



WINTER 2021

UPGRADED DROP BOXES AT TOWN HALL



With safety a top priority for Town Hall employees and guests, residents are strongly encouraged to conduct their Town transactions virtually. Payments can be made online at www.wakefield.ma.us/online-payments for many services, including taxes, water bills, white-goods stickers, refuse bags, cemetery services, and more. Many forms and applications can also be accessed on the Town's website www.wakefield.ma.us.

Town Hall has installed new drop boxes to make submitting documents to staff quick and easy. These boxes are clearly marked and located near the accessible parking spaces and sidewalk ramp, to the left of the Town Hall entrance.

DATES TO NOTE

Tax Collector

Third-quarter actual real estate bill due:
February 1, 2021

Third-quarter actual personal property bill due:
February 1, 2021

2021 motor vehicle excise bill commitment #1
Issued February 4, 2021 | Due March 8, 2021

Assessing Department

Abatement applications due:
February 1, 2021

Statutory exemptions due:
April 1, 2021



In 2015, Wakefield lifted its December-to-April on-street parking ban and now enforces parking limitations on an emergency basis.

When preparing for a snow event, the Town often initiates a temporary restriction of on-street parking. This allows plowing crews and public safety vehicles to safely access the roads and perform curb-to-curb cleanup. Parking ban announcements and other emergency notifications are made via our CodeRED e-alert system.

All parked cars must be removed from the roadways during a parking ban. If your residence does not have a driveway, connect with your landlord for parking options or coordinate with a neighbor who has extra driveway space. Vehicles that interfere with snow operations or emergency-vehicle access may be towed.

FROM THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

With cold weather coming and rising local and national COVID-19 numbers, the mettle of our citizens, guests, and Town employees has been tested. Despite the fact that most in Wakefield adhered to the suggested protocols, our COVID-19 numbers climbed and, at points, we've found ourselves labeled as a high-risk community. In our personal and business lives, we have had to adapt. Patrons still (as of this writing) enjoy outdoor dining, meeting friends in our public spaces (small groups, socially distanced, and masked), or "braving" chillier elements by hosting small family gatherings outside. I am curious as to how the sales of wool socks and long underwear are doing?

From a government standpoint, the Town continued its business. Town Clerk Betsy Sheeran and her election team presided over a flawless federal election. Close to 17,000 eligible voters cast their ballots either by mail, early in person, or at the polls on Election Day. Many took advantage of our secure election box and dropped off ballots at Town Hall. Social media was flooded with pictures of proud voters exercising their constitutional right. No issues here as all votes were counted and the results certified in a timely fashion.

On November 7, 2020, with the tremendous assistance of our Department of Public Works employees, Wakefield Community Access TV (WCAT), Town Moderator Bill Carroll, and Assistant Town Moderator David Watts, Wakefield held its second successful COVID-era Town Meeting. Over 200 registered voters, a high number for the November Town meeting, debated and voted on a number of important issues facing the Town. Again,

citizens were offered the choice to participate in the Field House or in a tent just outside. Around eighty people utilized the outdoor option. All participant votes were counted, regardless of seating location, and the meeting was conducted flawlessly. To my knowledge, no COVID cases were traced to either the June or November Town Meetings. Many citizens commented that they felt very comfortable and appreciated the efforts. Many also mentioned to me that they preferred the Saturday schedule, something we will have to discuss.

Realizing the importance of in-person classroom instruction, our schools continued to offer a hybrid model of education with safety as a top priority. Kudos to Superintendent Doug Lyons and his team for putting the needs of Wakefield students first.

In the summer 2020 newsletter, we reported on our new online permitting and licensing process. I am happy to report that we were able to process and approve over 150 licenses, including all restaurants and alcohol establishments, via the online portal. This was a learning experience for everyone, but the results were excellent. Thanks to Sherri Dalton for helping the businesses through the process. We continue to learn how to be more efficient, create less paper, and provide greater real-time access to information and processes, the one positive outcome of the pandemic.

Not all is rosy, however. We are forced to postpone until next year some of our more cherished traditions. We could not allow in-person lighting of the Christmas lights or the Menorah. *(continued on page 3)*

WELCOME

Since joining the team as Wakefield's Community and Economic Development Director in November, Erin Kokinda has been connecting with municipal colleagues and the business community.

"I have engaged with various planning and economic development organizations to best position Wakefield for success," says the former Deputy Director of the Middlesex 3 Coalition. "I've met with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, Boston MPO, Small Business Administration, Wakefield Lynnfield Chamber of Commerce, Wakefield Main Streets, and Massachusetts Office of Business Development, and many others. I've also been making internal connections within Town Hall in an effort to make Wakefield a business- and development-friendly community."

Programming has been developed for our small business community that will assist in recovery and planning for 2021. In December, Wakefield hosted a "Small Business Resource" webinar with a number of our local, state, and federal business organizations to highlight the resources available to our small-business community. In January 2021, we will kick off a Digital Marketing Webinar Series and Grant Program for our small-business community. Please visit the Community and Economic Development web page to learn more: www.wakefield.ma.us/community-and-economic-development.

"If you are considering opening or expanding a business, or are interested in a new development project, please reach out," Kokinda notes. "I can assist with site searches, technical assistance, and the permitting and zoning process. You can reach me directly at 781-246-6397 or ekokinda@wakefield.ma.us."

The live Nativity, Holiday Stroll, and Santa's House have all been postponed to 2021. However, in great Wakefield spirit, we adapted. Both the tree and Menorah lightings were broadcast virtually. The Wakefield Community Partnership continued to promote our local businesses on social media as if the Stroll had actually occurred. WCAT, in partnership with the local dance schools, filmed a number of performances that the public can enjoy remotely. Finally, the Wakefield Chamber of Commerce partnered with the Town to bring a little holiday cheer to our young and old with a Santa Parade through the neighborhoods.

The spirit, ingenuity, and generosity of our Town employees, business owners, and citizens continue to amaze. These groups work together for the benefit of the Town in a quiet and selfless manner. I have struggled to suitably define this sense of community spirit. Recently, I read a Boston Globe Magazine article about the 2007-2008 Boston Celtics. This was the year that Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce, and Ray Allen were introduced to each other as teammates. We all remember how great that team was as they sacrificed individual glory for team excellence. Ultimately, the team won the National Championship. What we may not recall is that 2007-2008 Celtics adopted the philosophy of Ubuntu as their mantra. In fact, the Celtics often broke their huddles by shouting Ubuntu.

The philosophy of Ubuntu is open to many interpretations, but my sole focus here is on inter-connectiveness and striving for a greater good. To paraphrase, Archbishop Desmond Tutu described a

person with Ubuntu as one who is open and available to others, affirms others, and does not feel threatened that others are able and good. Also, a person with Ubuntu is conscious that he/she belongs to a greater whole. In other words, our very success is linked to the success of others.

I personally believe that we do not lose our individuality when we get tied to the success of the others. Rather, our individuality is enhanced. Archbishop Tutu's words are so more elegant than my, "It's all about the W," yet the message is essentially the same.

I am so ever grateful for all of the selfless work of our employees, business owners, and citizens. Again, much gratitude to Emergency Management Director Tom Walsh who has been working every day to ensure that the Town's people and employees have the resources they need to manage through COVID-19. Health Director Ruth Clay, her staff, and the Board of Health have not only advised us on the proper protocols, but have followed up on every single COVID-19 case and question. Finally, we all share a debt of gratitude to the steady guidance of the Town Council. Their support of all aspects of the community is unmatched.

Please stay safe, wear a mask, social distance, and wash your hands.

Ubuntu,
Stephen P. Maio

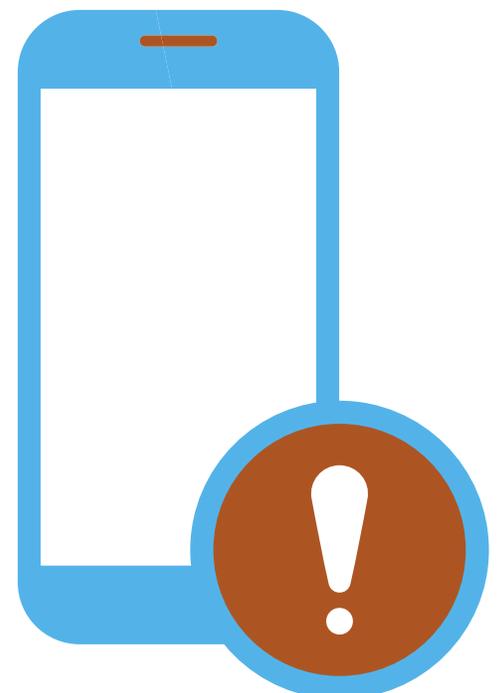
CodeRED E-ALERTS

Wakefield's CodeRED platform gives public safety leaders the ability to deliver timely information via phone, email, or text. This system can be used in emergency situations like drinking water contamination, evacuation notices, and parking bans. All residents and business owners should register.

Sign up today. Visit www.wakefield.ma.us and select "Subscribe to CodeRED E-Alerts" from the "Get Town News" drop-down menu. Be sure to choose the "create a managed account" option when you register so that you can update your contact information or remove yourself if you move out of town.

CodeRED is a geographical-based notification system, so a street address is required even if your cell phone is your preferred contact method. Those who move within Wakefield should update their accounts with their new addresses.

Residents and businesses without internet access are encouraged to contact a friend or family member for assistance or connect with the Wakefield Fire Department at 781-246-6435 to sign up.





Residents and merchants can promote the Ws, the easy ways we can keep Wakefield healthy: wash your hands, wear a mask, watch your distance....Wakefield pride!

Complimentary window decals featuring these best practices are now available in the Town Hall lobby, the Wakefield Co-operative Bank, or the lobby of the Chamber of Commerce office at 5 Common Street.

ASSESSING NEWS AND NOTES

Our annual classification hearing with the Town Council was held on October 15, 2020. This public hearing is a requirement of Massachusetts General Law and necessary in order to establish tax rates and send tax bills in a timely manner. Classification was adopted by the Councilors and subsequently approved by the state's Department of Revenue. Our fiscal year 2021 tax rates will be:

- \$12.73 residential
- \$24.67 commercial / industrial / personal (CIP)

The Assessing Department engaged in a state-mandated interim revaluation of the Town for fiscal year 2021 using calendar year 2019 sales as a basis for most residential sales and 2018-2019 for other classes where there were too few sales to analyze. The average single-family home valuation increased from \$555,900 to \$588,200, or about 5.81 percent. Commercial and industrial properties rose 1 percent for the same period.

Data obtained from MLS Property Information Network, Inc. indicated that the average sale price for a single-family home in Wakefield increased from \$580,530 to \$598,663 from 2018 to 2019 while days on market went from 40 to 35 days.

Once again, the Town Council selected the lowest residential factor allowed by law, which saves residential taxpayers an average of \$830. Also, in our first year offering the Wakefield Senior Discount, 162 Wakefield seniors qualified for this new exemption and many were able to see their tax bills reduced by almost 15 percent. Please check our website, www.wakefield.ma.us, for additional details.

Fiscal year 2021 also represents the seventh year of the full Debt Exclusion for the new Galvin Middle School. This added \$2,485,697 to our total tax levy and conforms to the restrictions of Proposition 2 ½. It adds \$0.40 to the

residential tax rate, or \$236 on the average single-family tax bill; \$0.76 is added to the CIP tax rate, or \$1,040 to those bills.

The average single-family value for fiscal year 2021 is \$588,200. Although the residential tax rate was lowered, increased housing values contribute to the overall tax bill increase of \$389, for an average total of \$7,088. The commercial tax bill is expected to average \$33,724. Since 2006, the average single-family tax bill increase has been 4.46 percent.

Property owners must be mindful that the assessments they see on their tax bills due February 1, 2021 are reflective of real estate market activity during 2019. Assessments are one year behind today's market. Sales activity from 2020 will be used for assessments next year.

NEWS AND EVENTS, ANYTIME

Web

Visit anytime for news and information at www.wakefield.ma.us.

Email

Never miss a message! News posted to our website can be sent right to your inbox. Visit our website and click "Get Town News" in the upper right corner of the screen. You can also opt to receive agendas for upcoming meetings of interest.

Community Events

View community events and submit your own on the community calendar managed by the Beebe Library. Access it, and the public meeting calendar, on our homepage.