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Monday, April 10, 2023

## Mayor's Newton Update



### **Update on State's Plan to Utilize Former Hotel Indigo as Temporary Emergency Housing for Families**

The Commonwealth's emergency shelter system is at capacity and facing significantly increased levels of demand by families facing homelessness. As a result, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has converted some 20 hotels in various cities and towns across Massachusetts to provide emergency housing on a temporary basis. In Massachusetts, the State has an affirmative duty to provide emergency shelter to families experiencing homelessness, which is sometimes referred to as "Right to Shelter."

DHCD previously let us know they were exploring the concept but only recently has the plan become firmer and clearer.

While contracts have not yet been signed, DHCD is working with Catholic Charities of Boston and with Mark Development, owner of the currently closed Hotel Indigo on Grove Street next to the MBTA Riverside Station, to provide an Emergency Assistance Family Shelter for families experiencing homelessness with children (under 21) and pregnant women. The plan is for this facility to be temporary, with a 2-year timeline for its use in this way.

DHCD's current plan calls for Mark Development to renovate portions of the hotel this spring and summer. This includes renovations to 59 rooms for family use and an additional 5 rooms for office, common and related used (of 191 total rooms). In addition, plans call for restoring some common areas and the kitchen to facilitate communal breakfasts and dinners. (The swimming pool will not be re-opened.)

DHCD's goal is to have the hotel ready to accept 59 families sometime in late August or early fall of this year, 2023. The families who will reside there are currently experiencing homelessness and living in Greater Boston.

The DHCD lease with Mark Development will run through August 2025 to help alleviate the acute shortage of emergency housing. This timeline is consistent with Mark Development's redevelopment plans for the Riverside site (lab/office space, housing, MBTA garages, retail).

DHCD will be partnering with Catholic Charities of Boston to provide on-site 24/7 support and services for the families. This includes a variety of family supports, adult education, employment and training skill building, and individual case management. Catholic Charities has deep experience operating family emergency shelters.

Based on their experience with other family emergency shelters, DHCD anticipates an average family size of three, with some of the children likely to be quite young and currently under school age. Representatives of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) are in discussions with staff from the Newton Public Schools to coordinate enrollment plans and to provide financial assistance to the district for any additional enrollees. Typically, about half of the school aged children in the emergency shelter program continue at their school of origin and choose not to enroll in the new district.

As in past years, DESE provides reimbursements. DESE will reimburse transportation costs accrued by school districts housing and schooling students experiencing homelessness. An additional DESE grant provides reimbursements for initial costs (computers, clothing, etc.) the school district incurs related to additional enrollment; DESE has indicated the amount will be \$1,000 per student. DESE also reimburses school districts with a per-pupil rate to cover the additional educational costs for any new enrollees they accept from the emergency shelter program; DESE has indicated the amount will be \$18,000 per student annualized.

Governor Healey recently signed a supplemental budget that will speed up the timeline for providing additional financial support for school districts enrolling new students related to this expansion of family shelters.

Interim Superintendent Kathleen Smith has provided the following statement as to the Newton Public School plan to welcome and support students who would be attending Newton Public Schools:

*As a district, we are very happy to work in partnership with the City of Newton and Catholic Charities of Boston to support all families who may be placed at the emergency assistance family shelter at the former Hotel Indigo. As part of our past work under the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act, we have supported families who temporarily reside in Newton through coordination of services, transportation, and all other school-based needs. We know that some students will attend school here in Newton, while others will continue to attend school in their current community. Regardless of the school students attend, our student services team stands ready to support students while they are in this transitional period in their young lives. I am confident our Newton school families and communities will embrace students and families and will ensure they feel welcome during their time with us.*

We anticipate that Mark Development will be seeking a building permit soon to undertake necessary renovations under the Massachusetts Dover Amendment, which provides an exemption from local zoning when the use qualifies as a religious or educational purpose. Any and all renovations to the hotel will be required to be reviewed and approved by Newton's Inspectional Services, Fire and Health Departments. Newton staff from these departments as well as Police, Newton Public Schools, and Human Services walked the Indigo site along with DHCD, DESE, Catholic Charities and Mark Development last week.

We have scheduled a virtual **community meeting** to help answer any questions on the proposed plan for the emergency shelter after the school vacation break

on **Tuesday, April 25 at 6:00 p.m.** Attend on zoom by clicking [here](#). The City has developed an initial FAQ for the proposal as it stands now which can be found [here](#). Updates to the plans will be provided at this website on an ongoing basis.

While this is a state initiative, our teams at City Hall and NPS are looking forward to and getting prepared to help these families while they are here in Newton. As this is temporary emergency shelter, DHCD has found that a family typically would live at the hotel for a year before moving to more permanent housing. I expect that many community members will offer to help as well. I feel this is not just an important responsibility but also a privilege to help these families at such a difficult time in their lives and I am confident that we will work together as a community to welcome and support them.

### **End of COVID-19 Emergency in Newton**

I will end the City of Newton's 2020 COVID-19 Declaration of Emergency on May 11, 2023.

My decision to end this declaration mirrors the announcement by President Biden and Governor Healey to end the Federal and State public health emergencies on the same date.

This decision comes at a time of hope, recovery and progress in public health. While COVID-19 continues to circulate, we now have many ways to manage the virus. This includes vaccines and boosters, treatments and therapies, testing and masking, and support for staying home when ill. In using these tools and following the guidance of public health officials, we can now see the positive results of our collective efforts to protect the health and safety of Newton's residents, employees and visitors.

The City is also lifting its COVID-19 Vaccination Policy in conjunction with this decision, and effective as of the date of this announcement. The City of Newton COVID-19 Vaccination Policy required proof of vaccination or approved exemption for our current and prospective employees. This announcement also brings to an end the agreements we reached through the collaboration and cooperation of many of our union's leadership. The commitment and participation of our employees and union leaders during the application of this policy contributed to our workforce being highly vaccinated at a very important time during the pandemic.

Lifting the Declaration of Emergency only impacts the vaccination policy at this time. Earlier, the Declaration allowed us to facilitate outdoor dining, suspend the winter parking ban, and suspend the plastic bag and styrofoam container bans.

Newton's Health and Human Services staff continues to advise that all residents, employees, and individuals who work in or visit Newton:

- Stay up to date with vaccines and boosters,
- Stay home and get tested if having any symptoms, and
- Consider wearing a mask if at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

As blossoms and daffodils emerge in the spring of 2023, I remember the dark shadow of the pandemic. All of us knew people who faced illness and infection, death and grief, job loss and financial distress, as well as anxiety and loneliness.

At the same time, throughout Newton I witnessed during the pandemic stoicism and strength, kindness and generosity, as well as support and kindness. I thank the employees of the City and Newton Public Schools for helping so many endure so much. I am grateful that we can now lift the Emergency Declaration.

### Updated COVID-19 Vaccination Data

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health updated the way they report [statewide COVID-19 vaccine data](#) to align with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on April 3, 2023. There are two primary changes:

- Shifting the categories to match the CDC's. The new categories are: at least one dose (of any type of COVID-19 vaccine), primary series completed (based on [CDC guidelines](#)), and boosted after 9/1/22 (the new bivalent booster became available 9/1/22; after this date, nearly all booster doses were the bivalent formulation). The previous categories were: at least one dose, fully vaccinated, first booster dose, and second booster dose.
- Adding doses that were administered in other states and countries but have been reported by local providers.

These changes will increase the number of people with at least one dose who have completed their primary series and decrease booster doses; this in turn will more accurately represent vaccination rates in Massachusetts and focus on the bivalent booster as the most important booster dose.

Using the updated data, Newtonians were highly vaccinated with the primary series and considerably less so with the bivalent boosters which became available in September 2022.

#### Updated Newton COVID-19 Vaccination Data from 4/3/2023

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>% <u>with at least one dose</u></b>	<b>% <u>with primary series completed</u></b>	<b>% <u>boosted after 9/1/22</u></b>
0-4 years	46%	36%	27%
5-11 years	91%	82%	38%
12-15 years	>95%	>95%	48%
16-19 years	73%	66%	26%
20-29 years	>95%	92%	26%
30-49 years	>95%	>95%	46%
50-64 years	>95%	>95%	61%
65-74 years	>95%	>95%	81%
75+ years	>95%	>95%	90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>&gt;95%</b>	<b>&gt;95%</b>	<b>50%</b>

### Here Come the Runners, Including Team Newton

Baseball at Fenway Park and the 127th Boston Marathon, both in person a week from today on Patriots Day, Monday, April 17: Great signs of spring!

Thirty thousand official runners from countries around the world will be crossing into Newton from Wellesley and making the turn at Washington Street onto

Commonwealth Avenue at Newton's Fire Station 2 to head up Heartbreak Hill.



The road closures and parking restrictions in Newton begin at 8:00 a.m. along the route and stay in place until approximately 6:00 p.m. Please plan ahead for alternative routes as Newton is bisected by the course. Also plan for traffic delays as no cars will be allowed to cross the Marathon route until the course is reopened.

Parking restrictions and tow-zones will be in place along the entire Marathon route, including the Carriage Lane of Commonwealth Avenue, as well as several streets around the course route. Parking restrictions will also be in place on portions of all streets that feed into the Marathon route. All effected streets will be posted with No Parking - Tow Zones signs.

Don't worry if you see low flying aircraft(s) along the Marathon route. They are conducting Surveillance/Safety checks that have been authorized by the F.A.A. and are a usual part of security and emergency preparedness activities.

Hats off to so many people in the Newton Police, Newton Fire, Public Works and Parks, Recreation and Culture Departments who have been working for months on logistics and safety plans.

Please remember that "If you see something, say something." Call the Newton Police Department at 617-796-2100 or dial 911.

### Team Newton

Our fingers are crossed for good running weather on Marathon Monday for all the athletes, including the 40 members of Team Newton (those who received bibs from the City of Newton). Every runner or charity on our team has a connection to Newton, including five City employees who are running.

Newton Fire Department – Running to support the Newton Firefighters' Children's Fund:

- Timothy Killilea

Newton Inspectional Services – Running to support Newton Veterans Services:

- John J. McGourty (a Veteran)

Newton Police Department – Running to support the Newton Police Memorial Association:

- Officer Brandon Baia
- Sergeant Declan Healy
- Officer Reid Larson

Find the list of athletes and the organization they're raising money for [here](#).

Good luck everyone.

## **New MBTA Commuter Rail Stations a High Priority**

Bringing the three Newton Commuter Rail stations in Auburndale, West Newton and Newtonville to full accessibility with high level platforms in both directions to increase service and reliability is the City of Newton's highest long-term transportation priority.

With this in mind, I provided comments on behalf of the people who live, work and visit the City of Newton to the MBTA leadership as they develop their FY 2024-2028 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). (Read the full letter [here](#).) Final designs for three new stations will be complete this year and I strongly urged the MBTA to include construction funding for the Newton stations in the CIP.

Currently, the Newton stations, each with only one platform, have the unfortunate distinction of being the only stations in the MBTA commuter rail system of providing limited bidirectional service such that reverse commuting is close to non-existent. The lack of accessibility is an injustice. The conditions of the stairs and platforms make mobility by commuter rail for those with disabilities impossible.

In addition to advocating for funding for the commuter rail stations, I also relayed our deep concerns about the elimination of Express Bus service between Boston and much of Newton.



## **Project: Pop-Up is Back**

[Project: Pop-Up](#) is coming back with a new location at 101 Union Street in Newton Centre.

We first piloted this groundbreaking storefront incubator initiative in Newton Centre, Newtonville and Newton Highlands in partnership with the Town of Needham in 2021 with \$138,000 from the state's COVID-19 economic recovery funds.

The pop-up store model provides a low-risk way for entrepreneurs to test drive the brick and mortar experience. Businesses can apply to pop up for several months at a subsidized rate and have access to a suite of resources to help them succeed. [UpNext](#), a Newton-based startup that

cultivates innovative retail opportunities, piloted the initiative with us and is facilitating this next iteration. Thanks go to Allison Yee.

This cycle of Project: Pop-Up is funded through another State grant from the Massachusetts Office of Business Development.

Applications are now available for emerging brands looking to give brick and mortar a try in Newton during the months of May and June. Find more information and an application [here](#).

### **National Health and Nutrition Survey Will Include Newtonians**

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), the most comprehensive survey of the health and nutritional status of people in the United States, is including Newton and other communities in Middlesex County this year.

Why Newton? Each year, 5,000 residents nationwide are chosen to participate in NHANES which is conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). All counties and cities in the United States have a chance to be selected for the NHANES and this year Middlesex County is one of the 15 counties.

“NHANES serves as the nation’s ‘health check-up’ by going into communities throughout the country to collect health information,” said Brian Moyer, PhD, Director of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). “The survey provides a wealth of important data about many of the major health and nutritional issues affecting the country.”



This is an exciting opportunity for Newtonians to provide voluntarily health and nutrition information that will help public health experts have a better understanding of the nation’s health to guide programs and policies.

Since 1960, NHANES collects data that address critical health concerns, such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. NHANES includes, for example, what percent of adults in the U.S. have high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes, risk factors and prevalence of diseases, and whether babies and children are growing at a healthy rate. Public health officials, legislators, and physicians use this information to develop health policies, direct and design health programs and services, and expand health knowledge. NHANES data also help produce national references and standardized growth charts used by pediatricians across the country.

#### Who Is Selected?

Some Newton residents will have an invitation-only opportunity to participate in NHANES. Addresses are randomly sampled within the county. By selecting participants randomly and then combining data from all counties visited this year, NHANES data can more accurately represent the U.S. population.

Selected households will be sent one or more letters inviting them to be part of NHANES and residents will be asked to voluntarily complete a brief online questionnaire to see if anyone in their home is eligible to take part. The first letters from NHANES are being mailed to selected Newton households on April 18.

Those eligible will be contacted by a NHANES representative to set up a telephone health interview at a convenient time, followed by a health examination that takes place in the NHANES mobile examination center in a Middlesex County location still to be determined. While no medical care is provided directly in the mobile examination center, a report on physical findings is given to each participant, along with an explanation of those findings from survey medical staff.

All information collected in the survey is kept confidential and individual privacy is protected by law. NHANES is taking all precautions needed, as recommended by the CDC, to keep survey participants and staff safe by following guidelines on social distancing, use of personal protective equipment, handwashing, and sanitation of the mobile examination center and all equipment.

Newton's Health and Human Services Commissioner Linda Walsh joins me in encouraging participation. Those selected for this survey can be confident that the critical information they provide will help advance our understanding of local and national health trends and inform health programs and policies.

Find more information about NHANES at [cdc.gov/nhanes](https://cdc.gov/nhanes).

## Help Plan a Future Path Connecting Newton and Needham

The City of Newton is partnering with the Town of Needham to study the future use of the former railroad corridor that historically connected the two communities.

A possible shared-use path would extend the Upper Falls Greenway across the Charles River, across I-95/128, and along the former railroad right of way to Webster Street in Needham Heights along the former Charles River railroad corridor. This long-term project is in the very preliminary stages.

The State has funded a feasibility study which includes a technical analysis, survey, and two community meetings to explore the project.

Newton's transportation planners are working with their counterparts in Needham and both groups are reaching out to residents. One particular focus is whether this would be a path for cyclists, pedestrians and similar uses *only*, or whether electric shuttle buses should also be included.



What do you think? [Follow this link](#) for more information, including on how to register for the virtual community meetings on Tuesday, April 18 at 6:00 p.m. and Wednesday, April 26 at 7:00 p.m. You can also take an [online survey](#), open through April, to give us feedback.

## 49th Annual Mayor's Community Breakfast, Wednesday, May 24

We'll come together in person for our annual community breakfast to break bread and renew our commitment to this good City.



Join us for the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Theodore D. Mann Newton Mayor's Community Breakfast on Wednesday, May 24, at the Mount Ida Campus - UMass Amherst. We'll gather at 7:30 a.m. outside, under a tent, in the Shaw Hall Courtyard.



In partnership with the Harmony Foundation, the Newton Interfaith Clergy Association, Newton Community Pride, the Rotary Club of Newton, and the Newton Public Schools, I invite residents, community groups, businesspeople and clergy of all faiths to join us.

We look forward to “Embracing CommUNITY” to celebrate and strengthen our community ties, neighbor to neighbor.

Tickets will be on sale in the coming days at [bit.ly/NewtonBreakfast23](https://bit.ly/NewtonBreakfast23) or through a link on the Mayor's webpage [here](#).

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Join Director of Senior Services Mignonne Murray on Tuesday, April 25, from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Brigham House, 20 Hartford St. in Newton Highlands, for **Cupcakes and Conversation**. Bring your questions and ideas for the future of Senior Services as we prepare for the opening of NewCAL. Please RSVP by calling 617-796-1675 or stop by the front desk at 20 Hartford Street. Drop-ins are also welcome.



P.P.S. Interested in what's happening in Congress? Join **Rep. Jake Auchincloss for a virtual roundtable discussion** with Newton residents tomorrow, Tuesday, April 11 from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. RSVP [here](#) to receive the zoom link to join the discussion.

P.P.P.S. **Congratulations to 2023 Guggenheim Fellows** Eun Young Lee of Auburndale, an associate professor of composition and teacher at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee, and Bonnie Honig of Waban, a professor of modern culture and media & political science at Brown University. These two Newtonians are among a group of 171 people from across the US and Canada from 48 scholarly disciplines who received this prestigious award this year. Read more about the 2023 recipients [here](#).



P.P.P.P.S. Enjoy [The Me2/ Orchestra](#) for **Classical Music for Mental Health** featuring works by Dvorak and Beethoven. Presented by The Newton Commission On Disability and Elliot House, the free concert is on Sunday, May 7 at 3:00 p.m. at Newton North High School (457 Walnut Street, Newton). Free parking is available in the lot off

Walnut Street, the theatre is wheelchair accessible, and ASL interpretation will be provided. Please enter via the “Theater Entrance” off Elm Street. If you need a reasonable accommodation, please contact Newton's ADA Coordinator, Jini Fairley, at least two business days in advance of this event:

[jfairley@newtonma.gov](mailto:jfairley@newtonma.gov) or (617) 796-1253. For Telecommunications Relay Service, please dial 711 or call the TTY/TDD line at 617-796-1089.



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

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