

MAYOR'S UPDATE
May 8, 2023
Mayor Sean R. Reardon

Opportunity Way Explosion Update:

Officials from the Newburyport Building Department were on scene throughout the weekend and on Monday morning. On Monday, hazardous materials technical and crews remained on scene, working on removing the final eight 55-gallon drums of chemicals and draining approximately 2,000 gallons of chemicals from chemical reactors at the plant. This process needs to be handled carefully, and crews may take additional time to complete this work. Additionally, a contractor has been brought in to shore up the steel supports to replace a crane that has been holding up the building since Friday.

Building Department officials will clear the scene once no further dangers or problems are discovered. City officials have been awaiting the arrival of insurance adjustors from Europe, and demolition operations will begin when it is safe to proceed, with a targeted date of completion for this week.

We send the City's heartfelt condolences to the family of Jack O'Keefe of Methuen, who tragically lost his life in the blast.

FY24 Budget Process:

You've probably already noticed that the FY24 Budget is on your desk tonight. We look forward to discussing this budget proposal with you in the budget workshops that will occur in the coming weeks, starting with Thursday night's session on the overall budget picture and general administration categories, including the Mayor's Office. This budget is built to a 2.3% increase in the property tax limit, based on the preference not encroach on the full 2.5% increase allowable by law. The general fund budget includes expenditures of over \$82.8M and is balanced by over \$14M in local receipts and \$68.5M in tax levy.

This budget devotes significant resources to our public schools, public safety, and the Department of Public Services, which are the main drivers of our budget every year. I am recommending investments in some major capital projects through DPS in order to secure our infrastructure, including our water supply, and there are also two new positions that will help with this work. One is an assistant engineer, who will also bring additional capacity to the engineering department particularly for watershed protection and roadway design and construction projects. The other is a chemist/environmental analyst in the Water Treatment Plant. Schools, Safety, and Public Works are crucial for the daily operation of the City, and we will be sure to provide them the funding they need.

I am also recommending initial investment in Information Technology and in our Planning Department. We have been underinvesting in IT in recent years, and these new proposed investments include a major capital project to rebuild our data center, and operating budget expenses to improve our cybersecurity and digital operations. This work was recommended in

the IT audit performed last year by an external agency, and has been spearheaded by our IT Director, James Pope. In our Planning Department, we are in need of additional capacity to lead on some major zoning initiatives, as well as to implement the recommendations of our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. We are recommending the addition of a Community and Economic Development Manager who will be able to drive this work and improve our work around branding and marketing, land use, and small business assistance, among other initiatives.

On a final note, you'll see that the Capital Improvement Plan and Budget were submitted at the same time, thanks to our Charter updates that were approved by the Governor this year. This will make it easier to consider both documents alongside each other, and to see how the capital requests drive our operating budget decisions. We look forward to all these conversations about our funding priorities for the year, and to having this budget approved by the end of June.

Fire Chief Appointment:

After conducting a thorough search process in accordance with Section 2-316 of the Code of Ordinances, I am appointing Stephen H Bradbury III as the next Fire Chief for the City of Newburyport. This appointment has been submitted to you for approval by the Council, and will be effective June 1, 2023 should the appointment be approved at the Council's meeting on May 29th. Bradbury is the current Acting Chief in Newburyport, and also serves as acting Emergency Management Director. He has served as Deputy Fire Chief and Assistant Emergency Management Director since September 2000, and first joined the Newburyport Fire Department as a Call Firefighter in 1993. We look forward to having your support for his nomination.

Pride Parade 2023:

The final vote on approval for the City's first Pride Parade is in your packet tonight. I am excited for this event and it should really kick off a great month of events in June around Pride. The Pride Board is a sub-group of the DEI Alliance, making this a City event.

May 4th Boards and Commissions Fair:

I want to thank everyone who attended the first annual Boards and Commission Fair on Thursday. It was very well attended and we continue to receive positive feedback from the event. We talked about doing this last year and to see it come to fruition was incredible. I want to thank Executive Assistant Christine Jackson for putting it all together and making it such a success.

Mayor Sean Reardon