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Date 2025-01-23 12:00:09+00:00

Subject A big housing opportunity in Newton

Plus: What employers need to know about UI taxes | What's next now that Needham voters said no to the town's MBTA-C plan

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Good morning friends,

We have news today about an interesting opportunity to create new housing in Newton. Plus we have an update on how Needham plans to respond after voters rejected its MBTA Communities Act plan last week.

But first, an important update for every employer related to the Unemployment Insurance Tax.

UI Insurance tax deal could still break employers' backs

Before turning over the wi-fi password to a new administration last week, Joe Biden's US Department of Labor

reached a deal with the Healey administration over that \$2.5 billion [unemployment insurance mistake](#) made by the Baker administration during the pandemic.

The bottom line? Rather than paying the feds back \$2.5 billion (plus \$487 million in interest), the tab was reduced to \$2 billion to be paid over 10 years (with \$73 million in interest).

Here's a [FAQ from the state](#) explaining what new agreement means to employers.

The agreement came amidst some fears that the Trump administration might not have [been as generous](#) to Massachusetts. And the outcome matters a lot to the state's employers who already fund the most expensive UI system in the nation.

Pius, Massachusetts employers are currently being taxed through 2028 to cover an added [\\$2.7 billion UI debt](#) shelled out during the pandemic.

Oh, and even before accounting for those additional payments, the state's UI Trust Fund was slated to be hundreds of millions of dollars in the red by the end of 2028.

As part of this week's settlement announcement, the state said there will be no immediate change to employers' bills through at least the end of 2026. And interest payments to the feds will come out of the state's general fund not UI, [reports the Globe's Jon Chesto](#).

This week Healey promised to pursue measures to reform the UI system and lighten the burden on employers. That can't happen soon enough.

But at some point the fear is this mistake could land on employers' backs. No one should underestimate how challenging that would be.

A housing idea that could be a regional game changer

Here's an interesting idea that could make a meaningful dent in our housing shortage, particularly for younger workers.

UMass/Amherst is [accepting proposals from developers](#) to build housing and/or mixed-use projects on its main campus in Amherst as well as its [Mount Ida Campus](#) in Newton.

The university is pitching the idea as a way “to create a comprehensive, long-range plan to modernize campus housing and maintain affordability for decades” and it’s an intriguing one.

Adding housing, along with perhaps some retail, at Mount Ida could ease regional pressures for undergraduate, graduate and non-student housing and greatly benefit employers who’ve struggled to attract or retain workers due to our acute housing shortage. Providing on-campus housing to students in part-time [professional graduate programs](#) is one way to attract young, skilled workers to the region.

It might also conceivably provide a university retirement community for seniors who would be attracted to living near campus amenities and learning.

The bucolic Mount Ida Campus [is 66 acres](#), not all of which is currently being used by its experiential learning and professional development and other programs.

Development on the property would not require a special permit from the city and has the support of the Healey-Driscoll administration.

In a statement, Housing Secretary Ed Augustus said the initiative “is in line with the administration’s priority to leverage state-owned land, build new housing, and drive down costs.”

Commercial real estate advisory firm Newmark is managing the procurement process. [Details.](#)

A warm thought for a cold week

Our always popular Spring Seasonings tasting event returns to the Newton Marriott on April 7.

Contact [Lise Elcock](#) if you’d like to learn about [becoming a sponsor](#).

Today’s grab bag

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The [Wellesley Wonderland Ice Sculpture Stroll](#) returns tomorrow (Friday) 4-6 p.m. Stroll Linden, Wellesley, and Church Squares discover whimsical ice sculpture and enjoy live music, food sampling, hot chocolate stations, costumed characters, plus in-store promotions and discounts.

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Newton’s [WinterFEST](#), hosted by Newton Community Pride, starts tomorrow (Friday) and continues through Sunday, offering a weekend of free, accessible winter activities ([free soup!](#)) for the whole community.

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Our first-annual Watertown Night event tonight is sold out. Our Feb. 5 [Winter Celebration](#) at William James College is almost sold out.

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Housing advocates who battled intentionally misleading skyscraper graphics [in Newton last year](#) and in Needham during the recent referendum can [feel Somerville's pain](#).

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Congratulations to Douglass Williams of [MIDA Newton](#) at Trio who was just named a [2025 James Beard semifinalist](#) for Outstanding Restaurateur.

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The Needham Human Rights Committee is hosting a forum on the new administration's immigration policy with Heather Yountz, an immigration attorney at the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, Jan. 27, 7:30 p.m., at the Center at the Heights and on Zoom. [Details](#)

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Gov. Maura Healey will reportedly file legislation next week that would allow municipalities to raise meals, hotel and car excise taxes. Healey [tried](#) but was unable to pass a similar measure last year. ([Globe](#))

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Former Newton School Committee member Geoffrey Epstein is running for mayor of Framingham against incumbent Charlie Sisitsky. ([Metrowest Daily News](#))

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President Trump has discussed imposing widespread or targeted tariffs as high as 25%. Please take a moment to respond to a Retailers Association of Massachusetts [survey](#) to help direct RAM on reactions to this potential action.

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If you appreciate the chamber's advocacy and events, we'd appreciate it if you'd take one minute to post a Google Review for the Charles River Chamber [here](#). Thanks!

Newton adopts generational tobacco ban

Newton City Councilors voted this week, 19-4, to approve a ban on selling tobacco and e-cigarette products in Newton to anyone born after March 1, 2004, no matter how long that person lives.

The city will become the 13th municipality in the state (including [Needham](#), only to anyone born after Jan. 1, 2004) to pass a generational ban, [according to Fig City News](#). It impacts 35 Newton businesses that sell tobacco products.

It comes just as [two state lawmakers filed a bill](#) last week that would ban nicotine sales in Massachusetts to anyone born after 2005. That seems like a fairer way to approach this, rather than a hodge-podge of different rules in different communities.

Needham moving toward paper compliance housing plan

Finally, on the heels of last week's disappointing but [decisive rejection](#) of Needham's MBTA Communities compliance plan by voters, the Needham Select Board and Planning Board unanimously [voted Tuesday](#) to adopt a [paper compliance approach](#).

Both bodies moved to support the Base Compliance Plan, which meets the state mandate but is projected to yield little housing.

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An independent analysis found the Base Plan might create about 411 new homes over the next decade or more.

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Compared that to the rejected Neighborhood Housing Plan which was projected to yield about [1,288 new middle market and affordable](#) homes over a decade and have made a meaningful dent in town's housing needs.

During the select board meeting Vice-Chair Heidi Frail, who had gallantly lead the effort to pass the bolder plan, said that while she was disappointed by the referendum result, she accepted it and emphasized that the process worked as intended. She also expressed a desire to understand how the process might be improved in the future.

The town will now forward the Base Plan to the state as an "action plan," which if approved, will put Needham in interim compliance until Town Meeting in May. The Planning Board will hold a public hearing, Feb. 13 at the Broadmeadow School.

The [Needham Observer has more](#).

That's what you need to know for today, unless you need to know why [cattle gallstones are worth more than gold](#).

There's more to tell you, so I'll be back tomorrow.

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

President & CEO

Charles River Regional Chamber

617.244.1688

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LOW TICKET ALERT!!!

Winter Celebration at William James College

Wed Feb 5, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

1 Wells Ave, Newton

Limited tickets remain

Our annual Winter Celebration is always a can't miss event. Connect with business, nonprofit, and civic leaders, celebrate our community, and support the work of the chamber in a lively and festive atmosphere.

This year, we'll gather at William James College, a renowned Newton-based institution dedicated to mental health education and leadership development.

Explore this modern, space, mingle with old friends, and make new connections while enjoying delicious food and drink provided by chamber-member [Better Life Food](#).

Register early and save! Additional discounts available for group ticket purchases – this is the perfect event to bring your friends, colleagues and clients to celebrate our business community and kick off 2025!

REGISTER

SOON

PRESENTING SPONSOR

NEXT WEEK...Please share with your 21-30-year-old colleagues
2025 Young Professionals Group Open House

Thurs Jan 30, noon to 1 p.m.

Hybrid (via Zoom or in-person at Workbar Needham, 117 Kendrick St, Ste 300, Needham)

Free for members & future members, ages 21-40

Come learn how to get involved with the chamber's Young Professionals Group in 2025. This kickoff meeting (in person with virtual option) will be an opportunity to meet current committee members, learn about ways to get involved, preview event plans for 2025 and provide input on initiatives/programs you'd like to see from the chamber's young professionals group this coming year.

Can't attend but interested in learning more? Reach out to Katherine Herer (kherer@charlesriverchamber.com) or Caroline Cueva (ccueva@gscommunitycare.org)

REGISTE

R NOW

Young Professionals Group Series Sponsors

[Watch](#) our latest webinar featuring a panel of experts sharing how employers can retain and assist visually impaired employees.

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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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