

Dear Friends,

I am looking ahead with hope and optimism to better days as we get vaccinated at an increasingly rapid pace and return to a sense of decency and respect in our national dialogue. This month, I want to draw attention to four critical local issues: the March 16 special election; Community Preservation funding for the Grace Church tower in Newton Corner; the initial findings of our police reform task force; and the status of our zoning work.

March 16 Special Election

The city is holding a special election to fill two open City Council seats. I am supporting **John Oliver** in Ward 1 and **Tarik Lucas** in Ward 2. ***All Newton voters can vote for both of them.***

You can vote in person on March 16, and you can vote early, the week of March 8-12 (Monday-Friday), at City Hall, or by mail. To vote by mail, you must request a ballot. Click the button below for information on voting in the special election:

<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/elections>

John Oliver is running for the Ward 1 seat left vacant by the passing of my City Council colleague Jay Ciccone (and the Ciccone family has endorsed John). John is the PTO co-president at Newton North, the former co-president of the Horace Mann PTO, a board member of Newton Community Education, an active supporter of improving our athletic fields, and coached youth sports for many years. With over 25 years of experience as a strategic marketing professional working on large, complex projects, he will bring a valuable skill set to the City Council. Here is a link to John's website: www.johnoliver4newton.org

Tarik Lucas is running for the open Ward 2 seat formerly held by Jake Auchincloss. Tarik serves on the Newtonville Historic Commission, is the former vice president of the Newtonville Area Council, and has the calm, impartial approach of someone who has been a sports referee for many years. Tarik also has a remarkable personal story. He is the descendant of enslaved peoples, Black immigrants from the Caribbean island of Nevis, Indigenous Americans, and Russian Jews. The son of a union postal worker and a union nurse knows the importance of affordable housing from personal experience. Here is a link to Tarik's website: www.teamtarik.org.

John and Tarik share progressive values coupled with a moderate, pragmatic, consensus-building approach that will serve the City of Newton well. Both are strong

supporters securing the appropriate safeguards to get our children back in the classroom safely. They will listen to our residents as we review our zoning code and proceed in a thoughtful, careful, and focused manner. As we continuously strive to improve public safety in our city, to improve public safety in our city.

Grace Church Tower

Newton has adopted the Community Preservation Act (CPA), which allows us to assess an additional property tax for a fund to support affordable housing, historic resources, open space, and recreation land. Grace Church, a beautiful, nearly 150 old structure in Newton Corner, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has applied for CPA funds to help repair and restore its historic tower. I strongly support this request for the following reasons:

- The tower is a landmark in Newton Corner and precisely the type of historical resource for which CPA funds should be used.
- The tower is likely to be demolished without this funding.
- There is an outpouring of support for this funding from residents throughout the city.
- Even though it is attached to a church, the tower is an architectural symbol, not a religious one. Thus, this funding is permitted under our federal and state constitutions.

The proposal was scheduled to be voted on by the City Council on February 16 but, due to procedural issues, that vote has been postponed. When it is before us again, I will vote in favor of funding this proposal fully.

Policing

On February 3, the Newton Police Reform Task Force presented an interim report to the City Council. Three lessons struck me as particularly noteworthy:

- We must think of our police officers as guardians rather than warriors;
- There is a disconnect that members of the police department feel with our residents; and
- There are poor working conditions for our officers, especially at police headquarters.

These initial findings (and there were other important ones) reinforce my firm belief that we need to work *with* our officers to make them part of the solutions rather than work against them. We cannot have a police department that just answers 911 calls, responds reactively, and feels unappreciated and unsupported by our residents. Nor can

we just say that we will shift responsibilities away from our police without clear, well-thought-out plans for how they will then be carried out.

I look forward to the Task Force's final report and a robust discussion of its suggestions for improvement.

Zoning review

After spending a year talking about radical changes to the zoning code throughout the city, the Planning Department and the City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee are taking a much-needed pause to reassess how we should proceed with zoning review efforts. I urge us to use this opportunity to focus on specific problems with our current zoning ordinance and then try to build consensus on how to address them. We should start with the current business districts in our village centers – Newton Highlands, Newtonville, Auburndale, Newton Centre.

Let's focus on specific changes we want to accomplish. In our commercial areas, we must look at our current zoning code's specific language regarding business districts and ask what is working and what is not. For example, if buildings are limited to two or three stories, should we change that rule? Should we modify or eliminate our parking requirements for businesses when we routinely waive them in the special permit process? What types of housing should be allowed in the heart of the commercial areas? Should housing be permitted on the first floor of buildings in commercial zones? These are just a few of the many questions that we need to address, and the details matter.

The recent work on the "Garage" ordinance, which the City Council passed on February 16, is an excellent example of how we should proceed. Several years ago, to address concerns about garages being overly prominent features of new residential construction, the City Council passed an ordinance to regulate the placement of garages. The ordinance was immediately met with criticism from design professionals. In response, the City Council repeatedly delayed its implementation, saying that it would address it as part of the zoning review process. Finally, this past fall, a majority of the Council agreed to address it now. The result is a new ordinance that has been carefully vetted with the design professionals and addresses the initial concerns. It is not perfect – nor will it ever be – but it is a carefully drafted set of rules that achieved broad support from the City Council and the design professionals who will need to work with it. This is exactly what we need to be doing with the rest of our zoning ordinance as we go forward.

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

Thanks,

Marc