

Thursday, Feb. 2, 2023

## Mayor's Newton Update

### **NGrid & Super Environmental Impact Gas Leaks**

In part as a result of our DPW Commissioner Jim McGonagle and our team raising the importance of major leaks, National Grid has repaired the 16 largest Grade 3 super environmental impact (SEI) gas leaks in the City of Newton as well as several smaller leaks.

While NGrid still has critical repair work to do, this is a huge start. (See the attached list [here](#).)

We have requested that National Grid prioritize the work by leak volume and keep fixing them a timely manner not just the next set of highest leaks but all of them. (fyi: The City of Newton has no authority to repair gas leaks. That responsibility falls solely on National Grid.)

Why is fixing the “super emitter gas leaks” so important?

Gas leaks are not uncommon especially as the gas line infrastructure in New England is among the oldest in the country. Under Newton, the 305 miles of gas pipes are made up mostly of cast iron and steel with a startling 78% of them “leak prone,” according to National Grid.

Leaking gas is made up mostly of methane. Methane is a significant contributor to climate change and is harmful to trees (including killing them).

When a gas leak is reported, National Grid is required to arrive within 60 minutes. The average time in Newton is about 22 minutes, according to National Grid.

Once at the location, a National Grid technician will take a variety of gas readings in the area, looking specifically for places where gas could be accumulating. They pay particular attention to the proximity of gas to structures.

A National Grid technician then grades the leak on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 considered an emergency needing immediate repair.

Class 2 leaks are considered “non-hazardous” but a “probable future hazard” and are monitored every six months and are repaired within one year.

Grade 3 leaks are considered “non-hazardous and likely to remain non-hazardous” and are rechecked periodically. With Class 3 leaks, National Grid is not required by the State to repair them until the gas main is replaced. However, a subset of Grade 3 leaks are graded as “significant environmental impact leaks”





because they emit substantial amounts of methane into both the ground and atmosphere. Starting in March 2019, the State has required that NGrid identify the Grade 3 super emitters and repair them within two years unless the pipe(s) are already slated for replacement within five years and then they have up to five years to fix them.

It's important that NGrid has fixed all our highest emitters. We will continue to (excuse the pun) pressure them to fix all of them.

If you smell gas, call National Grid's Gas Leak Emergency Line at 1-800-233-5325 immediately. Call if there is a scent of gas in the air, no matter how strong the smell of gas may be, whether just a whiff outside or a more distinct, overpowering smell

inside or out. If the smell is inside, go outside to make the call.

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### **Newton's Economic Stability/Mobility Initiative – A Partnership with EMPath**

When we received \$63.5 million in unprecedented one-time federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), we decided to strategically seed initiatives that help our community not just stabilize and recover, but permanently be more resilient, more livable, more vibrant, more inclusive and more sustainable. One key priority is to use the funds to help those hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, we want to provide under-resourced families disproportionately impacted by the pandemic with individual, intensive support for economic stability and mobility.

With the help of a terrific group of residents and people working in this field who provided me with their unanimous recommendation, we have decided to partner with the Boston-based nonprofit [Economic Mobility Pathways](#) (EMPath for short) on this Economic Stability / Mobility Initiative.

EMPath's mission is to transform people's lives by helping them move out of poverty. They are a national leader in economic mobility, offering a unique combination of direct service, a learning exchange of 150+ organizations nationwide, research and advocacy. EMPath has directly served thousands of low-income families in the Greater Boston region and helped them increase their wages.

In Newton, EMPath will support fifty low-income Newton families with intensive one-to-one Economic Mobility Coaching over the course of two years. The priority clients for this program are low-income Newton families who are at or below 50% of the area median income (AMI), have children under 18 years old (or are pregnant), and who are interested in working and increasing their income. We will purposefully seek to serve families or individuals most impacted by the pandemic with an emphasis on people of color who were disproportionately harmed as well

as those who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness, living in subsidized housing, or who are otherwise struggling.

*(With Newton Health and Human Services  
Commissioner Linda Walsh, EMPATH President and CEO Kim Janey and Newton  
Planning Director Barney Health.)*

EMPATH's coaching model, called Mobility Mentoring, has a proven track record of achieving results. The organization has a commitment to evaluation and making data-driven adaptations to their models. Led by Kim Janey, EMPATH's approach is client-centered, strengths-based, comprehensive, and coordinated.

EMPATH focuses on addressing five critical pillars: family stability, well-being, education and training, financial management, and employment & career management.

Over the life of the Newton program, one mentor will be fully engaged with each participant to support them as they set and work toward individual goals related to each pillar. Mentors will be available for mentoring sessions six days per week and in the evenings. After the two-year program concludes, participants will have the opportunity for longer-term support by moving to EMPATH's "flagship" program which continues for up to five years.

In addition to the tailored coaching, EMPATH will provide each family with a monthly cash incentive (\$250) for active participation in the program. This monthly guaranteed cash payment will provide participants with greater economic stability as they receive economic mobility coaching. The cash will serve as an incentive to continue with the coaching, while providing participants with some essential breathing room necessary to take on their bigger goals.

EMPATH will recruit Newton families in the late spring and the program will launch in the summer. They will be selecting the staff, developing recruitment materials, launching an outreach and recruitment plan, and working closely with our City's Health and Human Services and Planning staff. EMPATH will also work with our partners at the UMAss Donahue Institute to develop a monitoring and reporting timeline, define outcome measures, and implement a data collection plan.

I am extremely excited for this initiative to begin and very grateful to the 10-member Advisory Committee that helped make this effort a reality.

If you or someone you know might like to be a participant, please email us at [empath@newtonma.gov](mailto:empath@newtonma.gov) and we'll circle back to you when we begin the recruiting process.

Updated information about this initiative will be posted [here](#)

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**Mental Health, MassHealth and SNAP Updates**

Our Newton Social Services Division of Health & Human Services wants you to know about important updates and deadlines for public benefit programs, and new resources for mental health support.

### Mental Health Supports:

- 988 Crisis Support – If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 to talk with a trained counselor or [chat online](#).
- Behavioral Health Help Line (BHHL) – If you are struggling with mental health or substance use, the new behavioral health help line connects Massachusetts residents directly to clinical support where and when they need it. It's free, available 24/7, and offers real-time interpretation in over 200 languages. Call or text 833-773-2445 or [chat online](#).
- National Maternal Mental Health Hotline – New and expectant moms can receive 24/7, free, confidential support in English and Spanish. Call or text 1-833-9-HELP4MOMS.

Visit the [Newton Social Services website](#) for additional resources and support, or call us at 617-796-1420 to connect with a member of our Social Services team. We're here to help.

### MassHealth Health Insurance

MassHealth members may soon need to renew their health coverage. Throughout the pandemic, MassHealth maintained members' coverage and benefits as part of continuous coverage requirements from the COVID-19 emergency. This year, MassHealth is returning to the pre-pandemic renewal process.

What you need to do now:

- Make sure MassHealth has your most up to date address, phone number, and email so you do not miss important notices.
- Report any household changes.
- Keep an eye out for a renewal form in a blue envelope that will be sent to your mailing address on file.

Note: If MassHealth already has enough information to confirm your eligibility, your coverage will be renewed automatically, and you will be notified.

### SNAP (formerly Food Stamps)

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) recipients will soon lose the additional COVID SNAP benefits that the federal government provided throughout the pandemic. Households will receive their last extra SNAP payment on March 2, 2023. To ensure that you are receiving the full benefits for which you

are eligible, report reductions in income and claim income deductions through the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). If you need connection to additional food resources, please call us, Newton Social Services, at 617-796-1420.

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## **A Safer Route to Schools**

We heard this morning that Newton received a \$627,000 Safe Routes to School Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to implement bike and pedestrian improvements at the Parker Street and Route 9 intersection.

The improvements will make it safer for students walking and biking to Bowen Elementary School, Oak Hill & Brown Middle Schools, and Newton South High School.

Specifically, the upgrades will:

- Enable drivers to see students in the crosswalk by improving sight lines from the realignment of curbs, utility poles and crosswalks.
- Allow bicyclists to share space with pedestrians on a widened sidewalk on the east side of Parker Street.
- Help students and other pedestrians cross Rt. 9 via improved signal timing made possible by upgraded signal equipment.
- Provide a two-way protected bike lane on the eastbound onramp to connect to Sheldon Road

MassDOT will plan, design and construct the improvements with work expected to begin in June 2024.

This improvement follows our City work in 2021 which installed bike lanes on Parker Street from Newton Centre to Dedham Street. Our goal was to increase safe “bike to school” opportunities and reduce traffic congestion associated with student drop-offs/pick-ups. The City also installed its first contraflow bike lane on a section of Hagen Road with the same goal. During the pandemic, and continuing this school year, the rate of walking and biking to school has risen across Newton.

This project is an outgrowth of our City Planning Department’s work with Newton Safe Routes to School, many residents and parents & guardians at all four schools, the Newton Public Schools and MassDOT. I’m also grateful to the many City Departments (DPW and Police) that helped move this forward, as well as Bike Newton, the Transportation Advisory Group, the School Transportation Working Group, City Councilors and School Committee members.

Kudos to everyone involved.

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## Local (Furry) Engineers in Action

The North American beaver, *Castor canadensis*, is a native species that has made a successful comeback after being extirpated (i.e., made extinct) from the state in the 1700s by trapping and hunting.

Beavers rely on the ponds they create by constructing sticks and mud dams in small streams. Beavers remain active year-round and their ponds enable them to escape predators and have safe access to their food and lodges.

Beaver ponds and associated wetlands are among the most biologically productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to coral reefs and rain forests (per U.S. Environmental Protection Agency). They become home to amphibians, turtles, fish, otters, muskrats, and innumerable smaller animals. When flooding causes trees to die, nesting sites are created for Great Blue Herons, Wood Ducks, Tree Swallows, and other birds. Beaver ponds and wetlands also directly benefit humans by filtering out stormwater pollutants, mitigating storm flows, and recharging aquifers.

All that good doesn't mean they're the easiest neighbors. Their activity can threaten water supplies, sewage/septic systems, and cause flooding of public and private property. We know of a beaver(s) that has made themselves at home in one creek in the southern part of Newton.

Recognizing the need to address some beaver-human conflicts (primarily flooding), the State Legislature in 2000 created a pathway to alleviate some of these issues.

Concerned about imminent beaver-related flooding (or gnawing) threatening human health and safety? Contact Newton's Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) at (617) 796-1420 or [health@newtonma.gov](mailto:health@newtonma.gov). If HHS confirms there is an *imminent threat*, it can issue a 10-day emergency permit to alleviate the immediate problem. The Newton Conservation Commission will then issue an Emergency Certification or permit for the proposed work.

If a threat is not imminent, concerned parties can apply to the Newton Conservation Commission for a permit to address the problem. There are three ways to alleviate beaver-related flooding: (1) in-season trapping and killing of the beavers (a short-term solution), (2) breaching all or part of the dam (a short-term solution), and (3) installing a water-flow device to control the level of the pond (a long-term solution).

Beavers are "keystone" native species, part of Newton's dynamic and vibrant ecology, providing lots of ecological benefits ... and the occasional challenge. We can marvel at their engineering skills, their industriousness, and their abilities to create vibrant habitat and "green stormwater infrastructure" ... and we can ensure that we human neighbors remain safe and healthy.

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## Climate Change Microgrants Awarded

The first two awards from the City of Newton and the Village Bank's new Climate Change Microgrant Project will support a composting program at Underwood Elementary School and a hands-on, sustainable construction course at Newton North High School.

The grant program, launched in October, supports Newton advocates undertaking initiatives to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The City and The Village Bank each contributed \$2,500 to the project for a year. Grants of \$250 to \$1,000 are available.

### The First Two Awards:

Andy Gluck, Newton resident and the Underwood School's building aide and Green Team leader, received a \$250 grant to expand the school's composting program. The grant will support the purchase of stainless steel composting units for each classroom and information about the benefits of composting.



Pete Prokesch of the Studio for High Performance Design and Construction (Studio HPDC) in Newton received a \$1,000 grant. Along with other generous donations, the microgrant will help support the creation of a new six-week course at Newton North High School on High-Performance Buildings for Carpenters. The course will provide students with education and hands-on training related to sustainable construction practices.

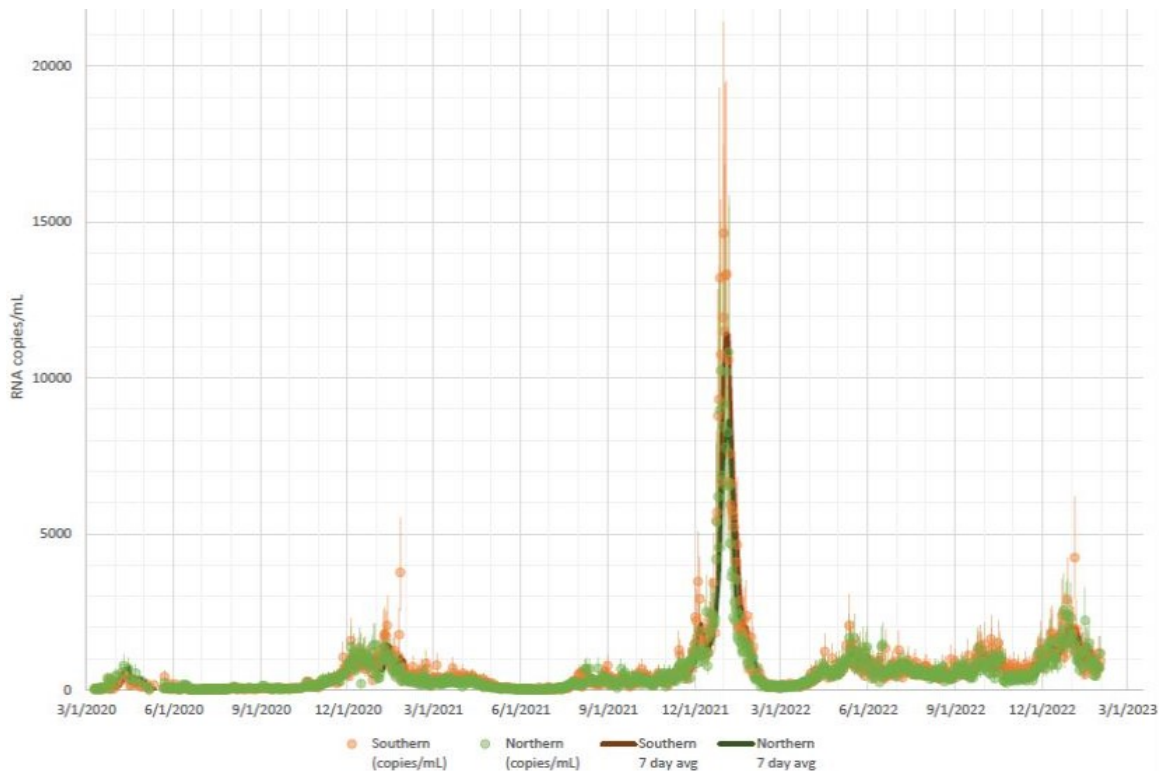
Have an idea for your own project? Learn more about the microgrant program or submit an application at [newtonma.gov/grant](https://newtonma.gov/grant).

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## COVID-19

With tests, vaccines and treatment readily available, we're continuing to see MWRA wastewater weekly data showing ups and downs at levels far below what we saw at the height of the Omicron surge.

MWRA COVID-19 Wastewater Data



The MWRA wastewater tracking has been a reliable predictor of COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic. Find more data [here](#).

### COVID-19 Booster Clinics

Newton Health and Human Services is partnering again with Holtzman Medical Group to offer the updated, bivalent COVID-19 booster vaccines.

Our clinics are open to anyone ages 6 months and older (ages 6 months to 5 years will be given Moderna). Anyone who has completed a primary vaccine series is eligible to receive this booster at least 2 months after their last COVID-19 vaccine or booster. People who recently had COVID may consider delaying the booster by 3 months from symptom onset or positive test. (Learn more about the booster vaccine [here](#).)

The clinics will be held at the Newton Free Library (330 Homer Street, Newton) in Druker Auditorium. Register [here](#) and select “Newton.”

- Monday, Feb. 6, 3:00 to 6:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, Feb. 15, 3:00 to 6:00 p.m.
- Friday, Feb. 17, 10:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, Feb. 28, 3:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Can't make it to the clinics at the Newton Free Library? Check [vaxfinder.mass.gov](https://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.



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## **Opus Newton Construction Begins and Traffic Changes at Nahanton/Winchester Streets**

2Life Communities is poised to begin construction of Opus Newton (174 apartments) on the campus of the JCC Greater Boston at Nahanton and Winchester Streets. This is an entirely new concept of housing (*living in community*) for older adults in the “middle market.”

During construction, the entrance to the JCC on Nahanton Street will need to be closed so a separate temporary entrance and exit will be opened on Winchester Street where there are existing driveways. The changes will begin in the next few weeks.

Questions? 2Life Communities and the JCC will be holding an informational Zoom meeting for neighbors on Thursday, Feb. 9 at 6:00 p.m. about the upcoming construction schedule and temporary traffic changes.

Join the Zoom meeting at [us02web.zoom.us/j/83919369935#success](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83919369935#success), or by phone at +1 360 209 5623, Meeting ID: 839 1936 9935.

Learn more about Opus Newton at [2LifeOpus.org](https://2LifeOpus.org).

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## **The Importance of School Building Projects**

Josh Morse, Newton’s Public Buildings Commissioner, was asked last week at the Newton Early Childhood Program (NECP) open house why school building projects like Angier, Zervas, Cabot, NECP and Lincoln-Eliot and electrification are so important.

Here’s what he had to say:

*School projects that are underway such as Lincoln-Eliot, those that we have completed in the last ten years, and the next ones on our master plan (Countryside, Franklin, and Horace Mann) are critical in delivering 21<sup>st</sup> century learning facilities that help promote and foster incredible learning environments for all our children.*



*When schools were constructed decades ago, education looked very different. Special education, student and staff support spaces, and many other critical space needs simply didn’t exist. This means that the current facilities lack the number and size of spaces needed to deliver adequately the core programs and services that our students rely on.*

*Furthermore, where nearly every building system within these schools has surpassed its useful life, the conditions of most of the spaces is not up to the standards we expect and strive to deliver. Educators and students at our schools up next for major renovations must overcome issues ranging from flooding, sewage smells, mold, leaks, and classrooms that are often too cold or too hot. Many of these schools also present significant physical accessibility barriers, both within and outside of the buildings.*

*Great school buildings help attract and retain great educators, and they have also been shown to improve student test scores.*

To read more about this from Josh, please click [here](#).

### Importance of Electrification in Public Buildings

*The City of Newton has a goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050. One major step toward achieving this goal is shifting our school and city buildings from fossil-fuel to fully electric.*

*When coupled with an efficient building design, it can cost less up front, less to operate, and has comparable maintenance costs, while providing superior indoor comfort. By not burning fossil fuels at our buildings, we obviously reduce our onsite carbon emissions. Plus, by converting to fully electric buildings, we help to reduce our carbon emissions because increasing amounts of the electricity we consume is renewably sourced. We have a long way to go, but if the next three school building projects and additional electrification project funding can be secured, we will be on track to convert roughly 20% of our total building square footage to fully electric heat pump technology.*

To read more about this from Josh, please click [here](#).

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### **Questions about the March 14 Override Vote?**

Still have questions about how the Override votes on March 14 will impact you and your family?

Join us at two upcoming in-person opportunities to get more information and ask questions:

Sunday, Feb. 5, 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.  
Newton Chinese Language School,  
Day Middle School, 21 Minot Place

Wednesday, Feb. 8, 7:00 p.m.  
Newton North High School Auditorium  
457 Walnut Street

I will be joined by Interim School Superintendent Kathy Smith at both forums to give an overview and answer questions.

Unclear about the three override questions? Find detailed information and answers to frequently asked questions at [newtonma.gov/override](http://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 three questions are approved.

Can't make one of the forums? Find videos of previous presentations [here](#) (Click on Meeting Recordings under the Meetings and Information) or email us with a question at [override@newtonma.gov](mailto:override@newtonma.gov).

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## **Plummeting Temperatures**

"Arctic Frontal Passage, Fri Predawn for Snow Shower Risk with Plummeting Temps" - That's the headline from our City of Newton weather forecast.

Even for hearty New Englanders, the weather on Friday and Saturday is going to be extremely cold with temperatures now forecast to dip below zero with wind making it feel even colder.

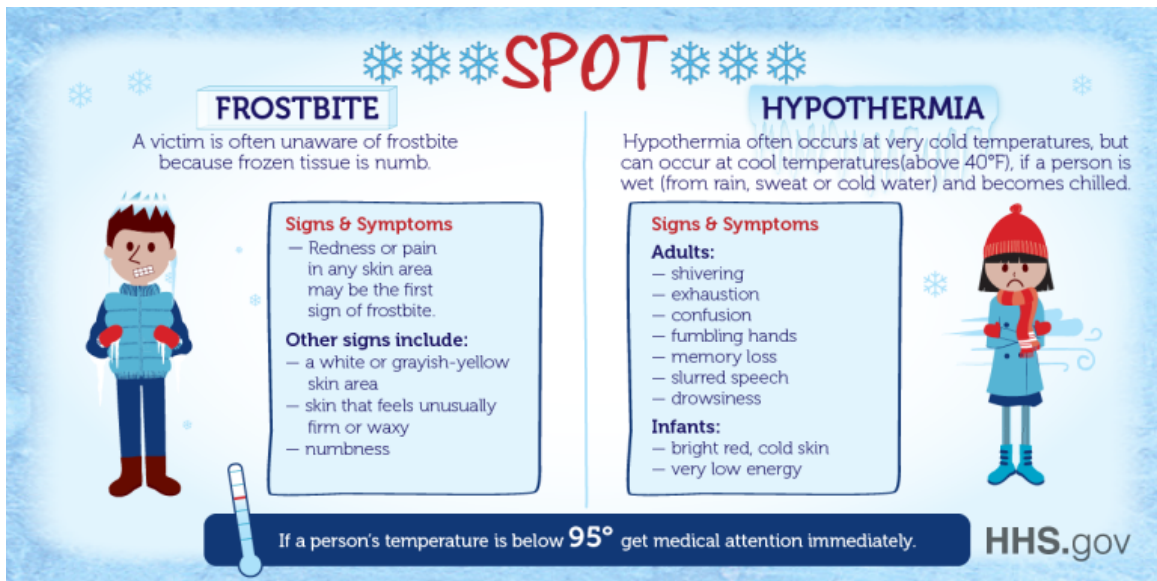
In cold temperatures, our bodies begin to lose heat faster than it can be produced, which can lead to frostbite and hypothermia.

Here's what to do:

Avoid: Try to stay indoors. If you must go outside, dress in layers of loose-fitting clothing and don't forget a hat, scarf or knit mask that covers the face and mouth, water-resistant boots, and mittens or gloves. Make sure the body parts most often affected by frostbite (nose, ears, toes, cheeks, chin, and fingers) are covered in warm, dry clothing.

Spot: Redness or pain in any skin area may be the first sign of frostbite. Other signs of frostbite include a white or grayish-yellow skin area, skin that feels unusually firm or waxy, and numbness. Signs of hypothermia in adults include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, and drowsiness. Signs of hypothermia in infants include bright red, cold skin and very low energy.

Treat: If a person's temperature is below 95°F get medical attention immediately. If a person is experiencing hypothermia or frostbite, seek medical attention as soon as possible. Get them into a warm room or shelter, remove any wet clothing, and warm them under dry layers of blankets and clothing. Place areas affected by frostbite in warm-to-touch (not hot) water. Do not rub or massage areas with frostbite.



### Heat your home safely.

Don't use your stove or oven for heat.

Use fireplaces, wood stoves, or other combustion heaters only if they are properly vented to the outside and do not leak gas from the flue or exhaust into indoor air space.

Use electric space heaters with automatic shut-off switches and non-glowing elements. Make sure to keep them away from any flammable materials like curtains or blankets. Never place a space heater on top of furniture or near water and never leave children unattended near a space heater.

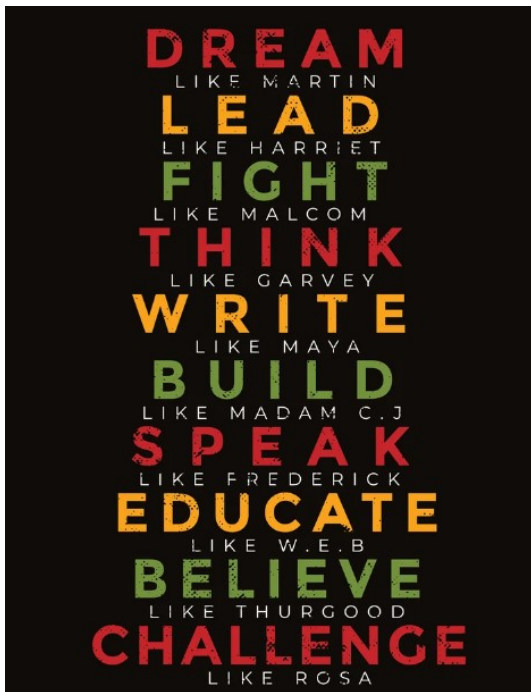
If your power goes out, please call Eversource at 1-800-592-2000, or report it online [here](#). (Eversource also has a mobile app, Eversource Energy, that can be downloaded for free from Google Play or the App Store.)  
As always, in an emergency, call 911.

Check on family, friends, and neighbors, especially older adults, those who live alone, those with medical conditions, and those who may need extra help.

*During Black History Month each February, we celebrate in Newton the rich heritage and share the experiences of Black Americans from the famous to the unnoted who wove the complex fabric of our country.*

*Join us at Black History Month events throughout the month from Black Superhero movies playing each Thursday at the Newton Free Library to a talk with History Newton about the migration of Black Americans from Virginia to West Newton in the 1870s, and much more.*

*Find a listing of events at [newtonma.gov](http://newtonma.gov).*



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### **A Message from Chief Carmichael**

As Mayor, I want everyone to know that Newton's Police Department values dignity, respect and compassion for all those with whom they interact. Please read Newton Police Chief John Carmichael's condemnation of the actions of Police Officers in Memphis, a condemnation that I share.

*On behalf of the Newton Police Department, I condemn the excessive and atrocious actions performed by members of the Memphis Police Department in the beating death of Tyre Nichols.*

*Any police officer watching the video or media coverage involving this incident is disheartened and disgusted by such blatant and deliberate misconduct.*

*The actions of these officers from beginning to end goes against everything that the vast majority of decent police officers believe in, and tears at the fabric of our honorable profession.*

*We want our community to know that conduct such as what we have witnessed in this horrific case does not align with the core values of the Newton Police Department or the philosophy of 21st Century Policing, which we fully embrace. We believe in developing police legitimacy through procedural justice and fair and impartial policing.*

*Nothing about the Memphis incident is remotely representative of how our police officers train or carry out their duties. Members of the Newton Police Department train consistently in proper use of force, de-escalation techniques, active bystander & duty to intervene training.*

*In addition to training, our officers value dignity, respect and compassion for all of those we come in contact with. We also work very hard to engage our community*

*through positive interactions and aim to develop confidence and trust from those we serve.*

*The Newton Police Department joins the community in denouncing excessive force and indifference in policing.*

*Our officers have been impacted by national excessive force incidents in the past leaving them feeling deflated and painted with a broad brush. It is important for the policing profession to stand up against wrongdoing and for our community to value the level of professionalism our officers demonstrate every day.*

Thank you, Chief Carmichael.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

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P.S. The City of Newton is **hiring poll workers** for the March 14 Override election. Early, in-person voting is expected to begin at City Hall on Friday, March 3 and run through Tuesday, March 7 with voting across the city on Tuesday, March 14. Training will be provided. Interested? Contact the Newton Elections Department at 617-796-1350 or email [elections@newtonma.gov](mailto:elections@newtonma.gov). Applications are available [here](#).

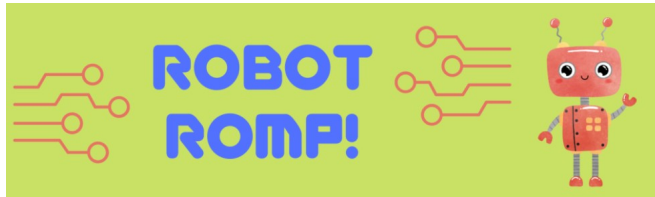
P.P.S. Want help on how to get the most out of the apps available on your smartphone? Come to the Newton Senior Center's temporary location at the Hyde Community Center, 90 Lincoln Street in Newton Highlands at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 7 and **learn how to install and register smartphone applications**. See a full list of programs at the Newton Senior Center at [newtonma.gov/seniors](http://newtonma.gov/seniors).

P.P.P.S. There's still time to nominate a friend or colleague, public figure or other rising star or changemaker for the **Charles River Chamber's Most Influential Business Leaders of Color** award. The nomination deadline is Monday, Feb. 6. Find the nomination form [here](#).



P.P.P.P.S. Congratulations to the **Newton South Wrestling team** for capturing the first Dual County League title in program history. Next stop is sectionals on Saturday, Feb. 11. Good luck!

P.P.P.P.S. Come on over to the **Newton Free Library's Children's Room for a Robot Romp** on Homer Street in February. Follow a robot path to learn a secret dance and get a prize, find secret messages to learn about Black technology innovators to celebrate Black History month, put together a magnetic robot, and more. Find the full schedule [here](#).



P.P.P.P.P.S. Thank you to the **students at Ward Elementary School** who on Tuesday night filled a lot of us with smiles and joy as we watched their Winter Concert. Click below to watch a very short clip of one number. Bravo to Mr. Miles and the kids at Ward!!



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

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