

MAYOR'S UPDATE
January 29, 2024
Mayor Sean R. Reardon

International Holocaust Remembrance Day:

Last week, I had the honor of attending and reading a proclamation at Newburyport's observance of International Holocaust Remembrance Day organized by Congregation Ahavas Achim and the Human Rights Commission. The highlight of the evening was a book talk with 8th graders at the Middle School, seniors from the COA and the author of "An Orange in Winter" Margaret McQuillan. Thank you to the HRC for all their work in our community. Thank you to Rabbi Alex Matthews of Congregation Ahavas Achim for his continued spiritual leadership in our community, which is so needed at this time of crisis around the world.

Whittier School Project Special Election:

Residents headed to the polls in the 11 communities that feed into the Whittier Regional Technical School District last Tuesday. In Newburyport, 5,053 votes were cast, 652 Yes and 4,401 No. Overall the vote tally was 21,257 with 5,595 Yes and 15,662 No. I am incredibly proud of this turnout across the region and especially for the number of voters that came out on a January day in Newburyport. There were no winners on Tuesday, but we now have an opportunity to work with our partners in the 11 communities and collaborate with Whittier on next steps. Whittier has scheduled a Building Committee meeting tomorrow, January 30 at 10am in the Whittier auditorium which I will be attending with other local leaders. We are working with our City Solicitor on next steps, and I have also enlisted the services of Pierce Atwood LLP to assist us as special counsel in this matter.

Assessor Appointment:

Assessor Jill Brennan is up for reappointment tonight. She has been phenomenal to work with these past two years which have been challenging with the steep increases in our local property values. She brings a wealth of knowledge and a wonderful presence to the role and I ask for your support.

Public Art Committee:

Thank you to the Council for approving the new Public Art Policy and Committee. We recognize the value of public art in creating a unique identity for Newburyport. It is an important component of our civic and cultural fabric and enlivens our public spaces. The City has always, and intends to continue to integrate a wide range of artworks reflecting diverse artistic disciplines and points of view into our public spaces. We are currently accepting nominations for two members of the public to serve on the Public Art Committee and look forward to moving the appointments to this exciting new committee.

Projects

Newburyport Rec:

The City hosted a community meeting to present the latest design for a new Rec Center at 59 Low Street, including a 3D walkthrough which has been posted on the City website. The meeting was well attended by the public and local leaders including Senator Tarr and several City Councillors. The project is at 100% Design Development, and these presentations will allow for community and Council feedback before moving into the Construction Document phase. In your packet tonight, you will find the drawings as well as cost estimates for the project and we look forward to presenting the plans once again at an upcoming Council subcommittee meeting in order to continue this important conversation.

Lower Atkinson Common:

We are pleased to inform you that the safety project at Lower Atkinson Common/Pioneer Fields has been approved by both the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission. We are in the process of obtaining cost estimates for the work to move the parking off Merrimac Street, extend sidewalks from Moulton to Plummer Ave, and improve the drainage at the park. This project should vastly improve pedestrian safety in this busy part of the City, and build on the traffic safety initiatives that were begun on Plummer Ave and within the safety zone last year. Once we have cost estimates, we will request an allocation from the remaining ARPA funds.

Bartlet Mall:

Bids for the Bartlet Mall restoration project are due on February 1. We had 4 companies attend the December 6 pre-bid site walk and expect several responses to our IFB. Once we open the bids, we will return to the Council to request release of the CPC bond so we may execute the contract and begin construction on this exciting project to restore Newburyport's original town common.

Downtown Lighting:

The City has taken delivery on the first phase of street lights and our City Electrician, Jeff Mattheson, has begun their installation. The first two lights, within Patrick Tracy Square, have been installed and look fantastic. Jeff will continue installing the remaining lights at Patrick Tracy Square, Inn Street, Market Square, which are funded by the CPC, as weather allows. He will then install the remaining lights for phase 1 along State and Pleasant Streets and the Green Street parking lot. We expect this work to carry through most of the summer.

Market Landing Park:

This project is on schedule at this time for completion in May/June. Our biggest concern at this time is that we will need National Grid to provide three new transformers in the coming months so that we don't need to come back and replace temporary ones at a later date. We have been pressing the contractor to expedite installations for their initial inspections, but are ultimately reliant on their timeline. We are looking to make any temporary disruptions to waterfront power off-season as the installation and connection of new transformers requires deenergizing/ reenergizing them in sequence. Local fundraising for site amenities has now been secured and we are purchasing alternate Adirondack Chairs (to match the ones already along the WFT berm) at a more reasonable price than those originally specified by Sasaki. Otherwise the new raised lawns, walkways, bike path alignment and "social steps" are starting to take shape with curbing, concrete forms, pavers and additional fill.

West End Fire Station:

The John F. Cutter Jr. Fire Station project continues to be on budget and slightly delayed from its original schedule due to correcting unsuitable soils and rebar issues and managing weather conditions. After completing the installation of the forms and rebar reinforcement for the building's walls, the contractor and subcontractors reached an important milestone in mid-January of pouring concrete into the Insulated Concrete Forms walls. There is a nice short (0:46) aerial drone video posted online of the two truck-mounted hydraulic concrete boom pumps in action. The contractor is now installing a concrete pad for the building's electrical transformer along with the associated trenching, conduit, and bollards in order to initiate the long-lead time process of getting in line to be approved for securing a transformer for the facility from National Grid. A roofing subcontractor is also on site framing the roof, and a metals subcontractor welding steel plates.

Bulkhead:

The Bulkhead Rehabilitation Project continues to be on schedule and on budget. Most of the basic bulkhead work is complete within the embayment, and the contractor has begun drilling to secure the new timber fender pile system next month. The contractor is continuing to drive the FRP sheetpiles along the eastern bulkhead during the weeks when the tides are favorable, and anticipates completing them by the end of February if the weather is manageable. The crews have had to deal with some significant winter weather, flooding, and slick surfaces during recent weeks. Looking ahead, the contractor will install the steel mooring piles along the eastern bulkhead with the target of completing the pile-driving in-water work by the end of March, so they can then continue to work on all of the concrete and associated work from the landside in the subsequent months.

Thank you very much.

Mayor Sean Reardon