

Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025

Mayor's Newton Update



City Again Receives Highest Financial Rating

Moody's Investors Service issued their highest credit rating, once again, to the City of Newton. They assigned us a Aaa Stable rating.

The Moody's Credit Opinion noted our many financial strengths. It cited our, "Exceptional fiscal management including a five-year forecast, capital plan and formal policies." It continued by pointing to our strong economy with high resident income and wealth. Finally, the rating also highlighted our "healthy financial position bolstered by diligent and forward-looking fiscal management."

While we received the very highest rating, Moody's cautioned us to pay attention to three challenges:

- "Revenue raising constraint under the Proposition 2 ½ tax levy limit."
- "Largely built-out city with limited new growth potential from development."
- "Above-average tax burden for residents compared to other Massachusetts communities."

Maintaining our Aaa bond rating is critically important, as it ensures the City receives the lowest interest rates on the bonds we issue, thus saving the City and our taxpayers' money. Ensuring the City's financial strength reflects my commitment to Newton's financial sustainability, now and for the long term. I will continue to invest in our schools, infrastructure, services and programs, tackle our significant long-term liabilities for our retirees, and maintain our financial health and economic stability.

The City expects to sell \$85.8 million of bonds on Tuesday, Jan. 21. Bond proceeds will provide funding in part for the Lincoln-Eliot, Franklin, Horace Mann and Countryside Elementary Schools, the Cooper Center for Active Living, and the Union Street Storm Drain Extension.

Envisioning an Additional Public Plaza in Newton Centre

In Newton Centre, we are carving out a portion of the Langley Parking Lot to repurpose temporarily as a public plaza. We're envisioning seating for outdoor dining, play spaces for youngsters and families, and space for art, community and culture. More broadly, we see a safe and fun place to meet and hang-out.

In Newton, we've enjoyed these so called "third spaces" at Bram Way in Newtonville and at The Street in Chestnut Hill. While Newton Centre has the fabulous Green that is well-loved and well-cared for, we are imagining an adjacent area (16,000 sq. feet) for community gathering space – on a *trial* basis.



As part of our planning process for the upcoming repaving of the Newton Centre Langley Parking Lot (affectionately known as the Triangle lot), we started brainstorming. Can we carve out a portion of it to pilot a plaza? We're focusing on the parking lot portion immediately adjacent to

the Green to complement and expand the footprint of that amazing green public space (along Centre Street between Beacon Street and Langley Road).

We have three guardrails. First, this will be a trial experiment to evaluate if additional community space is beneficial here in the heart of Newton Centre. Second, given that it will be a trial, we will not remove the pavement so that following the trial period it could be returned to parking. Third, the DPW and Planning teams have identified 67 new parking spaces around Newton Centre to offset the loss of 51 Triangle parking spaces during the trial.

We want to support our Newton Centre businesses. We have and will continue to reach out to work with them to make this the best pilot it can be. And we want to involve our residents in helping us think through the details of this exciting opportunity. I invite all who are interested to contact the team here by sending an email to us at NCPilot@newtonma.gov or visit the webpage [here](#).

Help us imagine the possibilities and create a fun and engaging space.

While very much in the planning stages, we wish to move quickly to arrive at a design to realize the space for the summer season.

I look forward to seeing you on the plaza this summer.

Heartfelt Thanks to Two Who Served Our City Well

This afternoon we celebrated the careers of Co-Director of Sustainability Bill Ferguson and City Engineer Lou Taverna who are both retiring this month.

Bill Ferguson came to Newton in 2013 after spending 35 years with the State of Rhode Island. Bill's accomplishments are deep and broad. He spearheaded the installation of solar arrays throughout the City that now generate roughly 40% of our municipal electricity consumption. Bill has also coordinated the installation of EV charging stations. He secured approximately \$5 million in grant funding, helped save millions of dollars in gas and electricity contracts, and led our efforts to implement BERDO (Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance) which will set Newton on a path toward meeting our goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.



As “Mr. All-Things Infrastructure for Newton” for 20-plus years, City Engineer Lou Taverna has led some truly transformative projects in Newton. He implemented our first ever comprehensive Water & Sewer Capital Improvement Program. He secured our first National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit. Lou also played a huge role in leading our Transportation Network Improvement Program. While our City Engineer, Lou served on the

MWRA Advisory Board for over 20 years, serving as its chair since 2015 and now represents the Advisory Board of the MWRA Board on Directors.

I thank both of these fine people for their service to our City and wish them well as they begin their next chapter.

Election Commission

Next week, the City Council will vote on my selection to fill an open Republican seat on the Newton Election Commission. By State Law, the makeup of the Commission must be four members, with two members from each of the “leading political parties” which at this time in history are the Democrat and Republican Parties.

Dave Power, CEO of the Perkins School for the Blind and a longstanding Newtonian and Republican, will be an excellent member of the Newton Election Commission. I know him to be a thoughtful, caring member of our community. He

has sound judgement. He has the proven ability to work effectively with the public and public officials, professional organizations and civic groups. He has a deep knowledge of administration. He is committed to fair, objective, and unbiased administration of elections.

Massachusetts State Law is very clear. In Cities, the Mayor appoints members of the Election Commission and the City Council votes on the approval of the Mayor's selection. By state law, City political committees (unlike Town political committees) do not have a role in recommending Election Commissioners. (Our research indicates that one Mayor, one time, chose one person that one political party recommended.) Nonetheless I thank the Newton Republican City Committee for putting their choices for this position forward.

The makeup of the Election Commission is partisan.

The work Commissioners do must be non-partisan. Their responsibility includes, among others, the certifying of voters' signatures on candidate nomination papers and state and local petitions, overseeing primary, preliminary and general elections, and certifying election results.

While affiliated with a specific party, my criteria for selecting an Election Commissioner is that they will be objective, unbiased and committed to holding free, fair and transparent elections according to Massachusetts Election Laws and Regulations. Dave Power meets all these criteria and I am grateful that he is willing to serve our democracy and our community.

National Fig Newton Day

Happy National Fig Newton Day! Yes, our City, lent our name to this tasty treat in the 1890s.

Want to learn more about the history of Newton's cookie? Click the photo below.

Warmly,

Ruthanne





P.S. Congratulations to **Newtonian and Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Paula Hammond** on being awarded the National Medal of Technology and Innovation, the nation’s highest honor for scientists and innovators. A pioneer in nanotechnology research, the President honored Professor Hammond for developing methods for “assembling thin films that can be used for drug delivery, would healing, and many other applications.”

P.P.S. Interested in becoming a police officer? The **Newton Police Department is hiring**. Click [here](#) for more information and to apply.



P.P.P.S. Celebrate the Year of the Snake with interactive activities, games, snacks and more at the Newton Free Library’s **Lunar New Year Celebration** on Saturday, Jan. 25 from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. This celebration is a collaboration between the Newton Free Library and the Newton Education Support Network, the Chinese American Association of Newton and the Newton Chinese Language School.

P.P.P.P.S. Take a close look at planets through a telescope, hold a meteorite in your hand and hear stories about the planets, stars and constellations at **Astronomy Night**, on Wednesday, Feb. 5 at the Hyde Community Center Playground, 90 Lincoln St. The free program hosted by the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council and astronomer Alex Trunnell begins at 6:00 and runs through 7:30 p.m. Check [here](#) if visibility that evening is questionable.



P.P.P.P.P.S. Enrollment for Newton Community Farm’s Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program opens on Monday, Feb. 10. Eat fresh, locally grown produce from June through October for a cost per share of \$893 for weekly pickup or \$483 for alternate weekly pickup. Click [here](#) for all the details. The Farm has 80 shares available on a first-come, first-served basis.

P.P.P.P.P.S. The **Tanglewood Marionettes** are at the City Hall War Memorial, 1000 Comm Ave., with a performance of **Cinderella** during school vacation week on Thursday, Feb. 20 at 11:00 a.m. Click [here](#) for more info and to purchase tickets.



Past P.S.s Happening Soon:



P.S. Join us to celebrate, reflect and be inspired by the life and the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at **Newton’s 57th Annual Community Celebration of Dr. King on MLK Day**, this Monday, Jan. 20. This year’s celebration begins at 9:00 a.m. at the First Unitarian Universalist Society in Newton (FUUSN), 1326 Washington Street in West Newton Square.



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