

Friday, Jan. 13, 2023

Mayor's Update



Armory Milestone

The redevelopment of the West Newton Armory on Washington Street into 100% permanently affordable housing achieved a major milestone on Wednesday night. The project received unanimous approval from the members of the City's Zoning Board of Appeals for its Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit at its third public hearing.

This achievement is the culmination of nearly four years of strategic planning, collaboration, and careful attention to the many aspects of sensitively revitalizing an iconic building to serve people needing deeply affordable apartments. I am particularly grateful for the hard work and persistence of our Director of Housing and Community Development Amanda Berman and Housing Program Manager Eamon Bencivengo.

In 2019, the Massachusetts National Guard decommissioned the 100-year old Armory and transferred management to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The State then offered Newton the opportunity to purchase the Armory for \$1 if we redeveloped it into 100% affordable housing. I enthusiastically seized on this opportunity and sought, and subsequently received, State and City Council approval to pursue this goal.

In the summer of 2021, the City released a Request For Proposal to solicit proposals from qualified affordable housing developers to undertake this redevelopment project. I formed a nine-member Review Committee to examine and interview the seven proponents the City received. Following the group's recommendation, in December 2021 I selected Metro West Collaborative Development/Civico Development to partner with us in the redevelopment of the Armory.

Metro West Collaborative Development is a Newton-based non-profit affordable housing developer. They have a long and successful track record of creating, financing and managing affordable housing. Civico Development is a for-profit housing developer that has built community-focused mixed-income housing throughout the Boston region.

The approval is for 43 apartments for intergenerational family housing. These apartments will be deeply affordable to individuals and families with incomes ranging between 30% and 60% of our area median income. (A family of four earning 30% of the area median income is \$42,050 while a family of four earning 60% of the area median income is \$84,120)

The historic front of the Armory will be preserved with an addition built behind it. Parking will be provided underground. The project will be environmentally sensitive, with the entire site designed and constructed to achieve Enterprise Green Communities standards and the new residential portion built in accordance with Passive House standards.

To help Metro West/Civico achieve this vision, the City has allocated nearly \$5 million in combined CPA, HOME, CDBG, and Inclusionary Zoning funds to the project. With an estimated total cost of \$25 million dollars, Metro West/Civico is also seek financing from private, state, and federal sources, with the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program being especially important. Having received the approval of the Zoning Board of Appeals, the application for Tax Credit financing will be submitted next week.

The next milestone is the start of construction. We anticipate groundbreaking in Spring 2025 with a ribbon-cutting scheduled for the Fall 2026.

One thing that is striking is that even with dedicated, experienced people leading our effort and continuous attention, moving from the vision of the Armory as affordable housing to the reality of move-in day will take seven years.

Celebrate 100,000 NewMo Rides With a Free One

NewMo, Newton's shared ride transportation system, is celebrating its 100,000th ride and we couldn't be prouder. NewMo launched three years ago as a transportation service for seniors and we expanded in October 2021 to serve everyone.

(Claudia Folkman, a volunteer at the Senior Center and a regular NewMo rider, boarding a hybrid driven by Kennedy.)

More than 12,000 people have registered to use NewMo. In the last 12 months alone, ridership doubled with the system now providing more than 300 trips each weekday.

This flexible, friendly and affordable service makes it possible for people to get to appointments, to work, to public transit stations, and to school without the expense or environmental impacts of using a personal vehicle.

Interestingly, NewMo is particularly helpful to people with limited options and tight budgets. NewMo users earn less, own fewer vehicles, and have fewer options for transportation than Newton's overall population.

- 56% of NewMo users come from households earning less than 80% of the area's median income (AMI) for a family of three (\$126,000), and 39% are

from households earning less than 50% of the AMI for a family of three (\$53,350).

- 27% live in households without a car.
- 19% say they chose NewMo because they had “no viable alternative.”

Survey and trip data also show that NewMo supports critical trips, helps more people access transit, and provides transportation to school or jobs.

- 49% of seniors using NewMo are going to medical appointments.
- 32% of non-seniors are going to jobs.
- 23% of non-seniors are connecting to transit, allowing more of us to access public transportation without a car and from further away.
- Newton North and Newton South High Schools are among the top destinations.

NewMo is also having a positive impact on carbon emissions.

- 30-40% of trips are shared.
- All of the vehicles, with the exception of the wheelchair accessible vans, are low-or no- emissions electric or hybrid vehicles. NewMo intends to transition the remaining hybrids to full electric vehicles this year. (We'll continue to use the two gas-powered wheelchair accessible vans until good EV models are available.)

Still haven't taken your first ride?

NewMo operates everywhere in Newton from 7:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. For those over 60 years old, NewMo also operates from 9 a.m. to noon on the weekends and provides door-to-door service (instead of corner-to-corner service). **The first five trips are free for all new users.** After that, all rides are \$2, or 50 cents for riders with low incomes who qualify. (To apply for the low-income rate, contact Nfreedman@newtonma.gov)

Signing up on a smartphone and booking a ride is simple. Download the NewMo app, create an account, select a payment method, enter the requested information, and you're ready to book a ride. Rides can also be booked by telephone. Call 617-655-8019 to request your ride.

Celebrate with Us!

To commemorate the 100,000th ride, NewMo is offering everyone one free ride until February 15. The free ride is automatic, so go ahead and book your ride.

COVID-19

There's an encouraging dip in the latest MWRA wastewater tracking data which has been an accurate predictor of COVID-19 case trends since the pandemic began. After an uptick over the holidays, the latest seven-day average shows a significant decline. (See the latest MWRA data [here](#).)

MWRA COVID-19 Wastewater Data

While COVID-19 levels in wastewater are declining, we know the virus is still circulating. The CDC community tracker now categorizes Middlesex County (where Newton is located) as Yellow – or in the medium risk category. In the yellow category, the CDC recommends that people at high risk of getting very sick wear a high-quality mask when indoors in public. Find more information at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

According to State Department of Public Health data, the cumulative number of our family, friends and neighbors in Newton who have died with COVID-19 is 221. The number of deaths this fall and early winter in Newton are:

September 2022	2
October 2022	4
November 2022	4
December 2022	5
January 1 – 12, 2023	3

May their memory be a blessing to their families and all who they touched.

Covid-19 Booster Clinics

Additional City sponsored, free COVID-19 booster clinics are available in Newton through the end of the month.

The Newton Department of Public Health and Human Services is continuing its partnership with Holtzman Medical Group to offer the updated, bivalent COVID-19 booster vaccine.

These clinics are open to anyone ages 6 months and older (ages 6 months - 5 years will be Moderna only).

People who recently had COVID may consider delaying the booster by 3 months from symptom onset or positive test. Learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine [here](#).

The clinics will be held at the Newton Free Library, 330 Homer Street, in Druker Auditorium by appointment only. Register at Holtzmanmedical.org.

Monday, Jan. 23 - 3:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 24 - 3:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 31 - 3:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Can't make it to one of these clinics? Check vaxfinder.mass.gov for locations in and around Newton to get a vaccine. Not sure when your last vaccine was? Click [here](#) to download your vaccine record.

The latest evidence for the effectiveness of the bivalent booster is compelling, according to Dr. Ashish Jha. On Monday, he provided statistics that people 65 and older who had the bivalent booster had an 81% reduction in hospitalizations and an 86% reduction in death compared to people 65 and older who did not get the updated booster.

Free COVID-19 Consultations on Treatment

Do you have COVID-19 and are interested in treatment, but don't know whether you're eligible or where to get it? Free telehealth consultations in multiple languages, are now available for individuals 18 and older; insurance is not required. If you are eligible, you can pick up your prescription at your pharmacy or get it delivered to your home for free. Call 833-273-6330 or visit color.com/covid-19-treatment-ma to schedule quickly your consultation.

Exploring Concepts for Dudley Road Parcel

We are pursuing discussions with NOW Communities/Civico Development to explore their concept of preserving open space with clustered housing on 15 acres between Dudley and Brandeis Roads.

The City's team reviewed nine potential partnership proposals as we explore options for the land adjacent to Newton South High School. The current owners of the land have given the City a specific period of time to consider purchasing the property at an asking price of \$24 million.

The NOW Communities/Civico Development proposal that the team chose is responsive to our goals. Their preliminary site plan envisions open space with permanent conservation restrictions mixed with a new residential cluster of homes, pedestrian connections between Brandeis and Dudley Roads, and a set-aside for City/school facility expansion needs. (See their initial ideas [here](#).)

The housing idea contemplates 75 to 125 total units. There is a mix of single and 3-to-6-unit buildings of 1.5 and 2.5 stories, all of which would be for home ownership. Twenty percent would be made affordable, with 10% available to households at 80% AMI and 10% to households at 110% AMI, in line with the City's inclusionary zoning requirements.

Our next steps in the exploration phase includes further due diligence on the site, financial feasibility analysis by the NOW/Civico team, a continuing dialogue with the City on a potential partnership scenario, and conversations with the owner.

Join our Department of Public Works team to keep the City running. We're looking for fleet mechanics and technicians, truck drivers and equipment operators, skilled laborers and more to join the crew that maintains Newton's roads, sidewalks, crosswalks and utilities infrastructure. Find more information and apply [here](#).

Planning the Future of I-95/128

Interested in the future of I-95/128 from Newton to Lexington? MassDOT (with input from communities, including Newton, along this busy highway corridor) is coming forward with draft recommendations for long-term changes.

MassDOT's study has been formally underway since 2021. They have been considering new transit connections, highway ramp changes, additional bike and pedestrian trails, and new land uses such as parkland, workplaces and more.

A virtual public meeting to present the draft recommendations is on Wednesday, January 18 at 6:00 p.m. [Register here](#) to attend, and check out the [project web site](#) for more information.

Newton's State Rep. Kay Kahn and Newton's Director of Transportation Planning Josh Ostroff are on the project working group. Give MassDOT and us feedback as the City will submit a comment letter later this Spring. Email Josh at jostroff@newtonma.gov.

Plans Underway for Override Voting

Mail-In Ballots

Ballot applications to vote by mail in the Tuesday, March 14 Override Election (as well as a possible primary election in September for City Councilors and School Committee members and the November general election) are expected to begin arriving at every Newton voters' home the first week in February.

Completed and signed applications can be mailed to the Newton City Clerk's Office (1000 Commonwealth Ave., Newton, MA 02459) or placed in one of the two secure drop boxes in front of City Hall. If you prefer to vote by mail, please try and get your application back to the Clerk's Office as soon as possible so election staff have time to process your application and mail a ballot to your home.

Election staff in the City Clerk's office expect to begin sending *ballots* for the override election to voters who completed applications the week of February 13.

Early In-Person Voting: 5 days in March

Plans are still being finalized for early in-person voting. The Newton Election Commission voted this week to schedule five days of early, in-person voting at City Hall in early March. The recommendation will be presented to the City

Council's Programs and Services Committee on Wednesday, Jan. 18 with a vote of the full City Council expected on Feb. 6. Stay tuned for the finalized dates of early, in-person voting.

Election Day: Tuesday, March 14

Polls across the City will be open on election day, March 14, from 7:00 a.m. 8:00 p.m.

How Will the Override Impact Newton Public Schools?

Interested in knowing how the general override that voters will decide on March 14 will impact the Newton Public Schools?

Interim School Superintendent Kathy Smith and her team are now preparing two budgets to present to the School Committee on Monday, Jan. 23. One will show the impact of providing the \$4.5 million that will be available to NPS if the override passes, and the other will show the impact to the Newton Public Schools if the override fails.

Watch the Jan. 23 meeting which begins at 6:30 p.m. on zoom at <https://zoom.us/j/390017072>. The meeting will also be broadcast by [NewTV](#).

Over the next few months the PTOs at each school will also be sponsoring information sessions where the Superintendent and others will be available to share information and answer questions.

Unclear about what the override and two debt exclusions will provide? Find detailed information and answers to frequently asked questions at newtonma.gov/override.

Wondering how a yes vote will impact your tax bill? Enter your property address into the [override calculator](#) for an estimate of how much your tax bill will increase if the override and debt exclusions pass.

Still have questions? Email us at override@newtonma.gov.

Celebrating Dr. King

On Monday we celebrate the dreams, the life, and the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Join us at Newton North High School on January 16 at 9:30 a.m. for Newton's 55th Annual Martin Luther King Day Celebration. A community food drive is also underway through Tuesday, Jan. 17. Find more information about both events [here](#).

In these uncertain times, I am lifted by my faith in our community— faith that the people of Newton will come together and honor the memory of Dr. King by doubling down on the future for all our children by actively standing together against hate and *for* love, against religious bigotry, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism and *for* inclusion, and against racism and *for* equity and diversity.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Interested in **learning to play tennis**, enhancing your skills, participating in tennis socials & round robins, and much more? Check out the pre-spring and spring offerings at newton@myrec being offered by JXS Tennis Academy. Registration for all classes begins on Friday, Jan. 20. Meet Joseph Smith, owner of JXS Tennis Academy, at the **Newton Camp Fair** on Sunday Jan. 29 at Newton North High School cafeteria, noon to 3:00 p.m.

P.P.S. Join the Newton Human Rights Commission for **Know Your Rights & Bystander Training** to learn the basics of anti-discrimination laws and how to respond to uncomfortable situations. Hosted by the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, the virtual webinar is on Tuesday, Jan. 24 at 6:00 p.m. Register [here](#).

P.P.P.S. **Bluebikes** are “hibernating” for the winter, but don’t worry, they’ll be back at their stations when the weather warms up in March or April.

P.P.P.P.S. **Calling all incoming kindergarteners**. The Newton Public Schools are asking parents of students planning to start kindergarten this fall for the 2023-2024 school year to let us know your student will be enrolling. (Your child must turn 5 years old prior to Sept. 1, 2023 to enroll.) This helps us to plan staffing and programming for next year. Please provide the information to NPS [here](#). Please note that kindergarten registration begins on Monday, March 1. If this is your first student entering the Newton Public Schools, please consider attending a virtual informational session on Tuesday, Feb. 28 at 7:00 p.m. (A meeting link will be posted [here](#) as the date gets closer.) More kindergarten registration information can be found [here](#).

P.P.P.P.P.S. Join SEPAC (the Newton Special Education Parents Advisory Council) for a **virtual presentation by Georgetown University Professor and disabilities studies scholar Jennifer Natalya Fink** about her book, *All Families: Disability Lineage and the Future of Kinship*. The program on Sunday, Jan. 22 at 7:30 p.m. will include an opportunity to ask questions. Professor Fink urges us all to embrace our disability lineage and build more genuinely inclusive communities in the process. Join the zoom at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82952474787>.



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