



April Newsletter

From City Councilor Marc Laredo

Dear Friends,

This is a busy time for the City Council as we embark on our annual review of the Mayor's proposed budget. This month, I will share some initial thoughts on the budget and provide updates on several important initiatives: the Community Dialogue Working Group; the state of our municipal and school buildings; and stormwater issues.

The Proposed Budget for City and School Funding

On April 16, the Mayor presented her proposed budget to the City Council. A copy of the budget can be found using the button below.

Mayor's Proposed Budget

The City Council now begins its review of the budget. Under our city's charter and state law, the City Council cannot reject the budget and prevent it from taking effect, increase spending, or shift spending between accounts. The City Council can only legally reduce or eliminate spending.

Furthermore, the Mayor's budget allocates a certain amount of money to the Newton Public Schools and that amount cannot be increased by the City Council or the School Committee. It is up to the School Committee (with the Mayor as one of its nine members) to determine how to use these funds for school services.

I expect that this year's budgetary process will be less contentious than it was in the past several years since the Newton Public Schools budget will increase by 5.2% and the municipal budget will increase by 5.1%. These are significantly higher percentage increases than in prior recent years. Having more money makes budget decisions easier.

I look forward to robust discussions about how our tax dollars will be spent in fiscal year 2025.

Community Dialogue Working Group

In the aftermath of the teachers' strike, Vice President Kalis and I created a working group of City Councilors, led by Councilor John Oliver, to develop a set of specific recommendations as to how the City Council can help our community better understand city finances and, working with other city leaders, engage in efforts to create greater trust and civility in the city.

On March 27, the Community Dialogue Working Group issued its initial recommendations at a City Council meeting. The meeting report and initial recommendations can be found below.

Meeting Report

The Group is continuing its important work and expects to issue its recommendations by early June.

City and School Building Tours

The condition of our municipal and school buildings is mixed. In order for City Councilors to see these conditions first hand, I arranged with the Mayor's Office and the School

Department for tours of five existing school buildings (Bigelow, Underwood, the Newton Early Childhood Center, Cabot, and Newton South), the site of the new Lincoln-Eliot School, Police headquarters, Fire headquarters and Station 3 which is located next to it, the Library, and the DPW facility on Crafts Street. I am scheduling additional tours in June.

The elementary schools that we have rebuilt or renovated – Angier, Zervas, Cabot, and the Early Childhood Education Center – are in excellent condition and we are working on Lincoln-Eliot, Countryside, Franklin, and Horace Mann. On the city side, work is underway on the Cooper Center for Active Living and the replacement of the Gath Pool, both of which will be terrific facilities when completed. Much of the credit for these successful projects belongs with our Public Buildings Commissioner Josh Morse, who works tirelessly to ensure that the work is done properly and on budget.

But there is still significant work ahead of us. On the school side, that includes the remaining elementary schools, our middle schools, and updates to Newton South. On the city side, our public safety buildings demonstrate both what can be done and what we still need to do. After many years of work, our fire stations are in good condition. But our police station needs a major renovation or even a completely new building in order to meet the requirements of 21st century policing. Likewise, we need to update the facilities where our other city employees work so that they can do their jobs properly and effectively.

I am confident that, working together, we will address these important needs in a fiscally sound manner.

Addressing Stormwater Issues

Stormwater management will be one of the major challenges facing the city in the next several years (and beyond). Stringent new federal regulations, coupled with increases in intensity and frequency of storms due to the effects of climate change, will require significant action, including:

- Reconstruction and greatly improved maintenance of our network of streams that run throughout the city (Newton is filled with streams, many of which are invisible to most residents because they have been channeled underground in enclosed culverts).
- Significant efforts to reduce phosphorus in our stormwater drainage system which then ends up in the Charles River.
- Ordinance changes that ensure that stormwater stays on private property as much as possible rather than getting into our stormwater system.

- Increased attention to open spaces and bodies of water such as Edmands Park, Bullough's Pond, Crystal Lake, and Cold Spring Park.

The Public Facilities Committee, of which I am a member, had an extensive discussion on stormwater issues in March. Use the button below to find the discussion and the backup materials.

Stormwater Discussion

As always, I welcome your thoughts, questions, comments, and criticisms!

Thanks,

Marc

Committee to Elect Marc Laredo

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