

MAYOR'S UPDATE
August 14, 2023
Mayor Sean R. Reardon

Market Landing Park Expansion:

Construction began on the expanded Market Landing Park project on August 7th. Thank you to all of you who joined for the groundbreaking ceremony on August 9th. Construction has required the fencing off of portions of the park and the surrounding parking. Much of the parking will be opened again at the completion of the project, though some spots will be permanently converted to green space. The City released information last week on where to park with these waterfront spots unavailable. For visitors, the Green Street Lot and Titcomb Street Garage are the closest alternatives.

From August 11 through September 14, all employee permit holders will be allowed to park in residential streets in two areas: from Fair Street to Lime Street in an easterly direction, between High and Water Streets, and from Green Street to Winter Street in a westerly direction, between High and Merrimac Streets. Starting September 15 and through May 1, 2024, employee permit holders will be allowed to park in the Green Street lot.

The City's Parking Advisory Committee will be meeting Wednesday, August 16 at 5:30 P.M. in the City Council Chambers to discuss these changes and other potential mitigation.

The City will continue to provide updates on the Market Landing Park Expansion project on its website. We will also keep residents updated on the Central Waterfront Bulkhead restoration project, which will begin after Labor Day and take place in a similar area, and will not require any additional closure of parking space.

School Committee Retreat:

The School Committee met last week on August 7 for its annual retreat, in which we discussed our strategic plan, the Superintendent's Evaluation, assessment data, and ideas for community budget input. The School Committee has completed its summer break and is back to its normal schedule of meeting every other Monday.

From the Water Treatment Plant:

The Water Treatment Plant is dealing with historic high levels of manganese in the water source this summer which has been caused by the significant amount of rain we have received, and this has led to instances of residents having brown or discolored water. On July 30th, a pre-oxidation pump in the Water Treatment Plant went down for a brief amount of time, which led to a higher amount of manganese as well. Residents who are experiencing tinted water, are advised to run cold water from either a first-floor bath tub or outdoor sillcock, which will flush the system and lead to the brown water clearing up.

This is a regional issue that many plants are dealing with, and Newburyport continues to provide safe water to its residents well within all state and federal regulations.

The water being released from the Treatment Plant has been clear and we are working with our water consultants to follow their recommendations for how best to treat this water. We have short term solutions that are reducing the tinting issues. This Indian Hill Water Line Project and proposed improvements at our Water Treatment Facility would both assist for long term mitigation for our water treatment, should we choose to go in this direction.

Grant Acceptances:

You have three grant acceptance orders on your agenda tonight. I want to draw your attention to two of them which we have requested to be approved in one reading. The first is the donation of a beach wheelchair through SMILE Mass (Small Miracles in Life Exist) that has been facilitated by our Commission on Disability and its Chair, Kristen Farrell. We have worked with the Harbormaster's Office to confirm that we will be able to take the chair, and to arrange an operations plan for reserving and cleaning it. We are asking to approve the donation in one reading to facilitate faster receipt of the chair so that it can be used during the remainder of this summer season. Thank you to everyone who has worked make this happen, and above all to SMILE Mass.

The second grant is an anticipated \$191,377 grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) through the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant program. The award of this grant is still under media embargo, but we do need to accept this grant before final announcements are made. The State has advised us to secure approval for this grant from the Council so that we will be ready to sign a contract, which we will have one week to do once it is sent, which could happen as early as this week. This project will fund community-wide education and outreach that will strengthen Newburyport's resilience and improve our ability to adopt future climate mitigation measures. This is the result of months of hard work from our Conservation and Resiliency staff and from the Resiliency Committee. We want to thank Julia Godtfredsen, Molly Ettenborough, Nancy London, Sarah Tappan, and Jane Healey, along with the many others who are leading this process. We hope to have your support in accepting this grant tonight.

Bartlet Mall:

The Community Services Committee will consider the updated design plan for Bartlet Mall during its August 15 meeting. Since the bond was approved back in September, 2022, the design has remained substantially the same while the details have been refined. We've sought approvals from 9 different Federal, State and local agencies, each of whom have looked at this project through a different lens and have offered their contributions. Our design team consists of geotechnical, environmental, water resource, and civil engineers, landscape architects, and architects.

Based on all the studies and testing performed, the plan for the Pond, at its highest level, is to dewater the pond and then line it with an HDPE/LDPE liner to prevent phosphorus from mixing with the water, which causes harmful algal blooms and human/animal contact with urban contaminants. The plan includes protection for the liner with stone and sediment which supports wildlife and aquatic plant life and the installation of a bedrock well to keep the water at a consistent level. We will also install a subsurface recirculation and aeration system to maintain the water quality long-term. This equipment will be stored in a small

pump house that will be designed to be discreet and to complement the Superior Courthouse in style.

The changes to the overall design are modest and have been made either to satisfy a regulatory agency, to reduce costs and/or long-term maintenance, or to take advantage of the latest available technology. Major changes include the construction of the pump house, the elevation of the surrounded walkway, and the addition of more aquatic plants to support wildlife, including the turtles that hibernate in the pond. We look forward to discussing this project further in Committee and before the Council on August 28th.

Lower Atkinson Common/Pioneer League Fields:

My office has requested a transfer from ARPA funding for the next phase of the Lower Atkinson Common master plan, which includes parking that is internal to the park, and will improve pedestrian and traffic safety in the Merrimac, Plummer and Moulton St neighborhood. This project will go before the Conservation Commission and the Planning Board the first week of September. This will give more time for community feedback, and my staff is working with neighbors, the Ward Councillor, the Community Action pre-school, and the Pioneer League to make sure all stakeholders are being heard as this plan progresses. We also received an opinion from the City Solicitor that this project would not require Article 97 review, as the addition of parking on the site would not be considered a change of use. We look forward to presenting more details about this project to the City Council at an upcoming Committee meeting.

MeVa Community Meeting:

Leadership at MeVa Transit will be joining us on Wednesday, August 16th at the Senior Community Center at 4pm to discuss their new bus routes and gain community feedback, especially on the sections around Anna Jaques Hospital and from Merrimac Street to High Street via Oakland Street. Thank you to MeVa for taking the time to listen to residents, and we will keep the community updated on the results of this meeting.

Newburyport Public Library Updates:

I have been working with AFSCME Local 939, the Union representing the Library staff at the Newburyport Public Library, in order to reach a resolution on the volunteer program. As part of the negotiation process, the Union organized a vote with Library staff to gauge their feelings on whether they wanted to continue the volunteer program. On August 10, librarians participated in a secret ballot vote and voted 12-7 against restarting the volunteer program. I am still committed to finding a solution that will allow for volunteers to resume. I also want to ensure that employees are respected and heard, and this vote is a clear sign that the Library employees are not yet ready to bring back the volunteer program.

Two additional processes are taking place that will impact these ongoing discussions. First, the Board of Library Directors is still working on updating its volunteer policy and this will need to be complete before restarting the program. Any new policy will be made with input from the Librarians and the Union.

In addition, the Library Board of Directors, together with the our Human Resources Department, are advancing the search for the next Head Librarian, and are in the interview

stage now. I believe it would be best to wait until a new Head Librarian is selected to approve a new policy and resume the volunteer program. A new Head Librarian should be able to be selected and onboarded by early fall.

Operation Backpack:

Once again this year, the City is serving as a drop-off location for the Pettengill House's Operation Backpack program, which collects school supplies, including backpacks, for area residents in need of assistance. You can drop off any donated goods to the City Hall lobby through August 17th.