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Date 2025-01-14 12:00:04+00:00

Subject The No. 1 thing to know about today's Needham vote

Today's Charles River Chamber's Need to Know newsletter: Large employers must now do this | Filling a hole in Newton | A 4th grader's plea

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Good morning!

It's decision day in Needham.

State and local leaders, YIMBYs, NIMBYs and many others (we understand a New York Times reporter is in town today) are looking to today's vote to repeal the town's MBTA Communities plan as a barometer.

Are residents willing to be part of the solution towards addressing the state's soul-and-economy-crushing housing shortage?

Or, will the fear of crowding; eroding "community character;" a refusal to believe the laws of supply and demand; or just not wanting to share, prevail?

"We're trying to sell a vision for the town 30, 40, or 50 years from now," Kate Weinograd chair of the leaders of the [YES for Needham](#) campaign tells [the Globe's Andrew Brinker](#). "We've used zoning in this town as a tool to prevent the sort of development that we don't want. Here, we've crafted a plan that's about what we do want."

And the "No" campaign?

They claim they're not against housing, or complying with the state MBTA Communities Law: They just don't like Needham's plan.

But who can be sure? No one from the [MAGA-red loving](#) Needham Residents for Thoughtful Zoning was willing be interviewed by the Globe, [the BBJ](#), or most other journalists (Here's the [one exception](#)).

Unlike the YES campaign, they never held any webinars, or public events, explaining their position. They've never divulged who's on their steering committee or the name of the "[licensed architect](#)" behind their scary, inaccurate renderings of buildings that would never be allowed under the new zoning.

It's was a curious campaign strategy. We'll know soon if it worked.

Here's the No. 1 thing to know before tonight

In order to repeal the October vote by Town Meeting, the "no" votes must both outnumber the "yes" votes and represent at least 20% of registered voters, or at least 5,020 "no" votes.

That's a high bar for a special election on a chilly January day.

It could conceivably happen that "no" could collect more votes and still not prevail – an uncomfortable scenario that would divide this already dividend community even further.

Polls close at 8 p.m. Find results at [The Needham Observer](#) or [Needham Local](#).

Worth reading (and listening):

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"Take it from a Milton resident: [Needham should vote 'yes' on the controversial housing plan](#)" by Globe columnist Shirley Leung.

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["An MBTA Communities reality check"](#) by Commonwealth Beacon's Jennifer Smith, [and the Codcast](#) featuring Luc Schuster, executive director of Boston Indicators, and me.

Large employers must now file EEO reports with state

The new [Wage Equity law](#) signed by Gov. Maura Healey last year includes a demographic data reporting requirement that applies to employers with 100 or more Massachusetts employees.

Covered employers are required to submit a copy of their most recent U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission report to the Commonwealth as well as the EEOC.

Beginning this month, the Secretary of State will launch a portal to collect completed EEO Workforce Data Reports. Filing deadline for employers is Feb. 3. [Details](#)

Newton looking to join generational butt ban

Newton could soon join Brookline, Needham and about other municipalities by imposing a [generational tobacco ban](#).

The Newton ban would prohibit sales in Newton of tobacco or e-cigarette products to anyone born after March 1, 2004. The decision would impact 35 retailers in Newton who could lose not just lose sales of tobacco products but on all the other items customers might have bought at the same time but are now buying in, say, Waltham or Boston.

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller wrote in her [newsletter](#) that she supports the ban. The ordinance goes before the Newton City Council on Jan. 21. [Share your opinion here](#) with councilors

Needham's generational tobacco ban was [approved late last year](#) and applies to anyone born after Jan.1, 2004 and impacts six licensed tobacco retailers.

Watertown Night honorees announced, tickets selling fast

Our judges met the other day and have selected the Watertown Community Foundation, O'Some Cafe, Archy LaSalle and Max Ritcey of Ritcey East to receive our first ever Watertown Business Awards.

They'll be recognized at the chamber's first annual [Watertown Night](#), Thursday, Jan. 23, 5:30 p.m. at Donohue's Bar and Grill.

More than 80 people have RSVP'd so far and it's going to be a who's who of local officials, business owners and residents.

Barabino stepping down at Olin

Olin College of Engineering President Gilda Barabino, will step down at the end of the academic year, after five years in that role. She plans to join the school's faculty.

Both [WBUR](#) and [the Globe](#) dig into the financial and academic challenges facing the Needham college which is renown for producing entrepreneurs and placing graduates at many of the nation's leading tech and other companies.

Tuesday grab bag

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The Charles River Regional Chamber's Board of Directors has elected [three new directors](#) to three year terms: [Elizabeth Holmes](#), director of corporate services at R.W. Holmes Commercial Real Estate; [Ellen Tanowitz](#), attorney, Tanowitz Law Office; and [Michela Desantis](#), senior development manager, Boylston Properties.

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Willow Bridge Property is looking to build a 369 unit, five-story, apartment building at 1361 Main Street in Waltham, under Chapter 40B. ([Waltham Times](#))

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Gov. Maura Healey's 2026 budget will include a provision to do away with renter-paid broker's fees. (State House News).

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Lemon Thai at 555 Washington Street in Wellesley is no longer in business.

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Babson College hosts an Undergraduate Student Resource Fair, Jan 24. Over 400 undergraduate students are expected. [Sign up for a table](#) or [contact KateDeeb](#).

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Learn about Eversource's proposed underground electric transmission cable replacement project along Chestnut Street south of Needham Junction, Jan. 22, at 5 p.m. in-person at Powers Hall or on Zoom, Jan. 27, 5:30 p.m. [Details](#).

Surely, no one's going to oppose this, right?

Have you ever wondered about that [hole in the ground](#) on Washington Street, right in the heart of Nonantum? We sure do—and have for [quite a while](#).

The former location of [Salvi's Barbershop](#), barber John Mula has been trying to develop the [long vacant lot](#) at 386-394 Watertown Street for about a decade.

His building was demolished around 2020 and he was approved to build ten units. But the project never penciled out.

Now Mula believes he has a finically feasible plan and has [proposed](#) a 13-unit mixed-use apartment building there. It features three affordable units, ten market-rate units, and 14 parking spaces.

His updated project must go through the city's special permit process and receive a zoning change, which is no easy task, especially in a neighborhood that's been resistant to development.

But, surely no one in The Lake going to object to a neighborhood guy building some modest apartments next to local shops, right? Right?

We'll keep you updated.

Don't take my word for this, take this fourth grader's

I'll leave you today (sorry these newsletters have been so long, it's been too darn busy), not with another diatribe from me about our urgent need for housing, but with an except from an essay about Needham's MBTA Communities referendum written by a 10-year-old, fourth grader, attending one of the town's elementary schools.

It was posted by her mom on the (closed group) Needham Facebook page:

"New people can be exciting and bring new opportunities!" the 10-year-old writes. "Like, for example, one of my best friends recently moved here and now there is an awesome addition to [my school]. Imagine how many new friends everyone would have with more housing! And let's say someone moves in and opens a new grocery store in town center that's convenient and it brings in more job opportunities!"

“...I’m saying as the future generation... If you want to be able to stay in our hometown, we need apartments to start our lives off. Less people won’t do us any good, so VOTE YES FOR NEEDHAM!”

That’s what you need to know for today, unless you want to see the highway signs the satirists at McSweeney's designed [just for Massachusetts](#).

Be back later this week.

I value [your feedback](#)

[Greg Reibman \(he, him\)](#)

President & CEO

Charles River Regional Chamber

617.244.1688

NEXT WEEK

Building a Supportive Workplace Against Domestic Violence

Tues. Jan 21, noon to 1 p.m.

via Zoom

Free, open to members & nonmembers

We all feel the impacts of domestic violence, whether we can identify it or not. In this webinar led by [Sydney Carter](#), Community Engagement Specialist at [REACH Beyond Domestic Violence](#), we will discuss how domestic violence can impact our colleagues and our work environments.

Participants will gain knowledge on how to support their colleagues and create a supportive workplace environment

REGISTE

R NOW

Small Business Seminar Series Sponsors

FREE NETWORKING EVENT

Coffee Connect at Papa Razzi Wellesley

Tues Jan 28, 8:30-9:30 a.m.

16 Washington Street, Wellesley

Free for members & future members

Start your morning off with coffee, conversation, and connections! Our popular Coffee Connect series kicks off 2025 at Papa Razzi in Wellesley Hills. Our hosts are opening early exclusively for this event. Join us to expand your network, exchange ideas, and build meaningful relationships with fellow Chamber members and local business professionals.

Our coffee connects often draw 75+ and are open to members and those interested in learning more about chamber membership.

REGISTE

R NOW

Coffee Connect Series Sponsors

We're hiring! Programs & Events Manager

A rare opening on our small but mighty chamber team!

We are seeking a dynamic and motivated Programs and Events Manager who is eager to learn and grow within our organization. This role offers a unique opportunity to develop skills in event planning, marketing, and community engagement. Collaborate closely with our team, members, volunteers, sponsors, and community partners to execute a diverse calendar of 70+ annual programs and events, including networking opportunities, webinars,

forums, fundraisers, and community gatherings.

[Learn more, spread the word and apply here.](#)

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Support our community, strengthen our advocacy

& access resources to grow your business.

OUR MISSION

is to champion our communities' economic
and cultural vitality through education, advocacy and networking.

OUR TEAM

[Greg Reibman](#), President & CEO

[Lise Ann Q. Elcock](#), VP, Membership & Development

[Katherine Herer](#), VP, Operations

[Tracey Aldrich Antaya](#), Membership Engagement Director

[Maxime Isaac](#), Member Services Manager

[Max Woolf](#), Public Policy Manager

EVENTS REFUND POLICY

Unless otherwise noted, event registrations are transferrable but not refundable.

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