

Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2023

Mayor's Update



Newton Again Receives “Aaa – Stable” Rating

A few days ago, the City of Newton once again received a “Aaa – Stable” rating (the highest possible) from Moody’s Investor Services.

Moody’s wrote about Newton, *“The Aaa rating reflects a very strong and diverse economy within the greater Boston metro area and high resident income and wealth. The rating also incorporates a healthy financial position bolstered by diligent and forward-looking fiscal*

management, and slightly above-average leverage that is proactively managed with an affordable fixed cost ratio.”

The City today issued \$20.3 million general obligation twenty-five year municipal bonds. We got a terrific effective rate, 2.93% with the premium.

Approximately half of the proceeds from the bonds are for the complete renovation of the new home for the Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School on Jackson Road. In addition, the bonding will be used for the Newton Free Library parking lot improvements (recently completed), the replacement of all water meters citywide, upgrades to the Newton Police and Fire Department radio communication system, and the complete renovation of the Newton Senior Center/NewCAL.

Maintaining our Aaa bond rating is critically important; it ensures the City receives the lowest interest rates on the bonds we issue, thus saving money for our taxpayers.

Read the press release from Moody’s at [moodys.com/NewtonMA](https://www.moodys.com/NewtonMA).

Two Scenarios for the Future of the Newton Public Schools

Last night at the School Committee, Newton Public School Interim Superintendent Kathy Smith and Assistant Superintendent/Chief Financial & Administrative Officer Liam Hurley previewed next year’s NPS budget and the impact that the proposed operating override vote on March 14 will have.

The Newton School Committee asked for two budgets, one with the additional \$4.5 million should voters approve the operating override, and the other without.

NPS leadership framed the two budgets in terms of the ability of NPS to meet its goals for optimal class sizes, academic excellence, continued breadth of programming and resources (both technology and facilities), rich and diverse mental health supports and student services, and meaningful professional development.

Both scenarios include a baseline addition of \$9.2 million, a 3.5% increase in line with the overall revenue growth of the City of Newton, bringing the NPS budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 to \$271.2M.

If the Override is Approved

The override would provide the schools with an additional \$4.5 million and a proposed \$275.7 million FY2024 budget.

The funds will allow NPS to maintain the personalized learning experience that NPS teachers strive for, as well as a rigorous academic program with challenging classes and coursework, robust and meaningful mental health supports, educational supports (e.g. literacy specialists and math coaches) needed by all types of learners including students still recovering educationally from the pandemic, those closing opportunity gaps, and others with disabilities, and modern, innovative and readily accessible technology, according to NPS leadership.

Even with the Override funds, NPS leaders need to continue to address a 1% - 2% budget gap in the range of \$2 million to \$4 million.

“I know that number looks large,” Superintendent Smith said. She went on to say that she is “optimistic.” By working with colleagues and trimming expenses that do not directly impact the classroom, they can keep focused on NPS priorities.

“Without the override, it is going to be difficult,” she said.

If the Override Is Not Approved

Without the override, NPS is looking at a potential shortfall of \$6 to \$8 million which will require extensive reductions to educational services and infrastructure.

Superintendent Smith expects across the board reductions to all departments, impacting the breadth and depth of programming for all students.

NPS leadership outlined the difficult decisions the School Committee would need to make:

- Elimination of 40 to 50 educator positions, resulting in larger class sizes from kindergarten through 12th grade.
- Increases in the number of students each guidance counselor and mental health professional supports.

- Decreases in elective options (including more free blocks and study halls and waitlists for classes and specialized electives at the high schools).
- Reductions in academic and social & emotional supports.
- Reductions in athletic, music, theater programs and clubs & activities at the middle and high schools.
- Reductions in the number of administrators and custodians.
- Reductions in the transportation program impacting all grades and increasing fees.
- Limiting summer building maintenance to only life/safety mandated improvements.
- Rolling back the 1 to 1 technology program in elementary schools and introducing a “bring your own device” program in grades 11 and 12.

Why are Budget Increases Needed?

Superintendent Smith and Assistant Superintendent Hurley pointed to three budget drivers resulting in the need for the additional \$4.5 million in operating funds.

- Growing Student Needs. A significant number of students returned from the pandemic with gaps or uneven academic skills, thereby requiring tailored and individualized instruction as well as careful tracking and progress monitoring. School leaders are also seeing more students coming to class with complex mental health and learning needs. NPS psychologists and the Social and Emotional Learning team are inundated with emails from parents looking for help.
- Rising Costs & Expenses. NPS is experiencing spikes in costs. The cost of health insurance has increased 5%, gas and utilities 22%, transportation costs 7% to 10%, and out-of-district tuition increased 14% statewide. Altogether, these increases amount to an added \$5.1 million in the NPS budget.
- Using One-Time Funds. NPS has benefitted from one-time federal funding from CARES, ARPA, and ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) to balance the current budget. Using one time funds for ongoing operations is not sustainable.

You can watch the School Committee presentation from last night on NewTV [here](#). (The presentation begins at the 38 minute mark.)

Questions about the Override?

We'll be answering your questions about the March 14 Override at a Virtual Town Hall meeting this Thursday, Jan. 26, starting at 7:00 p.m.

Join the zoom meeting at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82496361444>.

You can also find answers to frequently asked questions, an override calculator to find out how the override will impact your tax bill, and more information at newtonma.gov/override.

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

Early In-Person Voting Expected to Begin on Friday, March 3

The plans for voting on the override are being finalized.

Early In-Person Voting: 5 Days in March

Early, in-person voting for the March 14 Override Election is expected to begin at City Hall on Friday, March 3 and run through Tuesday, March 7.



Voters can cast their early, in-person ballots at City Hall from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays, Friday, March 3, Monday, March 6, and Tuesday, March 7. Weekend early, in-person voting will be open 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on both Saturday, March 4 and Sunday, March 5.

The Election Commission voted for these dates earlier this month and the City Council is expected to finalize them at their next meeting on Monday, Feb. 6.

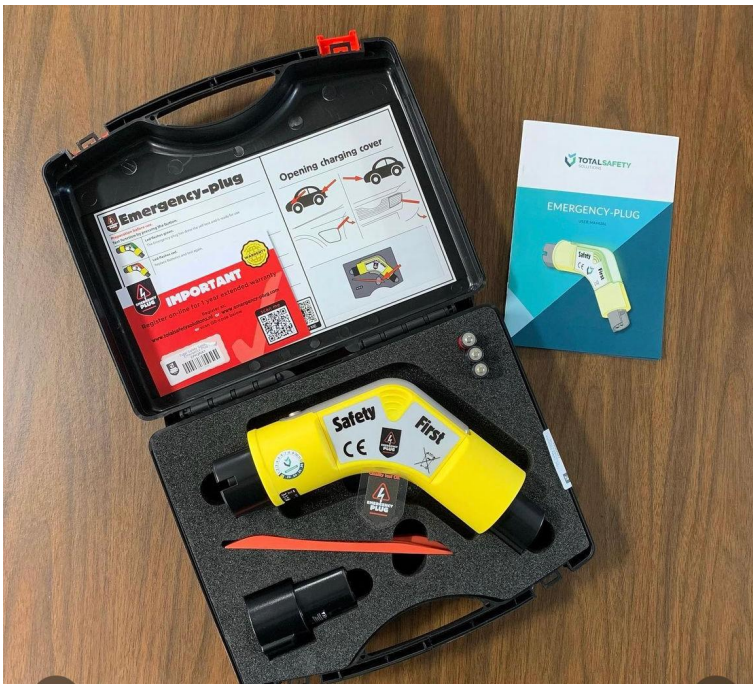
Mail-In Ballots

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. Election Day: Tuesday, March 14

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



The Newton Fire Department is just the second department in the country (New York City was the first) to have a new tool from Europe that makes responding to electric vehicle (EV) accidents safer. The Emergency Plug essentially puts the vehicle to sleep and prevents sudden movements that can be dangerous for everyone involved. Importantly, the battery is not de-energized by the device.

Data from NPD on Car, Bicycle and Pedestrian Accidents

Where's the most likely spot in Newton to get into a fender bender or worse?

Perhaps not surprisingly, it's the Newton Corner Rotary at the Mass Pike ramps and our six Newton roadways around Exit 127 (formerly Exit 17) where 54 crashes occurred in 2022 within a block of the intersection of Centre and Washington Streets.

Thankfully, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (which "owns" the exits below on the Mass Pike as well as the bridges above) is currently in the midst of the conceptual design phase for safety improvements. (Click [here](#) for more information.)

What is second on the list of top crash locations in Newton? The parking lots and Washington Street at Newton-Wellesley Hospital experienced 15 accidents. Other locations with a high number of incidents include the area around Walnut and Washington Streets, and Walnut and Beacon Streets.

Overall, the crash data shows the numbers have dropped over the past five years, with 1,203 crashes in 2022. This is 301 fewer than in 2017, 225 fewer than in 2018, and 127 fewer than in 2019. The number dipped dramatically to 762 when many of us were off the road during the height of the pandemic in 2020 (762 crashes), but when things started opening up again in 2021, Newton had 1,066 crashes.

Newton Police Chief John Carmichael brought the crash data before the City Council's Public Safety Committee last week as part of his regular meetings with the group to go over NPD data and statistics.

While there were 1,203 car crashes in Newton in 2023, none involved a loss of life as has been the case over the past five years. Most of the crashes were “minor” dings and dents where there were no citations issued and “no improper driving” was involved.

When drivers are cited, “inattention,” or distracted driving accounted for the most citations, with more than 200. Failing to yield at a right of way and tailgating are the next two most common contributing factors..

2022 car crash data also shows:

- 86% of car crashes occurred in sunny or cloudy weather, 8% in rain, 4% in snow, and the last 2% in sleet, hail, freezing rain or fog.
- Most crashes in Newton involve drivers between the ages of 25 and 29. The fewest are drivers between 16 and 21.
- Most crashes occur in Newton on Wednesday and the fewest on Saturday.
- The hours of 7:00 to 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. are the peak hours for car crashes in Newton.

Chief Carmichael also presented data on Pedestrian and Bicycle crashes. Again, thankfully, we’ve had no fatal pedestrian or bike accidents in Newton over the past five years.

Thirty-nine (39) pedestrians were struck by cars in 2022, the highest number in five years since the 40 we experienced in 2017. (There were 33 in 2018, 34 in 2019 and then a dip to 15 in 2020 and 32 in 2021.)

The total number of bicycle crashes increased slightly by 1 in 2023, going from 26 in 2017 and 2021 to 27 in 2022.

Interested in more of the details? Find the crash data [here](#).

Haywood House Senior Housing – Getting Close to Occupancy

Tenant selection is ongoing and occupancy is expected to begin in March at the Newton Housing Authority’s newly constructed Haywood House located on John F. Kennedy Circle in Nonantum.

(Photo: Groundbreaking of Haywood House in October 2021)

Named after the Reverend Howard Haywood, a beloved member of the Newton community and a dedicated advocate for affordable housing, Haywood House provides 55 units of affordable housing for seniors. The project offers deep and wide-ranging affordability with units for people with annual incomes ranging from 30% to 99% of the area median income. Tenant selection continues, with



residents moving in this spring. While the deadline for the Lottery has passed, applications are still being accepted for the post-lottery waitlist. These

applications will be reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis. [Click here](#) for more information.

As with many projects under construction in the last few years, the Newton Housing Authority has experienced cost increases and schedule delays due to inflation and supply chain disruptions. At the start of construction, the Newton Housing Authority committed an additional \$643,000 to address an early funding gap related to a significant jump in lumber prices. The cost increases continued throughout construction, leaving the project in need of additional funding to reach completion.

I am pleased to announce that the City of Newton is joining the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to help get Haywood House to the finish line.

I am committing \$250,000 of the City's ARPA funds from my earlier allocation of \$3.5 million for affordable housing and affordable housing climate resiliency to Haywood House in conjunction with the state adding an additional \$744,000. This additional City and State funding allows this important housing to be completed and people to call Haywood House their home this spring.

The Newton Housing Authority (despite its name) is not part of our City government. Rather, the NHA is an independent agency governed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The NHA administers federal and state-sponsored subsidized housing programs, including the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. Created in 1959, the NHA is by far the largest provider of affordable housing in our community, offering housing assistance and resident services programs to over 1,000 low income Newtonians.

With the construction of Haywood House, the NHA is moving forward with its goal to create more affordable housing here in Newton. For questions about the availability of units, eligibility requirements, and how to apply for rental housing, please contact the Newton Housing Authority office at 617-552-5501 or for more information click [here](#).

Join the fun this weekend, Saturday, Jan. 28 and Sunday, Jan. 29, at Newton's WinterFEST.

Newton Community Pride has planned activities for all ages.

Activities begin with a Soup Social at the Hyde Community Center, 90 Lincoln St., on Saturday from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. with free soup, hot chocolate and cookies donated



by local restaurants, and starting at 6:30 p.m., music by the Eli Cash Band and plenty of activities for kids including Glow in the Dark Hula Hooping.

On Sunday morning, the Newton Conservators will guide a winter walk through Cold Springs Park from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. (meet at 10:00 a.m. at the 1094 Beacon St. entrance and proceed around toward the left to the trail entrance by the sports fields.)

The activities continue on Sunday from noon to 4:00 p.m. on the Newton Centre Green, 1221 Centre St., with a Winter Market, music, dancing, special guests Olaf and Friends, and much more.

Newton Community Pride has also partnered with Welcome Home, a Newton non-profit providing families experiencing hardship with household items. Consider bringing a new or gently used full, queen or king blanket to donate.

Find more information about WinterFEST [here](#).

(Photo: WinterFEST 2022)

Standing with Our Asian Neighbors

Last week I joined our Asian neighbors at joyous celebrations of the Lunar New Year. With music and dancing, children and adults from the Newton Chinese Language School, the Chinese American Association of Newton and the Newton

Education Support Network held wonderful events ringing in the Year of the Rabbit, a year of hope.

On Sunday morning, we all woke up to devastating news of another mass shooting, this one at a dance studio in Monterey Park with people enjoying a festive Lunar New Year celebration. At this time, we know eleven people were murdered and at least nine more were injured.

We stand together with our Asian families during this difficult time.

Join a candlelight vigil this Saturday for the victims of the mass shooting. The City of Newton and our Human Rights Commission are coming together with many others across the Commonwealth on Saturday, Jan. 28 from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. at the Lion Gateway in Boston's Chinatown to stand against gun violence and to support our Asian American Pacific Islander neighbors.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Join the Senior Citizens Fund of Newton and Newton's Council on Aging to celebrate all that recently retired Director of Senior Services Jayne Colino has done for the older residents of Newton over 32 years of service. We'll gather at an **Open House reception in Jayne Colino's honor** on Monday, Jan. 30 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. at the Newton Free Library, Druker Auditorium, 330 Homer Street.



P.P.S. Check out the **City of Newton Summer Camp and Program Fair** this Sunday, Jan. 29. Stop by the Newton North High School Cafeteria, 457 Walnut St., anytime between noon and 3:00 p.m. to learn about summer camps, summer programs, and summer resources for youngsters, teens and families this summer. Representatives from Newton Parks, Recreation & Culture, Health and Human Services, Historic Newton and the Newton Public Schools will be

available to answer questions. Information on scholarships, summer jobs, and mental health resources will also be available. Find more information at newtonma.gov/activities.

P.P.P.S. The **Centre Street Food Pantry** in Newton Center offers a special grocery pickup hour for seniors every Tuesday from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. Seniors can receive extra assistance, as needed, to load groceries into their cars or from a volunteer translator. Seniors may choose cold and frozen foods, fresh bread and produce, dry goods and personal care items. No appointments are necessary. Then, starting at 2:00 p.m., all ages and family sizes in need of



groceries are welcome to visit the Centre Street Food Pantry at Trinity Parish of Newton Centre, 11 Homer St., on Tuesdays from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. or on the first Saturday of the month, 11:30 to 2:00 p.m. Questions? Find more info at centrestfoodpantry.org.



P.P.P.P.S. Join students across Massachusetts in celebrating **Winter Walk, Ride & Roll Day** on Wednesday, Feb. 1. Newton

families, please help by keeping your sidewalks clear of snow and ice not just on Feb. 1 but whenever the “Weather Gods” shower it upon us (like yesterday and tomorrow).

P.P.P.P.S. The 2023 **resident parking permits** are now available. Vendor issues delayed the delivery of this year’s permits, so the deadline for displaying the new sticker has been extended at least until the end of the month. These stickers are available to residents who live on streets with year-round parking restrictions. Interested in learning more about Resident Parking Permits, including eligibility? Click [here](#), and find an application [here](#). Submit an application to the Newton Police Department Traffic Bureau by email to trafficbureau@newtonma.gov, or in person at Newton Police Headquarters, 1321 Washington St, West Newton. Questions? Call the Traffic Bureau at 617-796-2106, or email them at trafficbureau@newtonma.gov. (This does not impact senior parking stickers which are for residents age 65 or older and allows free parking in our municipal parking lots. The current senior parking stickers (available for \$1) are valid through June 30, 2023. More info [here](#).)

P.P.P.P.P.S. Eat fresh, locally grown produce from June through October. Applications are being accepted for the very popular **Newton Community Farm’s 2023 Summer Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program**. (Please know that returning CSA sharers are given preference and all applicants must be a Friend of the Farm (\$50 donation) to be considered.) Good luck in the lottery! Shares cost \$797 for weekly or \$430 for alternative weekly pickups. Find details about the farm share program at newtoncommunityfarm.org.



P.P.P.P.P.P.S. **Story Starters**, a Newton based non-profit, is now enrolling families with children 3 to 8 years old for their 8-week Family Conversations program to help parents interested in starting and strengthening conversations about race with their young children. Families will be given age-appropriate tools (including books, parent guides, a curated book list, events and workshops) to learn from educators, racial justice advocates and each other how to have meaningful conversations about race and racism. The Winter program kicks off Sunday, Feb. 12 online or in-person. Questions? Find more information at storystarters.org.

P.P.P.P.P.P.P.S. Congratulations to **Boston Celtics Heroes Among Us** honorees **Vassili Syssoev** and **Sam Klein**. The Newton South seniors pair were recognized during the Celtics – Bulls game earlier this month for their work providing free landscaping and power washing services to community members who would otherwise not be able to access their services. Since starting Student Landscape in October, the pair has donated more than \$3,000 in complementary work.



(Photo: Vassili Syssoev and Sam Klein being honored during a recent Celtic game. Courtesy of the Boston Celtics.)



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