

Municipal Transparency and Accountability Initiative

Final Report
November 2024

League of Women Voters of Newton
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Nonpartisanship Policy: LWVN is a nonpartisan organization that does not support or oppose any political party or candidate. The League also encourages participation in local government by informing the citizens of Newton about their rights and responsibilities as voters.

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to evaluate the transparency and accountability of Newton's city government and to advocate for specific improvements, the League of Women Voters of Newton (LWVN) launched a [Municipal Transparency and Accountability Initiative](#) in June 2022. The impetus for this initiative was LWVN's concern about long-standing gaps in the availability of important municipal information that Newton residents need in order to follow and engage with local issues. Areas of significant information deficiency, in the view of the Newton League, have historically included the activities of the Newton City Council—including councilors' voting records and attendance¹—as well as clear, easily accessible information about Newton's municipal budget and overall fiscal performance.

An additional motivation behind this initiative was the awareness that there have been significant advances in recent years in best practices related to municipal transparency. The role that technology can play in increasing transparency, and thereby increasing trust in government and civic engagement, has been a particular focus. Recognizing that a municipal website is usually a local government's primary tool for sharing information with residents, many municipalities have embraced the potential of their official websites to make municipal data and information more accessible. The content and format of a municipal website has become one indication of a municipality's commitment to and value placed on transparency.

This initiative aims to identify the opportunities for Newton to make municipal information more easily and equitably accessible by adopting current best practices. Although this initiative was originally aimed at broadly evaluating the commitment of Newton's city government to transparency in both culture and practice, over time, the quality of information presented on the city's website² became the main focus. By sharing real-world examples from the websites of other municipalities, LWVN hopes to demonstrate some steps Newton could take to improve its own transparency.

LWV Newton emphasizes that it launched this transparency initiative to address *longstanding* deficiencies in the availability of municipal information in Newton. None of the analysis in this report should be interpreted as criticizing a specific administration or specific municipal leaders past or present. Additionally, nothing in this report should be interpreted as suggesting that there has been purposeful obfuscation by anyone in city leadership. The purpose of this report

¹ Note: at the time LWVN undertook this initiative, Newton's website did not contain a searchable database for City Council docket items. As of early 2024, the city now has a "[Docket Tracker](#)" database containing City Council information which is discussed in detail in Section IV.

² The Newton Public Schools maintains a website separate from the City of Newton's website. Given the limited volunteer resources available to conduct this transparency initiative, the school system and its website were not included within the scope of the work. While a public school system has distinct differences from a municipal government, clearly many of the principles and benefits of transparent governance would apply to the NPS website as well.

is solely to identify gaps and suggest improvements that the City of Newton can make with respect to governmental transparency with the hope that this work will have long-lasting benefits for the entire community.

II. BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES & SCOPE

Throughout its 104-year history, the League of Women Voters has been a vigorous advocate for transparent and accountable government. "The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation at all levels of government. The League further believes that governmental bodies must protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings, and making public records accessible."³

Government transparency refers to the obligation of a government to proactively share information related to the management of public resources, governmental operations, and governmental decision-making processes. Transparency is indispensable to an informed, engaged electorate and helps make governmental leaders accountable to their constituents. The League strongly believes that transparency and accountability in government—at all levels—is vital for a wide variety of reasons: to encourage civic engagement and participation, to allow residents to evaluate the management of public resources including progress toward goals, to improve services and outcomes, and to track and monitor the actions of governmental bodies and elected officials. For example, publicly available information should allow residents to evaluate fiscal performance, including trends, shifts, adherence to stated priorities, and achievement of stated goals. It should also allow residents to evaluate the effectiveness of various city departments, the use of city resources, and the degree to which city services are meeting the needs of residents. And it should inform residents about what decisions are being made, how they are being made, and how citizens can exercise their democratic rights. To achieve true transparency, information must be not only available, but it must also be easy to locate and presented in a format that can be understood by laypeople.

Newton is a contiguous suburb of Boston with a renowned public school system. A city of roughly 88,000 residents and 30,000 households, Newton is comprised of 13 separate villages, each with a distinct character. In recent years, several hot-button issues—including proposed housing developments, tax override referendums, a two-week teacher's strike, proposed changes to the zoning code, a proposed re-write of the city's charter, and a decision on whether to allow retail cannabis sales—have resulted in acrimonious divisions in the community. Frequently, participants in these debates do not even agree on basic, underlying facts. These public controversies have therefore intensified the need for clear, reliable, accessible

³ [LWVUS Impact on Issues](#): Statement of Position on the Citizen's Right to Know/Citizen Participation, as announced by the national board, June 1984.

municipal information. Pete Buttigieg, United States Secretary of Transportation under President Joe Biden, addressed this dynamic when he spoke at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government in November of 2024.

There really are in fact ways to make somebody better off without making somebody else worse off, but you need to use data and transparency to find those ways...The other reason I really believe in data and transparency about ourselves and about open data in government is that it helps make sure that when you have a debate it's over something real. I'd rather be beat up over a deficiency in our work that's actually happening than one that people just made up. The more you put your data out there to see, the more the rough and tumble of policy and politics is over a reality.⁴

A growing, robust body of literature makes clear the advantages when municipalities use technology to share information and data clearly and widely. According to a 2021 report by Deloitte:

Better services. Smarter and more efficient use of tax dollars. Greater transparency and civic engagement. All of this has resulted from the data-driven transformation that has moved through city halls across the country during the last six years. The way scores of municipal governments do business has changed. Residents are becoming more engaged with their local government while reaping tangible benefits. *For instance, cities are using and sharing data to steadily improve a wide array of city services, from emergency response and public transit options to expanded access to financial assistance and internet connectivity* [emphasis added].⁵

The National League of Cities, a membership organization representing more than 2,700 cities across the country, similarly emphasizes how clear, accessible data and information increases engagement and decreases polarization:

Engagement around data and plans is key to building transparency, understanding, and trust between a government, constituents, and partners.... High-performing leaders also use data to educate constituents about issues and plans related to the community. These communications can correct resident misconceptions and even reduce polarization.⁶

⁴ Remarks by Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, Institute of Politics, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, November 12, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiV7xv24KDI>.

⁵ The Monitor Institute by Deloitte, *Closing the Data Gap: How Cities Are Delivering Better Results for Residents*, June 30, 2021.

⁶ National League of Cities, *How Local Governments Can Put Community Data to Work*, December 12, 2022.

And the “What Works Cities” initiative spearheaded by Bloomberg CityLab emphasizes the vital role that transparent municipal data plays in encouraging civic engagement:

Municipalities that are proficient at data often have extensive open data portals, making important datasets — like budget allocations or 311 and 911 calls — available to everyone for perusal and analysis. The municipality of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, has released 50 of its most important datasets on its open platform, [Open Data BR](#). Among them: budget information and real-time traffic flows. Residents have, according to the Deloitte report, effectively been using the platform to create their own visualization of the datasets they’re interested in exploring.⁷

With these benefits in mind, the goal of this Municipal Transparency and Accountability Initiative was to pinpoint specific areas of municipal information deficiency in Newton, areas where improved sharing of data and information could provide a basis for greater resident engagement, lead to shared understanding, and, ideally, reduce opportunities for the spread of mis- and disinformation.

The research work of the Initiative comprised three components:

- a targeted community survey about the transparency of Newton’s government;
- an in-depth review of Newton’s city website; and
- a landscape analysis to assess how other communities share information, concluding with a comparison.

After summarizing our research, this report concludes with recommendations for Newton’s elected leaders.

III. COMMUNITY SURVEY

Survey Design

The research for this report was conducted by a Committee of LWVN members. As the first step in its research about Newton’s information deficiency, the Committee wanted to hear from key residents who have Newton-related information needs that are more complex than the everyday requirements of a resident, such as paying a city bill or reporting a missed trash pickup. While the ability of Newtonians to access basic services is extremely important and deserves study, the focus of this transparency initiative was different—namely, the ability of people to access the data and information that underlie and inform municipal decision making. The Committee therefore decided to target leaders of active community organizations who likely

⁷ Bloomberg CityLab, *The Cities That Have Mastered Data*, July 15, 2021.

follow issues before local government, use City facilities for their activities, or interact with City departments on a regular basis.

Working from personal knowledge, web searches, and consultation with the City's Community Outreach staff, the Committee compiled a list of **94 local nonprofit and community organizations** (see Appendix A). The list included organizations relating to human & youth services, community centers, advocacy on a broad range of local issues, identity, arts and culture, PTOs and public education, youth sports, and neighborhood associations. The survey consisted of **9 open-response questions** relating to how the organizations have experienced the transparency of Newton's government:

1. Name of person filling out the survey and the organization(s) you work with.
2. Overall, how important is transparency in Newton government to you/your group on a scale of 0 to 10 (with 0 being not at all important and 10 being vitally important).
3. Please explain your response to Question 2.
4. On a scale of 0 to 10 (with 0 being the worst and 10 being the best), how would you rate the transparency of Newton's government today?
5. Please explain your response to Question 4. If you can, please provide specific examples.
6. Have you or your group(s) previously worked on or talked about the issue of transparency/accountability in Newton's local government? Please explain.
7. What information have you needed in the course of your group's work that you were able to get from the City and how (specifically) did you get it? Please give one or more examples and explain in as much detail as possible.
8. What information have you needed that you were NOT able to get, how did you try to get it, what obstacles did you face, and what was the result? Please give one or more examples and explain in as much detail as possible.
9. If you do not think the city government currently ranks as a "10" with regard to transparency, what types of information do you think the City should be making available and how should they provide it?
10. Do you think that more governmental transparency leads to more governmental accountability? Why or why not? What do you see as the relationship between transparency and accountability?

The survey was sent by email to the 94 organizations, twice in June 2022 and again in October 2022, using Survey Monkey along with a brief letter of explanation of the initiative (see Appendix B). The League of Women Voters of Newton also publicized the survey in its newsletter and on its website, and an essay explaining the initiative with a link to the survey was posted on Village 14, a local discussion blog.⁸

Survey Responses

A total of 26 individuals responded to the survey and represented 27 unique organizations or 29% of our survey universe. (Note that some individuals who responded represented more than one organization and some organizations submitted responses via more than one individual.) A summary of responses follows:

Question 1: What organization do you work with?

The organizations that responded represent an array of local interests, as reflected in the following table:

Organization Category	# of Organizations Represented in Responses
Housing	4
Schools	4
Villages and Parks	4
Public Safety	3
Youth Services & Sports	3
Arts/Culture/Community Grants	3
Environment	2
Food and Economic Insecurity	2
Business and News	2
Total	27

Collectively, respondents indicated that the following **city services or functions are of interest to their organizations' work**: affordable housing grants, the budget process, emergency rent assistance demographic data, the Fair Housing Commission, Human Services,

⁸ At the time the Committee publicized the survey, the *Newton Tab* was no longer published and the two online news websites were just starting up.

the inclusionary zoning fund, inspectional services, parks and recreation, the permitting process, planning, Police Reform Task Force, reserving city facilities and resources, Urban Design Commission.

Question 2: Overall, how important is transparency in Newton government to you/your group?

Average response was **9.8/10**.

Question 3: Please explain your response to Question 2.

Respondents provided many reasons why transparency is important, including: awareness, understanding, access, civic involvement, safety, quality, democracy, good governance, safeguarding against favoritism and bad decisions, right to know, enables advocacy, fiscal responsibility, builds trust of city within and outside, necessary for communication and input, and enables community groups to plan and be effective.

In the words of one respondent, *"Without government transparency it is extremely hard to understand and know what is going on. For community groups and individuals being able to find, access, and understand what is going on at a local level is a must."*

Question 4: Please rate the transparency of Newton's government today.

Average response was **5.6/10**.

Question 5: Please explain your response to Question 4.

Answers to this question varied widely.

Many respondents noted difficulty accessing information that their organizations need on the Newton website. For example:

- "[T]he city still is lacking in a website that is user friendly to obtain fiscal, operational data as well as information on individual council members voting history, docket items etc in a comprehensive easy to access fashion for the general public to access."
- "When the website was redone rather than keep the plethora of information stored there on a back up site or a reference site the city chose to get rid of it. The new site deals only in PDFs. This is a terrible way to organize an informational website and severely limits the ability to find historical information....There are no tutorials for the average citizen to understand or find things. Historical documents do not exist at all on the new website."
- "The information is difficult to find and, in many cases, out-of-date. For example, the City Council sites are not consistent in their format and content, e.g., not all committees have recordings of meetings that are easy to locate. The reports do not identify councilors who make comments, so residents are not able to understand what any given councilor says about a particular agenda item. We do not know who voted for what and

why. We do not know who attended what meetings. The search function is useless as it gives all kinds of information that unless you are an expert or know city government well, will not help you."

- "I think a lot of information is available to those who know how to seek it out, but it is difficult for the average citizen to sift through the sheer quantity."

While some respondents noted that their organizations were able to get the information they needed, they frequently noted that their ability to do so was the result of time-intensive relationship-building with City personnel. For example:

"As it relates to me, [Newton] is quite transparent. I can work with City government employees to get the information that I need to move forward on the work of my groups. However, that comes from taking the time to establish relationships and build trust with each of the many departments that my group works with."

Question 6: Have you or your group(s) previously worked on or talked about the issue of transparency/accountability in Newton's local government?

Responses varied; while 10 of the respondents said that their groups had not discussed the issue of transparency/accountability, the remaining 16 respondents said that their groups had discussed this issue to varying degrees. Some examples include:

- "I pretty much talk about this nonstop."
- "Yes, transparency and accountability has been very important to our group...."
- "Yes, constantly. For example, how is the 311 data being used to make decisions about sidewalk snow removal routes? About where to install missing sidewalks? How is crash data being used to make decisions about where to spend city dollars on infrastructure and traffic calming?"
- "No, not in a big public way, but have had discussions with department heads in this regard as noted in #5."

Question 7: What information have you needed in the course of your group's work that you were able to get from the City and how (specifically) did you get it?

Only three of the respondents discussed accessing information via the City's website; in every other example cited by the respondents, information was obtained via direct outreach to a city department and, in many cases, required a personal contact or multiple attempts to be effective. Some examples include:

- "Having friends of friends or people who know how to navigate the system."
- "We have a representative from our group on various City committees and working groups."

- “We know enough to start with the Planning Department and that the housing materials/information is in that department. We are not sure if everyone would know to start there. As a user..., I might not have any idea where to begin and if I landed on it, what to do to meet my needs.”
- “- direct requests to [city councilors]...city website (is pretty unclear and updated irregularly/too close to dates of meetings)”
- “You have to request recordings. Requested meeting of recent Newton Historical Commission meeting because it was not posted anywhere.”

Question 8: What information have you needed that you were NOT able to get....?

In their responses to Question 8 (and referenced in their other responses), respondents identified the following **areas where they have found the availability of information to be inadequate**. This includes desired information that is either lacking, out-of-date, hard to find, inconsistently available, or not shared in a timely manner:

Affordable housing grants
ARPA funds proposals, usage
Budget process, trends, shifts
City Council and Committee minutes (meeting summary has no attribution of comments)
City Council voting and attendance record
Community Development Block Grants
Departmental Information: employees, contacts
Emergency rent assistance demographic data
GIS Data that is searchable and sortable
Inclusionary zoning fund
Meeting materials (often not available in advance)
Minutes and recordings of boards, commissions, City Council
Organization charts, roles, responsibilities of departments
Permits, search and sort function
311 data

Question 9: What types of information do you think the City should be making available and how should they provide it?

Respondents identified the following **opportunities to improve the website function**:

Use graphs and charts to convey information
Improve website navigation and search engine
Do not use PDFs to share data, information (not easily searchable, sortable)
Ensure data and information are up-to-date and shared in a timely fashion
Use consistent formats
Provide more historical information
Provide online tutorials and how-tos about how to find/use information
Provide organizational charts for City government and schools
Improve user friendliness for phone users who don't own computer or tablet
Improve user friendliness for non-English speakers

Question 10: Do you think that more governmental transparency leads to more governmental accountability?

Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they believe transparency leads to accountability. Sample responses include:

- "The more the general public sees and values the city's transparency, the more approachable city government becomes, the more engaged citizens become -- and it is an engaged citizenry that fosters accountability. It also gives rise to increased volunteerism."
- "Yes, I think most people would say so. Voters / residents can make informed choices as to candidates to support and mayoral priorities and proposals to support or speak up against. Easy access to information would benefit those in city government as well as residents to gain easy access and answers to questions."
- "Definitely. I understand that this could slow down the work of city government as transparency leads to questioning of priorities, decisions, etc., but I would hope the final product or process will be better for it."
- "Yes...as the Washington Post states. "Democracy dies in Darkness" Newton needs this now more than ever as faith in all levels of government is waning"

Limitations of Format and Take-Aways from Survey

The survey was intended to gather qualitative information about how the availability of information from the Newton website affects the ability of community organizations and local nonprofits to be effective. Through the survey, the committee aimed to find examples of the municipal information needs of community organizations and whether this information is readily available to the public. The survey results constitute one piece of the big picture of the transparency of Newton's local government. The Committee acknowledges certain limitations or potential for bias in the information gathered from the survey. Survey respondents were sometimes known personally by Committee members, and respondents do not represent a cross-section of Newton's diversity along socio-economic, ethnic, or racial lines.

Despite these limitations, survey responses offer some information that can be useful in thinking about improvements to how the City of Newton shares municipal information:

- Respondents emphasized the difficulty they frequently had finding information on the Newton website. In some instances, the sought-after information did not exist; in other instances, it existed but was difficult to locate (due to limitations of the search function and/or organization of the website); and in other instances, it could be located, but was out-of-date, poorly organized, or in a format that was difficult to use (e.g., a PDF).
- Several respondents indicated that they had to resort to contacting Newton city personnel or elected officials to get the desired information and noted that this approach was time-consuming and frequently required several attempts. Some acknowledged that their ultimate success in getting information was due to personal relationships, contacts, and/or overall familiarity with how municipal government works.
- It should be noted that this survey was designed to target organizations/individuals who are active in and knowledgeable about local issues and, as a result, probably have better-than-average understanding of how Newton's government works. As several respondents pointed out, the difficulties accessing information encountered by these "educated consumers" of municipal information suggest that accessing information would be even more difficult for the average resident. This suggests that the city's longstanding practices concerning information availability have not been equitable.
- Looking at the responses in totality, the city website appears to be a critical weak link in the dissemination of information. Navigation and organization, plus the quality and quantity of information provided all seem to be significant issues. In the following section, therefore, we take a closer look at the City of Newton website.

IV. REVIEW OF NEWTON'S WEBSITE AND LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

As the second and third components of its research, the Committee worked to identify information deficiencies on the City of Newton website, the place where information about city government is consolidated. To do so, the Committee compared the Newton website with the websites of nine other municipalities: five in Massachusetts (Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Medford, and Arlington) and four located in other states (Evanston, IL; South Bend, IN; Carmel, IN; and Cincinnati, OH). A majority of the websites are from municipalities that are roughly the size of Newton, but the sample also included two larger cities (Boston and Cincinnati) and one smaller town (Arlington). All of the websites chosen had some notable features that differentiated them from the Newton city website and made them exemplars, at least in some respects.

The Committee compared Newton's website and the other municipal websites along a variety of dimensions: These dimensions included:

- A. **TRANSPARENCY:** Is there a clear, explicit commitment to transparency and public information-sharing on the website? Does the website clearly explain the processes for public input, comment, and questions on municipal matters (e.g., how to contact elected officials, speak at a meeting, send a letter, etc.)?
- B. **GOVERNANCE:** Does that website clearly explain the responsibilities of different municipal officers and bodies (e.g., mayor, town or city council, school committee, etc.)? City Council, School Committee, Boards and Commissions: How are agendas, minutes, recordings organized? Can you easily find docket items and voting records?
- C. **BUDGET AND FINANCE:** Is the budget process explained? How are budget, spending & revenue info presented? Are there any interactive features or data visualization? Is the data searchable/sortable? Is there clear information about how federal and state grants/funding (ARPA, CDBG, etc.) are used?
- D. **DATA:** Does the website have an Open Data Portal or another method for providing municipal data? If so, what topics are included (e.g., housing, public safety, transportation, climate change)? Is the data current? How is it presented?

Below, we highlight notable examples of how other cities and towns provide information in each of these substantive areas. In each of these examples, we believe that the municipal information is provided in a manner that is more *accessible, clear, and/or engaging* than the way similar information is provided on the Newton website.

We intend this comparative review to be illustrative: by providing concrete examples of the type of information provided by other municipalities, as well as the format in which information is provided, the Committee hopes to encourage discussion of possible alternatives to the way information is currently provided on the Newton website.

A. Commitment to Transparency/Information on Public Input

Newton: The Newton website contains no explicitly stated overarching commitment to transparency and public information-sharing. Furthermore, information on how to interact with city government is limited. The website provides only a [Statement of Good Practices for Communications with Councilors Regarding Land Use Petitions](#), but this document is difficult to find (there is a link to a pdf at the bottom of City Council page) and it does not cover public comment other than on land use petitions.

Cambridge: Cambridge has a robust Open Data Program (discussed in more detail below) that contains a clear commitment to transparency: "[Our Mission: Help the City of Cambridge leverage data to improve transparency, efficiency, and innovation so that Cambridge becomes an even better place to live, visit, work, and do business.](#)" Cambridge also provides instructions on [how to attend, participate in, and speak at Regular and Special Meetings of the City Council and how to contact City Council Members](#). This webpage also contains links to Tips and FAQs, Guiding Principles and Goals, and City Council Meeting Final Actions.

Carmel: Carmel has a "Transparency and Accountability" webpage that states: "[The responsibility to be transparent and accountable regarding the business of the City is a high priority for Carmel. There are many ways to access documents, video recordings, renderings and other materials for anyone who may want to gather information.](#)" Also, the "[Let's Talk Carmel](#)" section of the website includes municipal metrics and questions submitted by residents (with answers from councilors).

Evanston: The Evanston website has a dedicated "[Transparency](#)" webpage that states: "The City of Evanston strives to promote transparency in all operations. By providing as much data as possible through our website residents can be better informed about what is going on in their city. It is our hope that by being transparent we can help improve our effectiveness and the efficiency of city operations. Don't see something you were hoping to find? Submit your recommendation in the form below. Recommend items for inclusion on the transparency website pages." Evanston additionally posts a [Public Comment Guide](#), a [Public Comment Sign-Up Form](#), and [Rules and Organization of the City Council of the City of Evanston](#).

South Bend: South Bend has a "[Transparency and Performance](#)" page that states "Innovation, transparency, and civic engagement are the bedrock of the City's efforts to improve residents' lives in South Bend. The City makes these values a reality by using technology, data, and city performance management practices to create an inclusive ecosystem where university researchers, City staff, and residents can come together to solve problems, develop ideas, and grow. This page contains data and resources illustrating the City's efforts towards improving residents' lives. All underlying data is publicly available on the City's Open Data Portal. There is also access to the City's 311 Service Portal, Police Transparency Hub and Public Records & Document Repository."

Cincinnati: Cincinnati's website includes a "[Transparency in City Government](#)" page that provides a wide variety of data about its budget, finances, operations and services online. Additionally, the [CincyInsights](#) page of the website states: "The Open Data Cincinnati initiative of the Office of Performance & Data Analytics (OPDA) promotes government accountability and transparency by providing open, online access to government data. The goal of this initiative is

to increase data accessibility, and encourage development of creative tools to engage, serve, and improve Cincinnati neighborhoods and residents' quality of life."

B. Governance: Responsibilities, Structure, Minutes, Dockets, Voting Records

Newton: Newton's website does not contain an overview of the city's governmental structure, division of responsibilities, term lengths, etc. Instead, the site has different web pages for each branch of the city government and municipal departments, and each of these uses a different format and provides different information; there is no consistent style or structure and no overall organizational chart. Understanding how Newton's government works—who does what, when, and how—is therefore very difficult. Specifically:

- Information about the City Council and its meetings is particularly difficult to find and follow. Agendas and reports are presented [on a webpage](#) in the form of a reverse chronological running list of agendas, reports dockets, and council actions in no particular order and sometimes out of chronological order. Council actions are tracked in docket reports that follow a format only easily understood by insiders. There are no minutes of discussion and debate, no separate links to packets and presentations, and no direct links to videos or recordings of individual meetings.
- The Council's committees post reports of the actions taken at meetings which include some record of discussion but comments made by individual councilors lack attribution. The committees appear to lack uniform standards for timely posting of minutes and meeting recordings following a meeting.
- Supporting materials for City Council meetings and Committee meetings are made available online every Friday evening in the Friday Packet. Council Meetings are held on Monday nights so the timing of the availability of meeting materials creates challenges for advocacy by organized groups or grass roots efforts.
- Until a few months ago (and at the time this Committee sent out its survey), Newton's website did not contain a searchable database for City Council docket items. Several survey respondents identified the lack of such a database as an information deficiency. Fortunately, the City now has a "[Docket Tracker](#)" that allows the user to either browse or search for docket items, track the history of an item, view votes and attendance as they relate to individual docket items, and see Council orders. This tracker represents a significant step forward, but it still has some shortcomings. Specifically, the tracker has limited historical information (retrospective entries stop in 2022) and the search box for councilor voting records is difficult to find. More significantly, docket items are currently not linked to meeting materials such as agendas, packets, minutes, and videos (as opposed to the Legistar system, discussed below, which integrates docket items with these materials and allows the user to read or view details of debate on docket items). Consequently, Newton's docket tracker, at present, does not provide a window into any of the discussion or debate on items; it simply shows the final vote.
- Department webpages, as noted above, all have different styles and structures. Basic departmental information—such as mission, department head, contact information—is missing from some pages and appears in different formats, when it appears at all, on different web pages
- Similarly, the information about the work of boards and commissions lacks a uniform style and structure. Agendas and minutes for different boards and commissions appear at many different locations throughout the website; none appear in the section actually

labeled Boards & Commissions. None of the boards or commissions appear to have links to videos of meetings, and materials (with the exception of Planning memos) are frequently not shared with the public in advance which creates a barrier to advocacy or public input. For example, in order to evaluate the efficacy of a proposed accommodation to a public space being voted on by the Commission on Disabilities, a disability advocate needs to be able to review the complex plans ahead of the meeting which is often not possible. There does not appear to be a uniform standard for the timely posting of minutes or recordings following a meeting.

- The City Clerk's "[Electronic Posting Board](#)"—which lists agendas, public notices, and other assorted documents for boards, commissions, Council committees, and all other municipal entities in a running list by date—lacks any organizing structure. Because the monthly posting board (and its connected archive) are not searchable, an individual document can be found only if the user knows the exact date of the document in question. Moreover, the way meeting dates are posted on the Electronic Posting Board make it difficult to find the meetings and is an inadequate means of notifying the public of meetings.

Somerville: Somerville's website includes a "[Your Government](#)" page that provides an overview of the responsibilities of the mayor, city council, school committee, boards and commissions, and city departments. Since 2022, Somerville uses [Legistar](#), a docket, meeting, and calendar tracker, to display all city council, committee, and school committee meeting information. Legistar is searchable. Agendas, meeting minutes, meeting details, and videos of meetings are posted and up-to-date. Posted agendas list every agenda item with identifying docket, citation, order numbers, minutes, actions, and videos, with links to the items in question. Links also provide information on how individual councilors voted on the item. Legistar also contains information about elected officials, including contact information, terms, and all legislation sponsored by each councilor. See Appendix A, Sample Somerville Legistar Calendar entry.

Boston: Boston has an excellent [City Government Overview](#) page that includes separate links to pages for the mayor, city council, cabinets (departments), and boards and commissions. The [City Council page](#) includes information about Council responsibilities, current councilors (with bios), meetings, agendas, the legislative process, how to watch a hearing, how to testify, and recordings. The website allows users to look up [roll call votes](#). Also included is a [glossary of terms and phrases](#) to help residents understand how their local government functions. Since 2021, Boston, like Somerville, uses the [Legistar](#) legislative management system to post all meeting materials and as a docket tracker. The Legistar system additionally allows the user to search for and identify all legislation and resolutions sponsored by a particular councilor. Department web pages have a consistent look and feel and contain similar types of information.

Arlington: Arlington's site has a page on [Town Governance](#) that briefly explains the role of various municipal bodies, but it includes a link to a more detailed 12-page primer ([The ABC's of Arlington's Government](#)) that lays out how town government works in Arlington.

Evanston, IL: Although Evanston does not have a docket tracker, it has [a very well organized webpage](#) that contains all City Council agenda and related documents in tabular form. For each meeting date, the table presents separate links for all relevant material, including agendas,

minutes, packet, actions, video link, and presentations. Each department has a [detailed organizational chart](#).

Carmel, IN: Carmel's website has a page called [Carmel, Indiana City Government Structure](#) that includes an overview of the branches of city government and city departments with links to more detailed information for each.

C. Budget and Finance: Budget Process, Interactive tools, Graphics, Year-over-year Spending

Newton: While the City of Newton's puts extensive budget information online, the information is difficult to find; it appears in a dropdown list on the Comptroller's webpage. For each fiscal year, the city uploads approximately 15 separate documents to this webpage. The annual budget and all related information are shared in spreadsheets presented as PDF documents. There are no interactive features and no data visualization. There is no way to download, sort, or analyze the data. There is no easy way to compare year-over-year trends, either in the aggregate or on a departmental basis. There is no information about the budget process (e.g., a timetable, responsibilities of the various branches of government, opportunities for resident input, etc.). A separate webpage called "Financial Trend Information" contains only Bond Sale Information, Employee Earnings Reports, and Board and Council Orders. There is no overarching, easily understood financial trend information, and all of the information in the "financial trend" folders is many years out-of-date.

Arlington: The town website has a description of the budget process on the [Financial and Budget Information](#) page. There is also a [Resident's Guide to the Budget](#). Additionally, there is an excellent page on [Financial & Budget Information](#) that includes: the Town Manager's financial plan and budget; a video explaining the budget; the [Arlington Visual Budget](#), an online tool intended to provide the public with a visual representation of the Town's financial history and outlook, as well as illustrate key trends; [Open Checkbook](#), an interactive site that allows users to search details of government spending by category, department, fund, government area, and vendor; links to annual reports, audits, Finance Committee Reports, Capital Planning Committee Reports, property tax and assessment data, and school budgets. See Appendix D, Sample Open Checkbook from Arlington, MA

Medford: Medford uses a popular municipal online platform, [ClearGov](#), to present its budget and finance data in an [interactive Budget Book](#). The Budget Book contains copious background information about the budget process, as well as organizational charts, financial policies, fund structure, budgeting basics, and a glossary. Additionally, the Budget Book contains detailed information about all aspects of Medford's finances with interactive charts and graphs and in-depth departmental information (including year-over-year spending, personnel numbers, and departmental goals). Medford received GFOA "Distinguished Budget Presentation Award" for Fiscal Year 2021 Municipal Budget.

Evanston: There is a [budget timeline on the Budget page](#). Like Medford, Evanston uses ClearGov digital Budget book software, [which provides a Budget Book that is optimized for online viewing](#). The Budget Book includes very good charts and graphs and year-over-year information (though the data does not appear to be downloadable). There is also a [budget survey](#) for residents.

Cambridge: The City of Cambridge explains the budget process on its [“About”](#) page. The Cambridge website also has a robust [Open Budget Portal](#) with many interactive features and visuals. The data is very easy to reorganize and manipulate, and it can be downloaded in a CSV format.

D. Open Data Portal: Public Safety, Housing, Transportation, Environment

Open data portals provide raw and aggregated data sets, data visualizations, charts, and graphs on topics of public interest. Open data portals are increasingly provided by government entities at all levels—federal, state, and local—to enable users to see, download, and analyze the data that informs governmental decision making and policy. At the municipal level, Open Data Portals frequently include up-to-date information on public safety (e.g., traffic accident data; locations and types of 911 calls), housing (e.g., aggregated building permit data), transportation, public health, and the environment.

Newton: Newton does not have an Open Data Portal. To the extent data and statistics of any kind appear on the Newton website, they are generally part of reports saved as PDFs and scattered in many locations around the website, not routinely updated, and cannot be downloaded in CSV or Excel formats for analysis by users.

Newton does, however, have an award-winning Geographic Information System (GIS), which is a computer system that analyzes and displays geographically referenced information. The system is used by most city departments and consists of about 80 data layers with information about properties throughout the city. [An interactive GIS browser](#) is available for public use on the website.

Boston: [Analyze Boston](#), Boston’s Open Data Hub, has 246 data sets (that appear to be largely current) on topics ranging from traffic crashes, firearms, building permits, health, Blue Bike usage, etc. Analyze Boston also showcases some of the analyses and projects created by users of the city’s open data.

Additionally, Boston’s Analytics Team also produces other analysis and visualizations to demonstrate how the city operates:

- [RentSmart Boston](#) compiles data from BOS:311 and the City’s Inspectional Services Division to give prospective tenants a more complete picture of the homes and apartments they are considering renting, assisting them in understanding any previous issues with the property, including: housing violations, building violations, enforcement violations, housing complaints, sanitation requests, and/or civic maintenance requests.
- [CityScore](#) is an initiative designed to inform the Mayor and city managers about the overall health of the City at a moment’s notice by aggregating key performance metrics into one number.
- [BostonMaps](#) is a centralized location to access GIS data, web maps, and web applications.

Cambridge: Cambridge maintains an [Open Data Portal](#) that currently hosts 427 data sets and data visualizations on a host of topics including crime statistics, car crashes, housing starts, air

quality, bicycle counts, to name just a few. *See*, for example, Appendix E: Data Visualization of Article 22 (Green) Buildings from Cambridge MA

Evanston: Evanston created an [Open Data Portal](#), and Evanston's [What Works Cities award](#) seems to have been based on its open data commitment and team; however, it does not seem that data has been updated since 2020 or 2021.

South Bend: South Bend has an [Open Data Portal](#) that includes 108 separate data sets.

Cincinnati: [Open Data Cincinnati](#) maintains 183 separate data sets on a wide range of topics, including Neighborhoods & Development, Public Services, Public Safety, Health & Environment, etc. The mission is "[t]o provide access to government data, encourage the development of creative tools to engage, serve and improve our neighborhoods and the quality of life of our residents." Cincinnati also maintains [Cincy Insights](#), the city's official visual open data portal. The website states: "The Office of Performance & Data Analytics (OPDA) collects citywide data to monitor performance, improve service delivery, promote transparency, drive innovation, and creatively problem-solve. In addition to continually adding and updating data sets posted to the City's Open Data Portal, OPDA created CincyInsights, an interactive dashboard portal, to make city data visual, conveniently accessible, and user-friendly for all members of the Cincinnati community. All CincyInsights pages contain fully interactive, automatically updated dashboards; each page provides relevant context and explanation, and includes definitions for the data in each visualization." *See* Appendix F: Building Project Permits from Cincy Insights, for an example.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In launching this Municipal Transparency and Accountability Initiative, the League of Women Voters of Newton aimed to evaluate whether Newton's government has a culture of openness and transparency that leads to trust in government and ultimately to a better quality of life for all residents. The work of the Initiative team examined whether our city government has approached information sharing in the digital age in ways that empower residents, drive greater civic engagement, and increase accountability and the efficient use of tax dollars.

We believe that, on the whole, our many local elected officials have the best of intentions with regard to transparency and want residents to have access to needed information. For instance, some (though not most) have digital newsletters to proactively share information with constituents. However, newsletters by necessity provide selective information that reflects the priorities and perspectives of the sender. A newsletter is also temporary, providing a "snapshot" of information at a given point in time, and it does not meet the standard of proactive disclosure under which constituents can have access to information without asking. A website can function as an ongoing, stable, searchable resource where data and information can be updated, trends can be documented and visualized, complete records of proceedings

can be kept, and background information about how municipal government is organized and works can reside.

Through this initiative, we have concluded that Newton has not leveraged the possibilities created in the digital age to promote a more informed, engaged community. Specifically, as we discussed above, the city website has not been updated to reflect many of the best practices embraced by other municipalities – practices that provide vital information in a clear, searchable, and accessible manner. Over the last two decades, as on-line dialogue has proliferated, we believe that the lack of a shared set of facts has likely contributed to polarization within the community.

Upon completion of this work, we have identified opportunities for Newton’s government to strengthen our community through improved information sharing, which we discuss below:

Create a Culture of Transparency

A government culture of transparency begins with the understanding that information about the management of government resources belongs to the people and that access to the information builds trust and civic engagement. A culture of transparency also includes standards to ensure that information is consistently shared, shared in a timely way, and that the information is accurate. As a first step in building a culture of transparency, many municipalities provide a transparency mission statement that commits to transparency and lays out the practices and policies in place to ensure open, timely, and accurate access to information. Practices that reflect a robust culture of transparency include:

- using commercially available municipal software to share information;
- providing easy access to information on the legislative process, including easy tracking of docket items, voting records, full minutes of discussions, and attendance history;
- establishing standards for timely posting of meeting agendas, meeting materials, minutes, and recordings;
- sharing information on the city website to educate users about how the government is organized (such as organizational charts) and presenting departmental information in a consistent manner;
- ensuring that the website has a robust search function to enable users to find the information they need;
- including an overview or tutorial on major processes including budgeting and the legislative function; and
- adopting open data sets.

Encourage Local Advocacy and Volunteer Leadership

Newton residents care deeply about a wide variety of issues and actively advocate at the local level for improvements to housing, transportation, climate, social justice, education, economic insecurity, and more. Informed advocates pushing for innovative solutions are an asset that

Newton should seek to empower. Effective advocacy requires an abundance of accurate, well-organized, and current information on a variety of things: the city budget, planning, departmental organization, policy, legislative history and voting records, and the local legislative processes.

In addition, Newton has a wealth of volunteer-run community organizations dedicated to the arts, recreational interests, youth sports and activities, neighborhood associations, religious activities, and more. These organizations contribute to the rich fabric of our community and make Newton a great place to live. Volunteer leaders of these organizations need easy, reliable access to information about a variety of things including city facilities, permits, regulations, and the local calendar. They also need to know how to navigate city departments when seeking to resolve issues.

A city website designed with the needs of volunteers and advocates in mind would be a boost to residents who dedicate their time to making our city better. It should not be necessary for an individual to have personal relationships with elected or government officials in order to be effective local leaders.

Foster Fiscal Transparency

Ensuring residents and local businesses have access to information about the use of tax revenues and the management of city assets is the cornerstone of local transparency. As this report noted in Section IV, the fiscal information shared on Newton's website does not meet current standards for good municipal transparency. Although there is copious budget information presented on the website, quantity does not trump quality. The numerous budget spreadsheets and long-form prose analyses are not user-friendly. Budget information and financial reports should be searchable and sortable and available at department level and aggregated. Municipal software packages like ClearGov, OpenCheckbook, and Visual Budget are off-the-shelf, customizable software packages that make it easy for municipalities to share fiscal information in a way that is understandable by the layperson. Newton should explore utilizing one or more of these platforms to better share budget information.

Lift the Veil on City Council and Other Public Meetings

The ability of the public to hold elected and government officials accountable depends heavily on strong government transparency. Similarly, advocacy and engaging on local issues requires strong transparency practices.

Public meetings are a significant part of the local governance process and Newton must do a better job of making it easy for people to know what is taking place in them. Meeting summaries that do not attribute comments to identified speakers and that are selective in reporting comments are not a substitute for full minutes or a written transcript of a meeting. Furthermore, recordings are not a substitute for a written transcript as listening to recordings is time-consuming and prohibitive for most people seeking to follow a single issue. Standards for

timely posting of agendas, meeting materials, and minutes or transcripts are also crucial. Information about meetings should also meet accessibility standards.

Newton's new Docket Tracker is a huge step toward meeting current standards for transparency for the legislative body. As noted above, integration of the docket tracker with meeting agendas, packets, and minutes is a crucial next step to ensure that users of the tracker can understand the context and outcomes of legislative proceedings.

Unlock the Potential of Open Data

It is not difficult to imagine the ways in which the availability of robust data can be useful to residents of any city or town. Municipal open data is a relatively new phenomenon that is evolving, but some examples of information that can be found on city websites include:

- Fire and Police Department response times by neighborhood
- Usage rates and busiest times for public recreational facilities including pools, athletic facilities and fields, along with the ability to make reservations online
- Locations and usage rates for public wireless hotspots
- A map of current and planned DPW projects with details like timeline and road closures
- Crime statistics such as the location and timing of home and car break-ins
- Public parking space usage rates and times to determine best times for availability
- Utilization of bike-sharing programs
- Progress toward climate change goals/carbon neutrality
- Map of affordable housing locations and/or a map of recently permitted or constructed multifamily housing
- 311 requests by location, e.g. missed trash pickups by location

Explore Non Web-Based Transparency Practices

Although this report has focused on ways to increase the transparency of Newton's website, it is also important to note that other creative methods of increasing civic engagement and trust in the government are being explored by municipalities across the country. A willingness to try innovative approaches to improving transparency is an important way to build and strengthen the culture of transparency within a local government. Two programs implemented by some of our neighboring communities are worthy of consideration:

1. Participatory budgeting (PB) is a process used in thousands of cities around the world in which community members get to decide how to spend a portion of the municipal budget. Locally, both [Cambridge](#) and [Boston](#) employ PB. Studies cite a range of benefits to communities that deploy PB, and improved transparency is one of the significant outcomes:

Two major positive impacts of PB emerged from the interviews. The first is that it served to boost civic participation, strengthen

community ties, and demystify city government, resulting in residents' increased sense of civic agency. Second, it helped identify community needs often overlooked in a city's conventional outreach process.⁹

2. The town of Lexington, Massachusetts runs an annual [Civic Academy](#) that allows residents to explore the inner workings of the local government. The course is organized into roughly 16 two-hour modules in which participants meet with and learn from the heads of various government departments and elected bodies.

Both of these programs allow residents to engage directly with their local governments, learn about municipal processes and procedures, and develop trust and a connection to their municipal governments. By allowing residents to “look under the hood” and see how their local governments operate, these programs help build transparency which, in turn, can increase trust and confidence in municipal governance and operations. Such programs would be valuable tools to help increase municipal transparency here in Newton.

In Closing

A local government that is committed to transparency will think in terms of the ways in which more information availability will improve quality of life for residents. For example, access to public safety data might give residents trust in the equitable treatment of neighborhoods as well as combat conspiracy theories to the contrary—or, conversely, might reveal underlying inequities that need to be addressed. Crash and traffic data will inform residents about the safety of streets in their neighborhoods and enable them to knowledgeably advocate for street improvements, if necessary. Data and visualizations that capture progress toward climate change goals will indicate whether current policies are working and whether new policies are needed. And tools to make municipal spending comprehensible to the layperson can provide assurance that tax dollars are being wisely spent.

As with finding a solution to any complex problem, the perspectives of all significant stakeholders need to be present. For Newton to formulate a plan for improving trust and engagement through greater transparency, a wide range of input is needed to reflect the diversity of needs in our community. Newton has a history with successful ad hoc citizens' commissions (such as the Citizens' Advisory Group and the Blue Ribbon Commission for Financial Resources) to study and explore remedies to local issues. A citizens' commission on local government transparency would be an ideal way to create a roadmap to greater transparency that reflects the needs and ideas of the “user group” while limiting the demand on our already over-stretched city government personnel.

⁹ The Brennan Center for Justice, “Making Participatory Budgeting Work: Experiences on the Front Lines”, August 23, 2022

For Newton, a municipal commitment to adopting leading-edge transparency practices can form the basis of a new relationship between the city government and its residents. In this new relationship, residents can engage more knowledgeably and actively as partners in the policymaking process, dis- and misinformation can be tamped down before spreading, and trust in government can grow.

VI. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Organizations Contacted for Community Survey

- 1 Arabic Baptist Food Pantry
- 2 Auburndale Community Association
- 3 Auburndale Neighborhood Association
- 4 Beautiful Newtonville
- 5 Bike Newton
- 6 Boys & Girls Club of Newton
- 7 Building Professionals Zoning Redesign Working Group
- 8 Bulloughs Pond Association
- 9 CAN-DO Citizens for Affordable Housing in Newton
- 10 Centre Street Food Pantry
- 11 Charles River Chamber of Commerce
- 12 Chestnut Hill Association
- 13 Chinese American Association of Newton
- 14 Citizens Commission on Energy
- 15 Crystal Lake Conservancy
- 16 Defund Newton Police
- 17 Engine 6
- 18 Families Organizing for Racial Justice
- 19 Family Access
- 20 Friends of Cold Spring Park
- 21 Friends of Farlow Park
- 22 Friends of Newton Tennis
- 23 Friends of Wellington Park
- 24 Global Education Leadership Fund
- 25 Greater Boston Chinese Cultural Association
- 26 Green Newton
- 27 Harmony Foundation
- 28 Historic Newton
- 29 Hyde Community Center
- 30 Indigenous People's Day
- 31 Jewish Community Center
- 32 League of Women Voters of Newton
- 33 Ligerbots
- 34 Myrtle Street Baptist Church
- 35 New Art Center
- 36 Newton Area Flag Football

- 37 Newton Art Association
- 38 Newton Athletic Association
- 39 Newton Athletic Fields Foundation
- 40 Newton Coalition of Black Residents
- 41 Newton Commission on Disability
- 42 Newton Community Development Foundation
- 43 Newton Community Pride
- 44 Newton Conservators
- 45 Newton Corner Neighborhood Association
- 46 Newton Council on Aging
- 47 Newton Cultural Alliance / Allen House
- 48 Newton Cultural Council
- 49 Newton Economic Development Commission
- 50 Newton Food Pantry
- 51 Newton Girls Basketball Association
- 52 Newton Girls Lacrosse
- 53 Newton Girls Soccer
- 54 Newton Girls Softball
- 55 Newton Gun Violence Prevention Collaborative
- 56 Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council
- 57 Newton Human Rights Commission
- 58 Newton Interfaith Clergy Association
- 59 Newton Interfaith Coalition for Housing Equity
- 60 Newton Little League
- 61 Newton Lower Falls Improvement Association
- 62 Newton Mustangs Football
- 63 Newton Neighbors Helping Neighbors
- 64 Newton Open Studios
- 65 Newton Planning & Development Board
- 66 Newton Schools Foundation
- 67 Newton Senior Center
- 68 Newton Talks Race
- 69 Newton Transportation Advisory Group
- 70 Newton Tree Conservancy
- 71 Newton Youth Hockey
- 72 Newton Youth Lacrosse
- 73 Newton Youth Soccer
- 74 Newtonville Neighborhood Area Council
- 75 Nonantum Neighborhood Association
- 76 Out Metrowest

- 77 Pathway to Possible
- 78 PTO Council
- 79 Right Size Newton
- 80 Rotary Club of Newton
- 81 Safe Routes to School Task Force
- 82 Senior Citizens Fund of Newton
- 83 Sons of Italy Newton
- 84 St. Mary of Carmen Society
- 85 Sustainable Materials Management Commission
- 86 The Second Step
- 87 U-CHAN
- 88 Understanding Our Differences
- 89 Upper Falls Neighborhood Area Council
- 90 Waban Improvement Society
- 91 Waban Neighborhood Area Council
- 92 Welcome Home
- 93 West Newton Neighborhood Association
- 94 West Suburban YMCA

Appendix B: Survey Cover Letter

Dear Neighbor,

As part of its newly launched [Municipal Transparency and Accountability Initiative](#), the League of Women Voters of Newton (LWVN) wants to know about your experiences with and views on transparency and accountability in Newton's local government.

The purpose of the **Municipal Transparency and Accountability Initiative** is to evaluate the transparency and accountability of Newton's city government and, as necessary, to advocate for specific improvements.

We are contacting you because we know that you play a leadership role in one or more groups or organizations here in Newton.

Over the next 12 months, LWVN will assess Newton's municipal transparency and accountability, with reference to the needs in our community as well as examples and best practices implemented in other communities, in the following key areas:

- **General information about municipal services, processes, and events**
- **Fiscal, operational, and demographic data**
- **Information about City Council activity**
- **Information and updates on the mayor's initiatives and priorities**
- **Information about Boards and Commissions**

LWVN seeks input from Newton groups and organizations to better understand our community's needs and experiences accessing and using information about our local government.

LWVN invites community members who are active in Newton groups and organizations to share their experiences with and views about governmental transparency in Newton by responding to [this brief survey](#):

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VDNW7TY>

by June 15, 2022.


LWVN looks forward to sharing the results of its **Municipal Transparency and Accountability Initiative** with the Newton community in 2023.

Thank you in advance for your help,

Marcia Johnson
President, League of Women Voters of Newton

P.S. Please feel free to reach out to us with any questions at LWVNsurvey@gmail.com.

Appendix C: Sample Legistar Calendar Entry from Somerville, MA



City of Somerville
Mayor Kaitiana Ballantyne

[Home](#)
[Search Agenda Items](#)
[Calendar](#)
[City Council](#)
[Committees](#)
[Office Members](#)
[Past Meetings](#)

City Council

12/8/2022 7:00 PM

City Council Chamber and Remote Participation

Agenda status:

Final-revised

Minutes status:

Final

Published agenda:

Agenda

Published minutes:

Minutes

Meeting video:

Video

Attachments:

Meeting Items (108)

105 records

Export

Show: Legislation only

File #	Ver.	Agenda #	Type	Title	Action	Result	Action Details	Video
22-2131	1	1.1.	Roll Call	Call of the Roll.	Placed on file	Pass	Roll Call	Video
22-2132	1	1.2.	Remembrances	Remembrances.	Approved	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2133	1	1.3.	Minutes	Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting, November 10, 2022.	Approved	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2134	1	2.1.	Citation	Commanding Councilor Matthew McLaughlin for his distinguished service as President of this Council in 2022.	Approved	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2135	1	2.2.	Citation	Commanding Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen for his distinguished service as Vice President of this Council in 2022.	Approved	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2136	1	4.1.	Ordinance	Amending Section 7-28 of the Code of Ordinances, the Demolition Review Ordinance, to require multilingual tenant notification for significant buildings.	Ordinance ordained	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2137	1	4.2.	Order	That the Chief of Police report to this Council, the percentage of requested traffic details for construction projects that have been filled by Somerville Police Department officers, and unfilled, for the past three years.	Approved and sent for discussion	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2138	1	4.3.	Order	That the Director of Mobility ensure a temporary protected bicycle and pedestrian detour for the portion of the Community Path between School and Medford Streets that is anticipated to be temporarily closed due to adjacent construction.	Approved	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2139	1	4.4.	Order	That the Director of Engineering install a protective guard over the expansion joint on the Medford Street bridge, as it poses a safety risk for bicyclists.	Approved and sent for discussion	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2140	1	4.5.	Communication	Informing this Council of the upcoming Highland Avenue traffic detour, projected to begin on Monday, December 12, 2022.	Placed on file	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2141	1	4.6.	Communication	Conveying a report of the Parking Study Task Force.	Placed on file	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2142	1	4.7.	Order	That the Director of Mobility increase lighting and short-term traffic calming measures on the corner of Pearl and Franklin Streets, to address safety concerns while the construction of Pearl Street is delayed.	Approved and sent for discussion	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2143	1	4.8.	Resolution	That this City Council supports the proposals of Somerville Stands Together for a municipal Green New Deal.	Approved	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2144	1	4.9.	Order	That the Director of Mobility consider installing speed humps on Highland Road, at the intersection with Morrison Avenue.	Approved and sent for discussion	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2145	1	4.10.	Order	That the Director of Capital Projects provide a list of active and proposed Capital Projects for the next five years, identifying each project's value and funding sources.	Approved	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2146	1	4.11.	Order	That the Director of the Office of Race and Social Justice, the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management and the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development document compliance with Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR) 321, Sections 3.3 and 3.5.	Approved and sent for discussion	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2147	1	4.12.	Order	That the Commissioner of Public Works consider extending yard waste pickup to December 31.	Approved	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2148	1	4.13.	Order	That the Director of Parks and Recreation and the Director of Communications work with the School Department to conduct a survey of residents to determine recreational interests and transportation needs for recreational programming, to inform departmental programming decisions.	Approved	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2149	1	4.14.	Order	That the Director of Health and Human Services and the Superintendent of Water and Sewer update this Council on the feasibility of partnering with a vendor to conduct COVID-19 wastewater testing.	Approved and sent for discussion	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2150	1	4.15.	Order	That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management and the Director of Engineering discuss with this Council, a policy of burying utilities when a new thoroughfare is constructed.	Approved and sent for discussion	Pass	Action details	Video
22-2151	1	6.A.1.	Committee Report	Report of this Special Committee on Charter Review, meeting as a Committee of the Whole on December 7, 2022.	Approved	Pass	Action details	Video

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF NEWTON

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Appendix D: Open Checkbook from Arlington, MA

Fiscal Year: 2021 [x] [Clear Filters]

Fund Type: Agency Fund | Capital Projects | Debt Service | Enterprise Funds |

General Fund | Grants | Revolving Funds | Trust Funds

Category:

Select a Category...

Department:

Select a Department...

Start Date:

mm/dd/yyyy

End Date:

mm/dd/yyyy

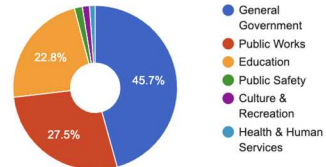
Vendor:

Select a Vendor...

Description:

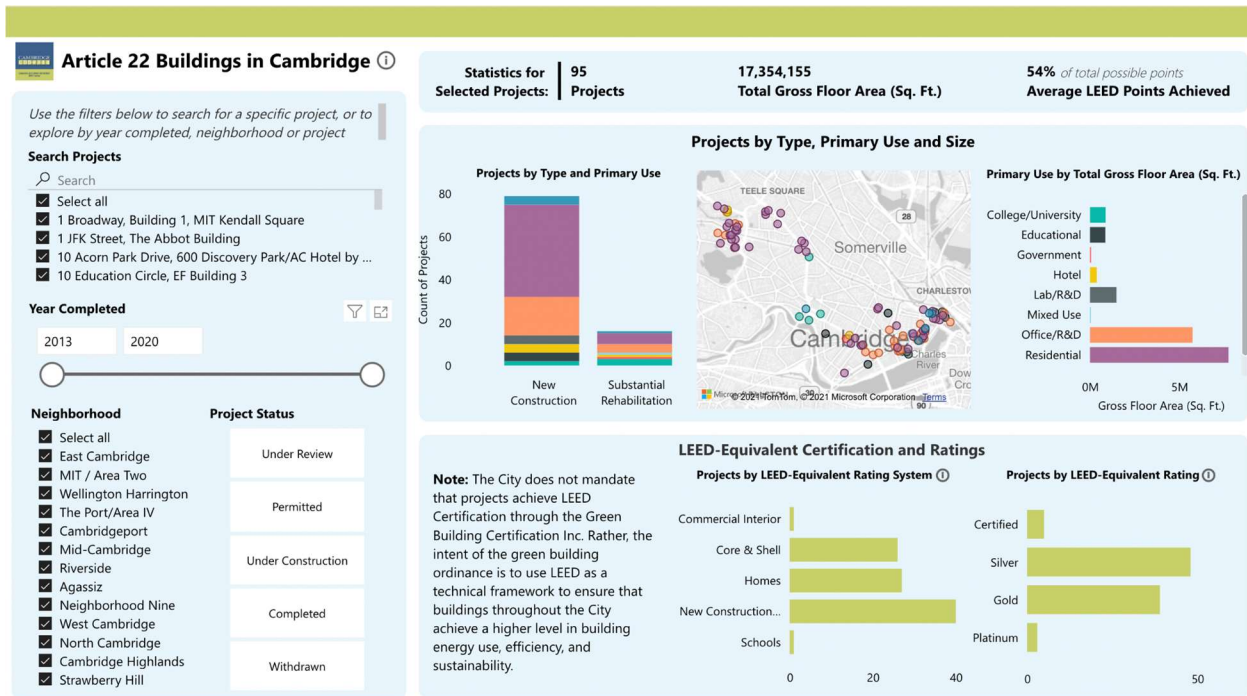
Select a Description...

Spending by Category (Total: \$91,248,927.19)



Department	Vendor	Description	Date	Amount	Check Number
School	Botos, Deborah	Professional Tech Services	Dec 02, 2021	1,102.50	512478
Human Resources	Mount Auburn Hospital	Exp:Workers Comp	Nov 11, 2021	1,711.80	511915
Fire	Mount Auburn Hospital	Hospital & Medical Care	Nov 11, 2021	1,068.86	511915
Police	Recipient	Indemnity:police Officers	Nov 11, 2021	366.91	511915
Highway	All One Health Resources, Inc	Maintenance	Oct 28, 2021	153.00	511422
Water / Sewer Enterprise	Mass Bay Transportation Authority	Maintenance	Sep 10, 2021	1,260.00	509923
Water / Sewer Enterprise	Verizon	Maintenance	Sep 10, 2021	453.87	509935
Water / Sewer Enterprise	Verizon	Water Meters	Sep 10, 2021	151.96	509935
Highway	Verizon	Maintenance	Sep 10, 2021	179.95	509935
Highway	Wanamaker Hardware Inc	Other Supplies	Sep 10, 2021	221.97	509936

Appendix E: Data Visualization of Article 22 (Green) Buildings from Cambridge MA



Appendix F: Building Project Permits from Cincy Insights (Cincinnati)

