

Dear Friends,

I hope that you are continuing to stay safe and healthy. October is a wonderful time in New England – apple picking, pumpkins, and beautiful fall foliage. Perhaps best of all for many children (and adults too!) is Halloween – a time to be imaginative, put on a costume, and get candy. While this year’s Halloween will be different, I hope that we can all enjoy, in a safe fashion, a brief respite from the bleak news we seem to be getting on a daily basis. In that spirit, here are my three October observations about our local government.

Elections:

November 3 is Election Day and our most important task is to get Joe Biden and Kamala Harris elected as our next president and vice president. Our national leadership helps set the tone for how we handle issues at a local level. Vice-President Biden and Senator Harris will listen and be respectful to views across the political spectrum. As a life-long Democrat, I share that approach to government and am looking forward to a better future based on decency, honesty, integrity, belief in science, the rule of law, respect, and true equality for all.

I also urge you to vote for Senator Markey and my City Council colleague Jake Auchincloss in their respective races for the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Schools:

Newton’s schools, like many others around the country, are still grappling with the difficult challenges posed by COVID-19. I firmly believe that we must be guided by science in our decision-making. Currently, the science tells us that in Newton - with its very low rate of COVID-19 - the benefits of making at least some in-person education available to all children outweigh our alternatives. Of course, if COVID rates rise, then we may need to switch course and resume remote learning for all students. But right now, we must do everything feasible to get our children back in the classroom as soon as possible.

Neither our facilities nor financial constraints should impede that effort. Our city building commissioner, Josh Morse, is leading the effort to test the air quality in all of our city’s classrooms to make sure it meets our high standards of safety. The Mayor and the Superintendent have assured us that financial considerations are not an issue in getting our children back to school. However, if we need additional funding in the future, then I will do everything possible to ensure that we have the funds needed to get our kids back in the classroom.

Zoning:

The Land Use Committee, on which I sit, recently approved the new Riverside project and this project will now go to the full City Council for a final vote. I voted for it in the Land Use Committee because it is a good project that has the support of the surrounding community (in large part because the developer and community worked closely together to address local concerns). We need to develop this site (it currently is a large parking lot next to the Riverside transit station and a vacant hotel) and it will bring an appropriate mix of commercial development and housing to the area.

As I have said repeatedly, we cannot remain stagnant as a community. At the same time, the City Council must ask the tough questions and demand that developers meet our community's needs while also helping good projects succeed. Our work on this project was greatly aided by the input of the Auburndale/Lower Falls community (ably represented by the Newton Lower Falls Improvement Association), as well as groups such as Green Newton which pushed hard for environmentally sound development.

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

Marc