

MAYOR'S UPDATE
October 31, 2022
Mayor Sean R. Reardon

Happy Halloween:

I want to thank everyone who took part in Halloween festivities around the City the past month. We had a great turnout for City Hall Trick-or-Treat and Downtown Trick-or-Treat was as busy as I had ever seen it. These events make Newburyport special and it was so great to see so many families out enjoying the City.

Plum Island Dredge Project:

Yesterday, we welcomed Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey, Congressman Seth Moulton, State Senator Bruce Tarr, State Senator Diane DiZoglio and Lieutenant Colonel Michael Carvelli of the Army Corps of Engineers among others to celebrate the start of the Plum Island Dredge Project. The Dredge started a few weeks back and when completed will have replaced over 230,000 cubic yards of sand on the beach. This was a great opportunity to celebrate the hard work that has gone in to getting this dredge project started but also acknowledge that this is just the first action that needs to take place on Plum Island. The second piece is for the Army Corps of Engineers to immediately begin the \$240K study on the jetty. These funds were secured by Senator Markey and Senator Warren earlier this year. We need to fix this jetty immediately following the dredge so all the hard work that went into the dredge is not for nothing.

Newburyport Youth Services:

In your packet tonight, you will see a presentation on Newburyport Youth Services at 59 Low Street. The presentation will be done by Kim Turner, Special Projects Manager, a representative from EGA architects, Andi Egmont, our Director of Youth Services, and Finance Director Ethan Manning. This presentation is the result of months of hard work since purchasing the building at 59 Low Street in January. Also accompanying the presentation is a bond order request for \$5.7M. It is not uncommon, nor is it bad practice to move to a bond at this stage in the project. Approving the bond at this time will signal that there is support for this project and allow us to move forward, rather than spend taxpayer money on a full design that may not gain Council approval. Once we have approved the plan and bond order we can proceed to changing the zoning while the further design work moves forward.

While this specific plan may be new to the Council, the idea for a home for Youth Services and using 59 Low Street to do so is a well-established proposal. NYS has been without a home since last October, and the time has come to have this conversation around NYS publicly. We are putting forth a plan that meets the needs of Newburyport Youth Services and gives the City an asset to be used for generations to come. While the cost is higher than it would have been had the project advanced several years ago, we plan to demonstrate that we have the funds and bonding capacity available to move forward with this plan and it will be the decision of the Council how to proceed. The Administration has answered and will continue to answer all questions that the Council has about this plan, and has made a significant effort to address all concerns. While discussions need to continue, there is no reason to delay this process. We believe this is a top-tier priority for the City and its youth, and that the children of Newburyport are worth the investment in NYS. We are committed to working with the Council on this plan and to advance to next steps as soon as possible.

Health Department:

Newburyport Health Director Laura Vlasuk was recently elected Region 3 Regional Representative at this year's Massachusetts Health Officers Association meeting. We are happy to congratulate her on this achievement, and look forward to seeing even greater representation for Newburyport in regional discussions on public health.

The Department will hold a flu shot clinic at the Senior Community Center on November 10th from 1 to 4pm and a Flu and Covid Vaccine clinic on Tuesday, November 22nd at City Hall from 8-11am. This clinic includes the COVID-19 Bivalent Booster Shot for those who have not yet received it.

Newburyport is currently at a 12.1% Covid test positivity rate, significantly higher than the state's average of 6.51%. While test positivity alone gives limited information, this does signal that Covid is still in the community and residents are reminded to get boosted and follow other recommended precautions.

Recent Hires

We have a number of new faces in City Hall, with a couple more starting soon. Renée Ward, Financial Purchasing Analyst, joined us on October 11th, and our new Outreach Specialist at the Council on Aging, Ann Freeman, started work yesterday. On November 14th, we will be joined by our new Accounting Clerk in the Treasurer's office, Doreen Gardner. You will also see an appointment before you this evening for James Pope to be the next Director of Information Technology. He brings public sector experience as the former IT Director in Gloucester and has most recently been in the private sector. We hope you take the opportunity to welcome all these new employees to the City.

Supplemental Budget

The FY23 Supplemental Budget is coming to you for a vote this evening. This proposal uses previously made cuts from our previous budget request and additional state aid to fund \$271,400 worth of City spending, including Fire Department overtime, Police Training, and Veterans Services and IT staffing. It also provides \$50,000 for outside counsel for the Waterfront West process, additional funding for Sidewalks through the meals tax, temporary rental space for NYS, and a replenishing of the Parks maintenance budget followed unanticipated necessary spending this summer. We hope to have your support tonight for these important projects and services.

Joint City Council-School Committee Meeting:

The annual City of Newburyport FY2024 Joint Budget Meeting with the City Council and School Committee will take place November 15th at the Senior Community Center at 6:30pm. This meeting is mandated by our City Charter Section 6-2. The meeting is a chance to review the financial condition of the city and forecast revenues and expenditures to better prepare for the upcoming budget season.

Sustainability, Recycling and Energy,

With the recent National Grid electricity price hikes for this winter, my administration is happy to announce that the city has taken the first step to aggregate electricity supply on behalf of all National Grid basic service users in the city. This means that the city, through the state's deregulated electricity market, has triggered its established opt out aggregation program to combine the purchasing power of its residents to achieve savings on electricity costs for all basic service users. We are working closely with our contracted broker, Colonial Power Group, and have gone out to bid for supply and have received pricing that will provide basic service users with an approximate 36% discount off of the National Grid rate from January through April 2023. It is currently under review by the State Department

of Public Utilities and once approved, notification will be sent to all National Grid basic service users on or around November 15th. At that time, we will be hosting information sessions to let people know about the program and how they can opt out if they so choose.

At this time, I would also like to acknowledge all of the efforts through the years to establish this program. It took several years to become an aggregated community through the Department of Public Utilities process and I'd like to thank the former administration, the Energy Advisory Committee, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, the City's Sustainability Office and Colonial Power Group for all of their contributions in developing this program for the city. I'd also like to thank the previous city council for creating the process by which my office could commence this program in an expedient manner. The program meets the state's original intent of a deregulated electricity market to benefit rate payers and has put Newburyport in position to help its residents and businesses. Communication with residents will be critical in the weeks ahead and I will be sure to use all of my administration's expanded communications channels to assist with the launch of this program.

Thank you to all whom have helped along the way and there will be more information coming soon.

Mayor Sean Reardon