help placing an order for your at-home tests? Call 1-800-232-0233 (TTY [1-888-720-7489](#)). Find information [here](#) about how to be reimbursed by insurance for at-home tests if you purchase them yourself. Need guidance on what to do if you test positive? Click [here](#).

You may notice a new look to our ambulances in Newton. Coastal Medical Transportation recently acquired the City of Newton's ambulance provider, Transformative Healthcare – Fallon Ambulance Service. The City of Newton completed a full review of Coastal and concluded we will be getting the same excellent service.



City of Newton Innovators and Employee of the Year

It's nice to close out the year honoring employees who did outstanding work for the City of Newton.

Innovators of the Year

Over the past two plus years, a team of people at City Hall have been creating a new way for people to find and track permits, licenses and information online.

NewGov has simplified the permit process by allowing residents, contractors and businesspeople to apply for building approvals, work permits and licenses online while allowing all of us to easily track the history and progress of work being done across Newton.

Two people have been the leaders behind this transformation.

(Photo: With Commissioner of Inspectional Services John Lojek, Innovators of the Year Deb Finamore and Sherri Lougee and Ruth Hoshino of HHS.)



Deb Finamore, Administrative Assistant in the Inspectional Services Department, and Sherri Lougee, Administrative Assistant in the Health and Human Services Department, were given the extraordinarily hard task of adapting the program from OpenGov to address specifically our needs in Newton.

Their ability to understand the scope of the system, master all it had to offer, tailor it specifically to Newton, and then become teachers and trainers as they implemented NewGov is why the project has been such a success. (Check out NewGov [here](#).)

With a combined 15 years of service in Newton, they were already integral members of their departments.

In their roles implementing NewGov, the two formed a great team – smart, efficient, effective, solution-focused multi-taskers who brought the system to life. They collaborated with staff across so many departments including John Miker in Information Technology, Jenn Caira in Planning, Newton Fire Department Deputy Chief Eduardo Melendez and NFD IT Manager Alex Chadis, and are now turning to the staff within the Clerk’s office.

Their work implementing NewGov is improving the way thousands of people interact with our City every week.

For all of this, Deb Finamore and Sherri Lougee are the 2022 City of Newton Innovators of the Year.

Huge thanks and congratulations.

Employee of the Year

Since being hired 8 years ago, Michael Barille has steadily climbed the ladder in the Department of Public Works as one of the shining lights of the department.

Today he is responsible for leading our asphalt, concrete and curbing betterment crews and is the working foreman at the Elliot Street Yard during winter operations - heavily involved in making sure our roads are salted, streets are plowed and that the storm operations run smoothly.

(Photo: With Deputy DPW Commissioner Shawna Sullivan, Employee of the Year Mike Barille and DPW Commissioner Jim McGonagle.)



Mike also oversees the installation and removal of the barriers around outdoor dining at restaurants across Newton, and recently he took on the role of Teamster Union Steward within the Street Division.

He's well versed in the intricacies of his job, greeting every question from residents and

business owners with courtesy and good, in-depth information.

How do we know? Newton DPW Commissioner Jim McGonagle and Deputy Commissioner Shawna Sullivan have received many calls and emails recognizing Mike's professionalism and praising the crew he leads.

Despite the overwhelming amount of work that everyone has, Mike consistently finds ways to help his colleagues and his willingness to work with new employees to bring them up to speed is invaluable.

For all of this, and for always exceeding expectations with a smile – Mike Barille (a Newton North graduate) is the City of Newton Employee of the Year.

Thank you Mike and congratulations.

Save the Date, Martin Luther King Day Celebration – Monday, Jan. 16

As we look ahead to the new year, Newton's 55th Annual Community Celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday, Jan. 16 is fast approaching.

SAVE THE DATE
MONDAY, JANUARY 16TH | NEWTON NORTH HIGH SCHOOL | 9:30 AM
CITY OF NEWTON'S 55TH ANNUAL COMMUNITY CELEBRATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

"JUSTICE"

"INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS A THREAT TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE"

- COMMUNITY LEARNING RESOURCES WILL BE AVAILABLE PRE-PROGRAM
- CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING
- FOOD DRIVE THE WEEK PRIOR
- EVENT INFORMATION & UPDATES: NEWTONMA.GOV/MLK23

MLK DAY HARMONY FOUNDATION

We'll gather at 9:30 a.m. at Newton North High School in person for a program inspired by Dr. King's powerful words, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." The words are as important today as when Dr. King wrote them in his iconic letter from the Birmingham, Alabama jail on April 16, 1963.

Register [here](#) to attend and find more information about the celebration, including learning resources for children.

(Lighting the shamash at Beth Menachem Chabad's menorah on Dudley Road with Rabbi Shalom Ber on Sunday, the first night of Hanukkah)

As menorahs are lit tonight and for the three nights that follow, our resolve to protect religious freedom and to share the light where it is most needed shines forth.

I wish you all joyous holidays, restful vacation days, and a healthy new year.

(NPD Community Resource Dog Officer Leo sends along a happy "woof" as well.)



Warmly,
Ruthanne

P.S. Do you have an idea for a bold, creative, vibrant design that will brighten our City, inspire civic pride, and introduce art to more public spaces? The City of Newton is partnering with Newton Community Pride to invite artists to submit their ideas for the

Celebrate Newton banner initiative. Banners will adorn approximately 100 light poles throughout Newton beginning this spring. Selected artists will receive an honorarium of \$1,800. Submissions are due by Jan. 17, 2023. Find the official rules and more info [here](#).



P.P.S. Applications to take the **Municipal Police Officer exam**, the first step toward joining the Newton Police Department, are now being accepted by Massachusetts Civil Service. The applications are due at the end of January on Tuesday, Jan. 31. (Applicants are encouraged to apply early as a late fee will be assessed for application filed after Tuesday, Jan. 17.) Testing is scheduled to begin on Saturday, March 18. Find more information about the process of becoming a police officer at mass.gov/civilservice.



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