

May Newsletter

From City Councilor Marc Laredo



Dear Friends,

I hope you are able to stay upbeat and positive as we enter the summer months, a difficult task given the recent national and international news. This month's observations focus on our recently completed budget deliberations.

Budget

On May 26, I joined a majority of the City Council in voting to reject the Mayor's proposed budget because it did not include what we viewed as sufficient funding for the Newton public schools. While our city's charter and state law require that the Mayor's proposed budget still goes into effect (the City Council cannot reject the budget, increase spending, or shift spending between accounts - it can only reduce or eliminate spending), this vote is still significant - I cannot recall another year in which a majority of the City Council voted to reject the budget. So why did this happen?

Each year, the Mayor tells the School Committee how much she has allocated for the schools from the total city budget. With this number, the School Committee (and the Mayor is one of the nine members of the School Committee) determines how to use these funds for school services. The School Committee does not have any authority to increase the Mayor's allocation.

This year (and for the next several years) we had and will have an extraordinary source of money available to supplement our budget - various federal and state pandemic-related programs, particularly American Rescue

Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The city has received \$63 million in (ARPA) funds, and approximately \$30 million has not yet been allocated. Under federal law, only the Mayor can decide how the ARPA funds are used to address pandemic-related issues.

At the end of March, the School Committee and the Superintendent stated that they believed there was a multi-million dollar gap between the Mayor's initial proposed allocation to the Newton Public Schools and what the School Committee and the Superintendent believed we needed to provide funding for necessary school services next year. This was the gap *after* accounting for the drop in school enrollment over the past several years.

After the School Committee overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for additional funding, the Mayor agreed to provide an additional \$1.5 million from ARPA funds for the schools, but there still was a \$1.4 million gap - meaning that the number of middle school literacy specialists would be greatly reduced and other teaching positions would be eliminated.

As we began our final deliberations last week, there was general agreement on the budget with one significant exception - the amount of funding for our schools. As I listened to the passionate remarks of my colleagues, I concluded that we needed to take a firm stand on the appropriate level of school funding. I reached this decision for two reasons: (a) the last two years have been extraordinarily difficult for our students, especially with the delay in resuming in-person learning, and now is not the time to exacerbate the consequences of that situation, and (b) the ARPA funds are meant to be spent over several years to address pandemic-related problems and using ARPA funds for literacy and mental health needs of our most vulnerable students is a fiscally responsible course of action. Therefore, I voted against the proposed budget because the Mayor rejected our request to provide the additional funding that I and many of my colleagues believed was necessary.

Other Issues

- *Last Mile Delivery Services.* Earlier this year, I

docketed an item to regulate so-called last mile delivery services (also called micro fulfillment centers). I am pleased to report that the City Council adopted an ordinance prohibiting them in our village centers but allowing them in other city parts. I believe that this strikes a sensible balance in ensuring that our village centers can be vibrant but allowing for a type of business in our city that serves the needs of our residents.

- *Zoning In Our Village Centers.* Our Zoning and Planning Committee is in the midst of considering changes to our zoning code that will make development easier in our village centers. I think that many of the proposed changes make sense, but, as always, I will review each one carefully because the details matter. These discussions are expected to continue throughout the year.
- *Police Shooting in Newton Highlands.* After an inquest by a District Court judge, the District Attorney concluded that Newton police officers had acted appropriately in the shooting death in Newton Highlands in January 2021. While every loss of life is tragic, I fully agree with the statement made by the Mayor and the Police Chief that “[w]e unequivocally stand in support of the Newton police officers and their actions on that difficult day.”
- *Gath Pool.* Plans continue for a new Gath Pool. I am pleased that we are moving forward with this long-overdue work and hope that we will also create a second city-owned indoor swimming facility on the south side of the city in the future. Now we are focusing on the design of the pool itself and how it will best meet the needs of different users. I urge residents to stay actively involved in this important project.

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

Thanks,

Marc

P.S. I am proud to share this picture of our son Matt and our new daughter-in-law, Joanna Yelen (both 2011 Newton North graduates)!

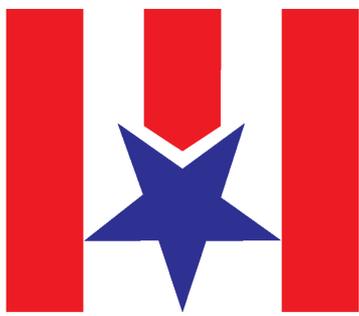


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