

May Newsletter

From City Councilor Marc Laredo



Dear Friends

We are finally getting back to normal, or at least a partial return to normal! This month's newsletter will summarize the proposed ordinances on gun stores in Newton, the Mayor's proposed budget, and our police department.

Gun Stores

In April, City Councilors and residents learned that a gun store had applied to open on Washington Street in Newtonville. We immediately heard concerns from hundreds of people. I cannot recall an item during my time on the Council that has generated as much input from our community or one in which the views have been so one-sided (in this case, for banning gun stores). Here is where things stand now:

- The entire City Council and the Mayor docketed an item to regulate (but not ban) gun stores in Newton. A public hearing was held, and it came before the full City Council for discussion on May 17.
- In addition, a number of Councilors (including me) docketed an item to ban gun stores in Newton completely.
- We are getting a range of legal views. Our city's Law Department believes that anything more aggressive than the proposed regulation could be challenged in the courts and that a total ban will likely be ruled unconstitutional.
- However, a group of prominent Newton lawyers believes that a total ban should be pursued or at least a stronger ordinance. Two major international law firms (Mintz and Ropes & Gray) have offered their

services pro bono (for free) to help the city fight any legal challenges to either a stricter ordinance or a total ban.

- On May 26, the Zoning and Planning Committee voted to schedule a public hearing on the total ban in the latter part of June (after we finish our annual budget work).

Given that the gun store may soon try to open on Washington Street, I think it is most prudent that we vote to pass an ordinance to regulate gun stores now, so long as we, after that, promptly consider a total ban. Since the gun store has not yet opened, it will be subject to any zoning ordinance that was publicly noticed (even if not enacted) at the time the store opened. Thus, if we pass the restrictive ordinance in the next few weeks, it will be effective as of the date of the public notice and apply to the pending application.

Finally, it is important that we have a complete, vigorous discussion on the ban; I will reserve my final judgment on whether a ban is the best way to proceed until we have had that discussion.

Budget

On May 12, 2021, Mayor Fuller presented her budget for fiscal year 2022 (July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022) to the City Council. We have until June 26, 2021 to vote to approve or reject the budget (we cannot make any line-items changes).

Over the next 45 days, the various committees of the City Council will meet with the departments to review each department's budget. We also set water, sewer, and stormwater rates for the next fiscal year during our budget proceedings. The review process allows us to examine each department's past performance and goals for the future.

The city and schools will be the beneficiaries of approximately \$60 million from the federal American Rescue Plan Act that must be spent by the end of 2024. This is good financial news for the city and will help reduce financial pressure on the city for the next several

years. Notably, since this money is being given to us as a grant, the Mayor may decide how this money is spent without any approval by the City Council (although the Mayor has announced her intent to meet with Councilors to get their views on spending). Only a small portion of these funds have been allocated to date.

Public Safety

On May 20, the Mayor and the current acting Police Chief, Howard Mintz, met with the City Council's Public Safety and Transportation Committee to review this year's police budget. Overall, I think this portion of the budget is excellent.

First, thank you to Chief Mintz, who had formerly served as Newton's Police Chief and came out of retirement to lead the department for much of the past year. He has done an outstanding job during a challenging time. The Mayor has appointed a new chief, John Carmichael, formerly the police chief in Walpole, and I look forward to working with him.

More importantly, this budget explicitly addresses ways to improve Newton's policing, including better working conditions and training for our police officers. This is a different and, in my mind, better approach than the "defund" concept that some (including a number of my City Council colleagues) had called for last year. I look forward to working with the Mayor, the police department, and our residents on this important issue.

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

Thanks,

Marc



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