

## Residents sound off on Main Street design project

BY MAUREEN SULLIVAN

A room full of residents spoke out on proposals to the Main Street Improvement Project during a public forum April 16 at the Community-Senior Center.

Their concerns ranged from having some of the bike lanes flush with the sidewalks to parking and bump outs, which are generally use to slow traffic.

“We have real problems on Main Street,” said one resident, who is a cyclist. “How do bike lanes improve congestion?” He added that to pursue bike lanes for Main Street would be “a fool’s errand.”

Another resident said the design was “beautiful,” but



Josh Ostroff fields questions about the Main Street Improvement Project during a public forum on April 16 at the Community-Senior Center. Photo by Maureen Sullivan

agreed that the proposed bike lanes would make the road narrower.

Members of the project team emphasized the

need for the project itself, as well as the importance

### PROJECT

continued on page 3

## New assistant chief fired up about position

BY SANDY QUADROS BOWLES  
 EDITOR

As Natick grows, so does the demand on the town’s fire department.

That is one reason that Christopher Hampton has been promoted to the role of assistant fire chief.

This new position, which he started in February, provides daily oversight to allow the chief to take on broader responsibilities.

The job was created to ensure there is a chief officer dedicated to the day to day operations, “someone who is directly connected to our crews and focused on training, safety, and readiness,” Hampton said.

While the chief has a broader strategic focus, Hampton’s new role provides firefighters with “the leadership support they need on



New deputy fire chief Christopher Hampton hopes to be a voice for the firefighters he oversees. Photo by Sandy Quadros Bowles

the ground every day.”

The job reflects the department’s growing call volume. In 2024, the department broke the 6,000 call number for the first

### ASSISTANT CHIEF

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# 'Soccer's Big Event' is coming to 'Boston Stadium'

## Two million people will be looking for things to do in surrounding towns

BY THERESA KNAPP

*Editor's note: Due to copyright issues, the more commonly known name for the football/soccer matches cannot be used by publications outside of the official association. We are calling it "Soccer's Big Event."*

The most popular sport in the world is football (or "soccer" in the U.S.) and this year several matches of the global soccer tournament – or "Soccer's Big Event" – will be played in June and July in Massachusetts.

Boston is one of 16 cities across North America that will host matches. Specific dates for the Boston area will be announced closer to the event, but will be between June 13 and July 9.

At a recent Tourism Summit and Legislative Breakfast hosted by the MetroWest Boston Visitors Bureau, state and local officials explained how Massachusetts is preparing for the event.

The main speaker at the conference was Greta Teller of "Bostonfwc26," the group that is overseeing local logistics for the world organization. She said there are many ways MetroWest communities can provide experiences for the

millions of visitors who are expected to flood the area.

"Two million people are coming, and there are only 740,000 tickets," Teller said. "And many of those people are coming without tickets and will need things to do."

There are opportunities for communities all around Eastern Massachusetts, and beyond, to join in the festivities and revelry, Teller said, adding fans just want to be in Massachusetts to support their team, which is an opportunity for local fan festivals, fan marches, fan zones, pep rallies, watch parties, and more.

The event, Teller said, will provide a significant boost to hotels, restaurants and other local businesses; and the Bostonfwc is encouraging towns to organize fan festivals and cultural celebrations in the area, and to promote those events through the organization's website and the MWVB (for free).

At the summit, it was noted that MetroWest has the largest population of Brazilians outside of Brazil, Brockton has the largest Cape Verde population outside of Cape Verde, and Worcester is home to a large Ghana population – all of which

can be a consideration when organizing activities around Soccer's Big Event.

MetroWest Visitors Bureau Executive Director Stacey David said local towns and organizations should think about experiences visitors might enjoy and market them accordingly – anything related to arts, culture, living history, outdoor activities (trail systems) – will be a big draw.

"Think about what you have in your town, and let the MetroWest Visitors Bureau help promote it," said David.

However, the very first action anyone should take, she said, is to change all website references from "Gillette Stadium" to "Boston Stadium," which is what visitors will be searching for when planning their trip.

When creating watch parties and other events, organizers should consult the organization's public viewing regulations, including broadcast licenses, branding, etc., which can be found at <https://bit.ly/FIFA-publicViewing>.

The MetroWest Boston Visitors Bureau is available to provide assistance to local organizations. The organization



"Soccer's Big Event" is coming to "Boston Stadium" in June and July. Image created by Theresa Knapp using ChatGPT

promotes travel and tourism throughout the 19 towns of the MetroWest region, which include Ashland, Bellingham, Framingham, Franklin, Holliston, Hopedale, Hopkinton, Hudson, Marlborough, Medway, Milford, Millis, Natick, Northborough, Sherborn, Southborough, Sudbury, Wayland, and Westborough, according to [www.metrowest-visitors.org](http://www.metrowest-visitors.org).

**Many visitors know they will not get a ticket but they want to be in Massachusetts to support their team, which is an opportunity for local fan festivals, fan marches, pep rallies, watch parties, and more.**

~Greta Teller, Bostonfwc26  
<https://bostonfwc26.com>

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**PROJECT**

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of public input.

“This is a challenging project,” said Morgan Griffiths, the town’s transportation and economic development planner. “Main Street is the heart of Natick.”

The project, which would stretch from Cottage Street to Middlesex Avenue, would address several issues identified by the town’s Complete Streets policy and other surveys. This would include updated signal timing, streetscape upgrades and improvements to the pavement and sidewalks.

“Main Street is declining in quality,” said Griffiths. “There are safety concerns.”

As part of the improvements, Court Street would be turned one-way, from Washington Street to Main Street.

A chief goal is to use state and federal funds to pay for the project, with a cost estimate of \$11 million, once it’s finalized and ready to go. And that is where the forum began buzzing.

The town hopes to use funds from the Transportation Improvement Project (TIP) or MassWorks. “TIP would be the most fiscally responsible,” said Griffiths, because the program



**Residents inspect the “hybrid” approach to the Main Street Improvement Project public forum.** Photo by Maureen Sullivan

could pick up the entire \$11 million tab.

However, there’s a catch: The program requires dedicated bike lanes. The MassWorks grant would be for a maximum of \$5 million, but has no requirements on bike lanes.

The project team also announced the results of a Flash-Vote conducted in early April. The main takeaways of the input received is that parking is perceived as “hard to find,” and there’s no strong consensus for or against bike lanes. Preferences included having protected lanes; bike racks and parking; and placing bike lanes on nearby streets.

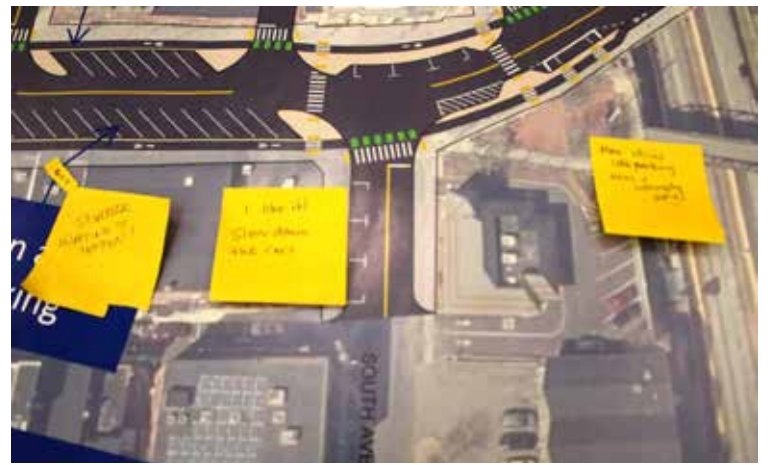
Once the forum entered the question-and-answer period, res-

idents keyed in on the proposed bike lanes, part of which would be flush with the sidewalks, as well as the parking situation.

Diane Young, a resident and Town Meeting member, asked how emergency vehicles, including fire engines, would be able to negotiate Main Street with the new design patterns, and why there’s such a rush to get these plans before the Select Board.

Feedback from the public forum, as well as the FlashVote and other online survey forms, will be compiled and brought before the Select Board on May 13. At this meeting, the board is expected to decide whether to bring the hybrid plan to the design phase.

Project team members and



**Some of the public comments regarding proposed changes to Main Street, including parking and the possible inclusion of bike lanes.** Photo by Maureen Sullivan



**This “hybrid” approach to improving downtown Natick includes bump-outs and having Court Street go one-way from Washington Street to Main Street.** Photo by Maureen Sullivan

town officials emphasized that nothing has been finalized about the project, and changes will continue to be made.

The project’s webpage may

be found at [www.natickma.gov/main-st-study](http://www.natickma.gov/main-st-study)

Ideas or concerns about the project can be emailed to [communications@natickma.org](mailto:communications@natickma.org).

# Pedaling for a good cause: Kids Ride set May 17



**Kids pedal to show their mettle.** Courtesy photo

There is no age limit to caring as youngsters will prove at an upcoming ride in town.

The 18th Annual Natick Pan Mass Challenge (PMC) Kids Ride will be held on Sunday, May 17 at Belkin Family Look-out Farm. As an official Pan Mass Challenge program, the Natick PMC Kids Ride is a way to include young cyclists in

the mission to raise money for cancer research and treatment at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

Last year, the race attracted 500 people to cheer on 200 riders. Each year organizers aim to increase ridership because every dollar raised goes to the Pan Mass Challenge/Jimmy Fund.

Kids also have the option to raise funds in the name of a relative or friend fighting cancer, or to dedicate their ride to a special

person.

“In 2016, my son Finn Carlson was born at 24 weeks. During his NICU stay, he was

diagnosed with cancer and

## **PEDALING**

*continued on page 14*

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# South Natick dam scheduled to be removed this summer

By MAUREEN SULLIVAN

An historic symbol of South Natick admired by generations of artists and nature lovers is closer to being removed.

According to the town's Department of Public Works, the Charles River Dam is scheduled to be demolished later this year, as part of overall site improvements.

The town has sent out bids for a dam removal contractor. According to Town Administrator James Errickson, "the bidding process is nearing completion with a potential award this spring."

He added that "a contract is not yet executed, but pending final contract award the work is targeted for this summer."

The town decided to remove the dam following a "high hazard" designation from the state's Office of Dam Safety, meaning failure could lead to

serious damage and loss of life. In addition, inspections by the town and state over the past several years have revealed erosion on top of the earthen berm and deteriorated stone and masonry on the walls on both sides of the spillway.

According to the town's Conservation Commission, taking down the dam would remove the threat of a potential breach; reduce flooding during and after storms; and help improve fish migration and adjacent wildlife habitats.

A dam has been a part of South Natick since its establishment as a Praying Indian community in the 1700s.

Until the early 1900s, the dam provided water power for a grist mill. When the mill was removed, and the present dam built in 1934, the millstones became part of the viewing area.

Most of the costs for the dam removal are being covered with a \$1 million Dam and Seawall grant from the state. The current costs are estimated at about \$1.2 million.

The removal is part of two separate but related projects. The Recreation and Parks Department is planning upgrades



Long an attraction for artists and nature lovers, the Charles River Dam is scheduled to be removed over the summer, as part of a site improvement project. Photo by Maureen Sullivan

to the parks flanking the river, as well as the multipurpose area and the Hunnewell fields, both off Pleasant Street.

According to Andrea Snell, the town's director of Community Services, the upgrades will include new accessible walkways, picnic area, new tree plantings, rain gardens, stormwater improvements, and a small paved parking space at the multipurpose area.

The project is still in its early planning stages, including design work and cost estimates.

The small wooded area between the dam and the bridge, known as Horace Holyoke Island, is expected to remain following the dam removal, she added.

Updates are available via <https://natickma.gov/1676/Project-Dam-Removal-River-Restoration>

## localtownpages

Published Monthly  
Mailed FREE to the  
Community of Natick  
Circulation: 16,442  
households & businesses

**Publisher**

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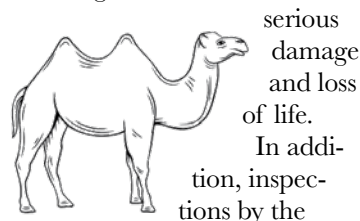
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Paul Revere was here:

# Natick's 'secret society' has a star-studded past

BY SEAN SULLIVAN

"It's a well-kept secret that everybody knows," said Ed Sloper, leading the way up into rarefied levels of the building.

The two most dominant structures of Natick's downtown district stand like sheer cliffs, staring at one another across a narrow chasm below.

At ground level, Main Street runs between them like a river that had patiently eroded its path.

Inhabiting the spaces at street level are familiar stores and businesses. Five Crows on the west side, a shop that specializes in local, handmade goods. Its neighbor and longtime Natick staple, Debsan, has been coloring and decorating homes and businesses for decades with its wallpaper and paint offerings.

Across Main Street, Middlesex Savings Bank facilitates commerce as it's done for nearly two centuries. Its east side neighbor is The Hive, a relative newcomer that serves



**Ed Sloper serves as District Deputy Grandmaster for the Meridian Lodge in Natick.** Photo by Sean Sullivan

as an incubator for small local businesses.

But compared to one obscure organization and tenant in the building, all of them have arrived on the scene fairly recently.

That longtime resident is a lodge of Freemasons.

The order of Freemasons is said to be the oldest secular



**Past members hold a place of honor.** Photo by Sean Sullivan



**The décor reflects the organization's rich history.** Photo by Sean Sullivan



**None other than Paul Revere is said to have granted the Charter for the lodge in Natick in 1797.** Photo by Sean Sullivan



**The artwork all connects back to the organization.** Photo by Sean Sullivan



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fraternal organization in the world, dating back to medieval times.

"It's non-sectarian," said Sloper, who's been a Freemason for most of his life, "but you have to believe in a supreme being."

That said, discussions of politics and religion are forbidden at meetings, according to rules and tradition. That's a custom or bit of wisdom that's been vindicated throughout history the world over. One need only attend a Thanksgiving dinner to appreciate the perils of those divisive topics of discourse.

As part of its Christmas party last year, said Sloper, 14 families gathered together to celebrate.

"They're supposed to support each other if they need anything," said Sloper, who's been a member of the lodge for 52 years.

Sloper puts membership at around 135 for the Meridian Lodge in Natick. He serves as District Deputy Grandmaster

for the organization. As a fraternal society, membership in the group is limited to men.

Charter for the lodge in Natick is said to have been granted by none other than Paul Revere himself in 1797. Revere became a member of the Freemasons in 1760, and went on to lead the organization in Massachusetts as its Grandmaster.

One of the "Sons of Liberty," Revere is said to have made many connections with fellow revolutionaries through his involvement in the Freemason organization.

At least 14 U.S. presidents are said to have been members of the semi-secret society.



**SECRET SOCIETY**

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# Saving for Retirement: Are You Guessing or Planning?



Gary Shilman, Financial Advisor

for keeping your current home, everyday expenses and health care, \$1 million doesn't stretch as far as you thought, and the beach house remains a dream. The problem wasn't your discipline – it was that your number was never really your number. It was arbitrary, not anchored to what your ideal retirement would actually cost.

How can you make sure your retirement number is right for you?

A solid savings goal starts with a clear picture of the retirement you want. Think through where you plan to live, whether you'll keep your current home or downsize, how much you plan to travel, if you'll help children and grandchildren financially and what health care might cost you later in life. Build a realistic monthly budget, then multiply by 12 months to find your annual need. Adjust this amount for inflation until the first year of retirement.

Then, multiply that figure by 25 to get a sense of how much may be needed to save. It's a formula based on the idea of withdrawing 4% annually from your savings, assuming you retire in your mid-60s. If you need \$60,000 a year, your target is around \$1.5 million. You may need more or less depending on your lifestyle, health, unexpected expenses, Social Security benefits and other income. No single rate or strategy will work for everyone. A financial advisor can help you determine your number and strategy.

Once you know your target, the path forward becomes clearer. Here are a few tips for next steps:

**Start early.** The sooner you begin saving, the more time compound interest has to work in your favor. Small amounts set aside automatically each paycheck have the opportunity to

grow significantly over decades.

**Live below your means.** Spending less than you earn is one of the most powerful wealth-building habits. When your income rises, save and invest the difference instead of upgrading your lifestyle.

**Keep your debt under control.** Since credit cards and other high-interest debt can slow your progress, pay off balances monthly when possible.

**Invest consistently.** If your employer offers a 401(k), aim to contribute at least 10%-15% of your salary, and increase your contributions after every raise. If you max out your 401(k), a traditional IRA or Roth IRA may offer additional tax-advantaged growth (eligibility and contribution limits apply).

**Boost your income when you can.** Develop new skills, ask for a raise or explore a side

income. Every extra dollar saved moves you closer to your goal.

The difference between a retirement you love and one full of compromises often comes down to the planning you do today. Know your real number, build a solid plan and get the right help along the way.

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Let's say you dream of spending your retirement mornings on a warm beach, coffee in hand, waves rolling in. To get there, you had a simple plan: save \$1 million and buy the beach house you always wanted.

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# Group promotes giving without doubts

BY SEAN SULLIVAN

A new social group in Natick is seeking to take the guessing out of giving.

“I was inspired by other giving groups I’d heard of,” said Natick resident Kate Eckstein. She founded the Natick Giving Club, which hosted its first meeting in late March.

The organization’s goal is to connect philanthropy with groups that depend on those donations.

Giving to good causes can come with a sense of uncertainty. Once givers hit that donate button, there’s little insight into how that money is being spent, and what percentage of it actually makes it to those organizations and neighbors who need it most.

In addition, it can be difficult to discern how effectively a charity organization is fulfilling its mission. By putting philanthropists and charities in the same room, the Natick Giving Club seeks to smooth some of those sources of friction.

The organization was de-



**Natick resident Kate Eckstein, who founded the Natick Giving Club, speaks to potential donors.**  
*Photo by Sean Sullivan*

signed to bring a sense of transparency and community back to the process of local philanthropy.

“No middleman, no red tape,” said Eckstein. “To make

giving back to Natick easy and social and non-scary.”

The club plans to meet quarterly, and maintains an online presence to keep community members involved and informed.

During the Natick Giving Club’s inaugural event, three local nonprofits were invited to share their mission before the group of gathered givers. Those charities included “A Place to Turn,” “The Natick Service Council,” and “Spark Kindness.”

The forum was designed to be a social gathering, at which each charity gave a presentation of its mission before an audience. The event included a question-and-answer session, where community members could glean more detailed info from each nonprofit. About 25 locals attended the meeting, and donations come from those members.

“It was a small but mighty group,” said Eckstein.

Members would then vote to direct their donations to the organization they felt most met

their charitable criteria. It was a tough list to choose from.

Eckstein was inspired to create the group by a philanthropic culture she found overly-formal.

“They have a lot of rules,” said Eckstein. “I wanted to be more inclusive and less rules-based. I want it to be an easy way to connect with organizations.”

The Natick Giving Club is a hyper-local version of other groups that have emerged in recent years, organizations whose mission is to remove much of the mystery associated with charitable giving.

“Give Well” is one of those. This online organization gathers research on the effectiveness of aid efforts worldwide. With that evidence-based data as its north star, Give Well recommends organizations and aid efforts that do the most good per dollar.

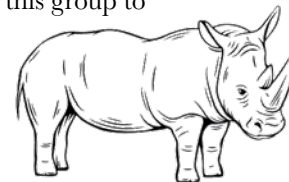
“Effective Altruism” is another. That movement also analyzes data to determine how efficient aid orgs are in meeting their respective missions. Based on those rankings, givers can

make better and more-informed decisions about where to direct their resources.

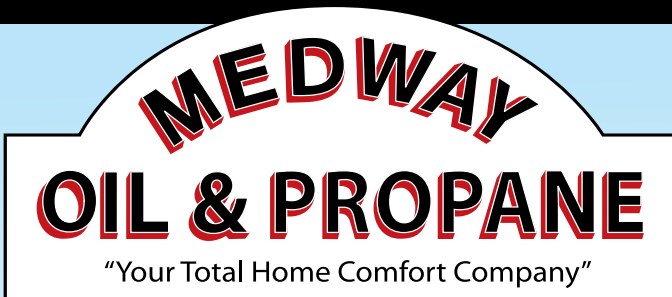
The aim is the same for the Natick Giving Club, albeit with a social spin and emphasis on local community. The in-person meetings aren’t just about the facts, but also serve to put a friendly and familiar face to philanthropy and the groups to which they give.

That knack for making and maintaining connections is a skill that Eckstein has imported from her experience in the business sphere. From corporate culture, she gleaned the value of getting people in a room together, and the multiplier effect of those relationships.

“I want it to be an easy way to connect with organizations,” said Eckstein. “You get to know other people in town who have the same goals as you do. I’d love for this group to sort of span beyond my group.”



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Your Money, Your Independence

# Grads: Don't Pay the Comfort Tax, Invest in the "Struggle"



Glenn Brown, CFP

Every commencement season, a familiar debate plays out: move back home to save money or head to a cramped apartment on a diet of ramen and determination?

On a spreadsheet, the live-at-home option looks like a win. By eliminating rent and utilities, the theory suggests you can save \$20,000 to \$40,000 in your first year.

Sorry Grads, but this premise rarely becomes reality. It's ironic: you rolled your eyes at professors steeped in abstract theory, yet here you are committing the same nonsense.

## The Myth of Boomerang Savings

When the Bank of Mom and Dad subsidizes your life, psychological urgency evaporates. Without the boundary of a rent check, savings leak into high-end gyms, trips, subscriptions and tech. The justification is: "I'm suffering enough by living at home; I deserve this." Instead of a surplus, you entrench expensive habits you can't afford once you leave.

To build financial independence, you first need to take flight. Just as a plane needs the resistance of wind to generate lift, you need the friction of real-world expenses to get off the ground. Living at home removes headwinds and leaves you idling on the runway while your peers are taking off.

## The Geography of Opportunity

High-rent brain-hubs trigger the Agglomeration Effect, forcing you into a network of mentors and peers that hometowns lack. Research shows physical proximity leads to faster promotions and better career matching. You can't effectively network from your basement with AI; career-defining windows of opportunity open when you are present, both at work and socializing outside of it.

Furthermore, roommates are

a masterclass in negotiation. Sharing a kitchen, bathroom and utility bills teaches conflict resolution and accountability. These soft skills create an independence gap between those who handle their own friction points and those who have them smoothed over by parents.

## The Real Cost of Entry-Level

Manage your burn rate without suffocating your future. Aim for the 30% Rule: keep all housing costs under 30% of your gross income. In the Boston-area, this means Davis Square or Allston/Brighton, not splitting a Seaport two-bedroom.

Parents, if your graduate is complaining of costs and can't get ahead, don't pay their rent as it kills urgency. Instead, offer a one-time "get out of jail" card for a true crisis. This provides security without removing the daily incentive to work hard to change outcomes.

## Independence is a Habit

Living at home for "just a year" often turns into three. Grads, when you live like Boomers in a cozy setup, you lose the primary engine of growth: discontent. If you aren't bothered by your surroundings, you won't hunt for a promotion or take a career risk. The most effective career coach is a little room you're desperate to leave; that daily friction creates an obsession with progress and a determination to never return.

## Advice to Class of 2026

**To the parents:** Supporting independence means letting them struggle. The best gift this May isn't their old room back (or worse, refinishing the basement); it's the belief that they are capable of building their own independence.

**To the graduates:** The money you think you'll save at home comes at the cost of your ambition. Renting a room you can barely afford in a city

that excites you is a form of aggressive investing; you are betting on your own ability to grow into future expenses.

Go find the cramped apartment. Deal with noisy roommates. The struggle of your 20's is how you get a 2X-5X return in your 30's. Financial independence isn't something you're given; it starts by choosing to outgrow the Comfort Tax.

*The opinions voiced in this material are for general information only and are not intended to provide specific advice or recommendations for any individual.*

*Glenn Brown is a Holliston resident and owner of PlanDynamic, LLC, www.PlanDynamic.com. Glenn is a fee-only Certified Financial Planner™ helping motivated people take control of their planning and investing, so they can balance kids, aging parents and financial independence.*

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# You just May fall in love with this Month's Library offerings

May flowers are blooming and so are the activities at the Morse Institute Library, 14 East Central St. Here is a sampling.

**CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS**  
**Project ABC Playgroup, Fridays, May 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29, 10 to 11 a.m.** Project ABC's playgroup in collaboration with the library offers a variety of activities for children up to age six and their families. Explore a new theme each week based on a favorite book. STEAM, ELA, and SEL activities, and a circle time with songs and stories. No registration required.

**Lego Free Build, Saturday, May 2, 10 to 11:30 a.m.** A LEGO family event. Drop in and build anything you like. LEGOs are provided. This program is for children ages four and older with a grownup partner. No registration is required.

**Play Nights, Monday, May 4 5/4, 5/11, 6:30-7:30 p.m.** Drop in and play with us! We will have select themed play items for littles and their grownups to explore. Play nights are for everyone, but are geared to the preschool set and their adventuresome grownups. No registration required.

**All Together Preschool Storytime, Tuesday, May 5 and 12, 10 to 10:30 a.m.** Stories, songs, and a short play activity. This story hour is geared for children ages 3 to preK5 and their grownup part-

ner. Younger siblings are welcome as observers. Registration is required.

**Toddler Time, Wednesday, May 6 and 13, 10 to 10:30 a.m.** Toddlers (walkers through age 2) and their special grownups are welcome. This program features stories, songs, and stretches for the first half and special play activities for the later half. Registration is required.

**Spring Special: Stomp Rockets, Thursday, May 7, 3:45 to 4:30 p.m.** An afternoon of in-person crafting, creating stomp rockets. This program is for children in grades 2-5. Registration is required.

**Children's Mental Health Awareness Craft, Wednesday, May 13, 3:30 to 4:30 p.m.** Make a breathing wand to practice mindfulness. No registration required.

**Purposeful Play, Thursday, May 21, 28, 10 to 11 a.m.** Drop in to explore tabletop activities for preschool aged children and their grownup partners. No registration required.

**Bilingual Saturday Storytime: Hindi and English.** A special Saturday Storytime featuring stories, songs, and rhymes in Hindi and English to celebrate Asian American Heritage Month. This is a drop-in program and is geared toward preschool aged children and their grownups, but all ages are welcome. No registration is required.



**ALL AGES PROGRAMS**  
**Friends of the Morse Institute Library Spring Book, Music, and Bake Sale, Saturday, May 16, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Sunday, May 17, noon to 3 p.m. Open Mic Night, Tuesday, May 12, 7 to 8:30 p.m.** Singers, poets, musicians, writers, performance artists, all are welcome. Performers can sign up for a five or 10 minute time slot on a first come first served basis. No registration required.

**TEEN PROGRAMS**  
**Teen Mental Health Month Drop-In Coloring, Friday, May 1 and 22, Teens ages 11 to 18** are invited to stop by the Teen Room where a coloring supply station will be set up all month in recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month. All supplies provided, just come by and take a break from a busy day either individually or with friends. No registration required.

**Teen Puzzle Weekend, Saturday, May 2 and Sunday, May 3, all day.** Teens are invited to stop by and work on the puzzle on the Teen Room table. For teens and tweens, ages 11-18. No registration required.

**Tween & Teen Take & Make: Mini Brick Builds, Monday, May 4, 2 to 9 p.m.** For tweens and teens ages 11-18, available in the Teen Room until the kits run out.

**Teens & Tweens: Drop-In Meditative Art, Wednesday, May 13, 2 to 4:30 p.m.** Stop by the Teen Room for a meditative art activity in recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month. Coloring, paint by sticker art, and scratch art options will be available on this early release Wednesday. For teens 11-18, supplies are limited.

**Teen MakerLab To Go: 3D Sakura Bonsai Puzzle Kits, Monday, May 18, all day.** Sign up for a Sakura Bonsai 3D puzzle kits in honor of AAPI Heritage Month. Kits for registered participants will be at the circulation desk starting Monday, May 18 and must be picked up by Friday, June 5. Teens and tweens ages 11 to 18 may register for a kit, but the puzzles are recommended for ages 14 and older so some tweens may need some assistance. Registration required.

**ADULT PROGRAMS**  
**Tea & Mindfulness: A Chinese Tea Ceremony Experience, -Monday, May 4 and May 18, 2:30 to 4 p.m.** To gentle guqin music, explore classic Chinese tea ware, Yixing teapot and gaiwan, and learn how to recognize tea by sight and aroma. Participants will taste three types of Chinese tea: green tea, oolong tea, and black tea, discovering their distinctive flavors and traditions. Also explore the history of how

tea traveled from China to the rest of the world, becoming one of the most beloved beverages globally. The program includes a hands-on introduction to basic tea etiquette and brewing techniques, featuring gongfu-style brewing and gaiwan tasting. Bilingual, English and Chinese. Space is limited and registration is required.

**In concert, Liana Paniyeva, Monday, May 4, 7 to 8 p.m.** Award-winning pianist Liana Paniyeva will present a solo recital featuring masterworks of the Romantic repertoire. The program includes Schumann's Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Brahms's Fantasies, Op. 116, Amy Beach: 4 Sketches, Op. 15, and Clara Schumann: Scherzo, Op. 14, No. 2 in C minor. Registration for this event is suggested, but not required.

**Lippan Workshop, Wednesday, May 6, 2:30 to 4 p.m.** Lippan is a folk art style from India that uses clay and cut mirrors to make art. Come in to learn the technique and take home tea light holders. This art form will be taught by Niloufer Rakhangi, the artist of *The Water Lily Designs* in Sharon. This program is for adults and registration is required.

**Understanding Your Cat with Cat Behaviorist Rachel Geller, Thursday, May 7, 7 to 8 p.m.** Everyone loves a good cat video... but what if your cat isn't acting quite as cute as the ones you see on the internet? Are you tired of your cat thinking "outside the box?" Or are you living with a hardcore shredder and not a snowboarder. And when it comes to your multi-cat household, why can't they all just get along? Meet Dr. Rachel Geller, certified cat behaviorist, she will answer all of these ques-

**MORSE**  
*continued on page 11*



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# Carpenter Ants: A Serious Threat to MetroWest Homes



**Jim Maxxuchelli, owner, WPC Pest and Termite Control**

In Massachusetts, homeowners face unique pest challenges due to our changing seasons and moisture prone climate. While many people dismiss ants as a minor annoyance, carpenter ants are one of the most destructive pests affecting homes in the MetroWest Area.

We regularly see carpenter ant infestations throughout MetroWest—and the damage

they cause can be extensive if left untreated. Said, Jim Maz-zuchelli from WPC Pest and Termite Control, Inc.,

**Warning Signs Home-owners Should Watch For**

- Large black or reddish ants, often active at night, inside your home
- Winged ants (swarmers) appearing indoors in spring
- Piles of sawdust like debris near baseboards or windows
- Faint rustling sounds inside walls
- Ant trails from basements, kitchens, or exterior siding
- These signs should never be ignored—especially in homes with moisture issues or older construction.

**Why DIY Treatments Often Fail**

Over the counter sprays and baits may kill visible ants but rarely address the nest hidden deep within walls or structural wood. In many cases, improper

treatment allows infestations to spread and continue causing damage. Effective carpenter ant control requires professional experience, proper identification, and targeted treatment.

At WPC Pest and Termite Control, Inc., we understand the specific pest pressures MetroWest homeowners face. Our experienced technicians use proven methods to locate carpenter ant nests, eliminate infestations at the source, and help prevent future problems.

If you suspect carpenter ants—or want peace of mind before damage worsens—don't wait.

Contact WPC Pest and Termite Control, Inc. today for a FREE professional carpenter ant inspection and protect your home from hidden structural damage. WPC Pest and Termite Control, Inc. 508-366-1820. Nobugsnopests.com

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## Art in Bloom at Morse Library

Celebrate the wonders of nature at Art in Bloom 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday May 2 and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday, May 3 at the Morse Institute Library, 14 East Central Street.

This is an all-ages collaborative event with Morse Institute

Library, Natick Garden Club and Natick Art Association.

Visitors can view the Natick Garden Club's floral arrangements inspired by children's picture books and art created by Natick Art Association artists.

This event celebrates the

shared creativity of authors, illustrators, artists, and floral designers. From butterflies to bees, jellyfish to hummingbirds, acorns to oak trees, and forests to oceans, the magic of nature is boundless, the exhibit explains.

**MORSE**

*continued from page 10*

tions and more. Registration is required.

**Follow the Reader Book Group, Monday, May 11, 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.** Introducing a new book group for adult. The group will walk around Natick and talk about a selected book. This month's book is *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Limited copies of the book will be available at the Circulation desk of the library. Some titles are also available through Hoopla and Libby/Overdrive. Registration and acceptance of the user agreement is required.

**Paint by Sticker, Saturday, May 16, 3 to 4 p.m.** Like paint by number, but with stickers. Find the sticker, peel it, and place it in the right space. Watch as an enchanted garden-themed image emerges from the original unfinished illustration. The length it takes to complete the project will depend on the design chosen. Participants are welcome to complete more than one design during the class. Registration is required.

**Reverse Painting, Thursday, May 21, 6:30 to 8 p.m.** Use a centuries-old technique

to create a painting of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Hokusai. Complete the painting in reverse order (back to front) by tracing the image with black marker or paint pen. Then with acrylic paint, add the details first, then the larger areas, and finally the background. It is possible to finish the project in under an hour, however, participants will have up to 90 minutes to complete the painting. Registration required.

**An Evening with Ezekiel's Wheels Klezmer Band Trio, Thursday, May 28, 7 to 8 p.m.** Join Ezekiel's Wheels Klezmer Band to celebrate Jewish Heritage Month with an evening of klezmer music and Yiddish song. Dance and sing with the International Jewish Music Festival winning ensemble based in Boston. Ezekiel's Wheels Klezmer Band is one of the world's preeminent klezmer ensembles. Registration is not required.

*The library is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m. The library is closed Saturday May 23, Sunday May 24, Monday May 25 and Sunday May 31. For the most up-to-date and complete schedule and to register for programs, visit morseinstitute.org*

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# May is Mental Health Awareness Month

To raise awareness, reduce stigma, and provide support and resources to the community, the Town of Natick is offering a variety of events and activities throughout the month of May.

To explore all of the events happening this May and learn how to register, visit the Natick Health Department's website at [bit.ly/natick-health-events](http://bit.ly/natick-health-events).

Here are the featured events happening during the month. All are free.

- **Saturday, May 9**, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the Natick Common - Health and Wellness Resource Fair.
- **Wednesday, May 13, Tuesday, May 19 and Wednesday, May 27**, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Morse Institute Library, Mindfulness Workshop Series. Registration is required.
- **Thursday, May 14** from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Morse Institute Library, QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention Training. Registration is required.
- **Friday, May 15**. All day, wear green in recognition of mental health awareness.
- **Sunday, May 17**, from 1 to 2:45 p.m. at Bloom and Grow,



Natick shines a spotlight on mental health awareness. Courtesy photo

- Mindful Grid Painting. Registration is required.
  - **Monday, May 18** from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Kennedy Middle School - Mindfulness Skills for Everyday Living. Registration is required.
  - **Tuesday, May 26** from 7 - 8 p.m. on Zoom, Feelings Forecast: Virtual Family Storytime & Emotional Weather Activity. Registration is required.
  - **Friday, May 29** from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Ten Trees Books. Lunch and Learn: Supporting Children's Emotional Health and Caregivers Too. Registration is required.
  - **Saturday, May 30** at 11 a.m. at The Center for Arts in Natick (TCAN), *Turning Red* movie screening. Registration is required.
- Organizers thank the community partners and organizations for making this month-long series of events possible: Natick Health Department, Natick Service Council, Natick Community Senior Center, Spark Kindness, Morse Institute Library, TCAN, First Congregational Church of Natick, Bloom and Grow, Ten Trees Books.
- To share ideas on how the Town of Natick can best support the mental health of the community, complete an anonymous survey [bit.ly/natick-mental-health-survey](http://bit.ly/natick-mental-health-survey).

## ASSISTANT CHIEF

*continued from page 1*

time. They responded to 6,500 calls last year. "Each year we go up 400 or 500 more," he said.

In his new position, Hampton will also emphasize "training, safety and readiness," which is especially important as the call volume grows and "the types of emergencies we respond to have become more complex."

This training keeps the firefighters "the best they can be, so they can go forward and provide that great service to the community."

He also emphasizes firefighting wellness and mental health resources. Sadly, not every call has a positive outcome.

"Those moments can stay with you," he said. "We ask our people to carry a heavy burden, and we owe it to them to make sure they have the support they need, both on the job and off."

Hampton is no stranger to the Natick Fire Department or the town itself. A town native, he graduated from Natick High School.

He joined the Marines after finishing high school. While serving, he "fell in love with the camaraderie" of the corps and "knew I wanted to continue serving" once he left the Marines.

He decided that fire service was "a natural fit."

Hampton, 40, spent five years with the Wellesley Fire Department before joining Natick Fire.

Since then, he worked his way through the ranks, from firefighter to Lieutenant, Captain, Deputy Chief, and now Assistant Chief.

Along the way, he earned a master's degree in public administration and recently finished the Chief Fire Officer Management Training Program at the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy. He is also a credentialed chief in the state of Massachusetts.

He takes joy in the sense of service imbedded in the job and "knowing that what you do matters. There are very few professions where you show up on someone's worst day and have the ability to make it better."

But as with all jobs, there are challenges to face. The work often forces him to miss holidays, birthdays and bedtime routine.

"Every firefighter has to navigate this," he said. "You find ways to work around it," but "it's taxing" on loved ones.

He is grateful for the support of his wife Kelsey and his children Noah, 13, Claire, 8, Emily, 5, and John, 4.

"Their support through all this has been unwavering," he said. "I wouldn't be here without them."

His fellow firefighters also provide invaluable backing, he said. He described his colleagues as a "second family."

He hopes in turn to serve as source of support for them. "I have an open door," he said. "I want them to feel like they have a voice."



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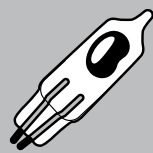
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## SECRET SOCIETY

*continued from page 6*

The Meridian Lodge is sight to behold. Its grand room where meetings are held is a cavernous space, featuring high ceilings and walls adorned with intriguing frescoes.

The artwork was painted mostly in the 1930s and 1940s, said Sloper. "All have something to do with Freemasonry."

Adjacent rooms and offices give the impression of a floor plan that's been more of an improvisation than a plan. Understandable, given the building's age and original architecture.

Unlike the businesses below at street level, the lodge and its Freemasons aren't much in the business of marketing the work that they do. These days, said Sloper, the lodge's efforts come mostly in the form of philanthropy.

Funding for the Freemason comes largely from endowments and fundraising. The Meridian Lodge gives out three scholarships per year, and participated in local charitable events.

Worldwide, said Sloper, the collective organizations donate about \$2 million to causes each day.

"It's a pretty good organization."

# Studies continue on the future use of Johnson School

By MAUREEN SULLIVAN

For nearly eight decades, Johnson Elementary School on South Main Street welcomed families from around the neighborhood.

Closed since 2024, the town has conducted several studies to determine the future of the school's building and grounds.

While it's too early for any final recommendations, the studies, including one by UMAss-Boston done in 2025, identified several opportunities for potential uses, including:

- Youth and family programming, including after-school and vacation care
- Community-based mental health and wellness services
- A one-stop community resource and referral center
- Intergenerational programming and social supports
- Flexible space for nonprofit partners, support groups and inclusive community activities
- Teen activity space

In February, several town committees made recommendations regarding Johnson's



The town is trying to determine the future of the former Johnson Elementary School on South Main Street. Photo by Maureen Sullivan



The Select Board is overseeing the grounds of the former Johnson Elementary School on South Main Street. Recent work included repairs to a swing set. Photo by Maureen Sullivan

building and grounds. The Recreation and Park Commission's report ties Johnson to the former Cole Elementary School on Boden Lane, which was converted into a recreation center in the 1980s.

In that report, the commission called the Cole Center "functionally obsolete." The report also asked for a feasibility study to help preserve field space, and determine the best location for a community center and the Recreation and Parks Department.

The Open Space Advisory

Committee recommended preserving Johnson's forest areas and recreation facilities, while the Council on Aging would like to see the addition of walking paths and a community garden at the site.

According to Town Administrator James Errickson, an update on Johnson could be presented to the Select Board sometime this spring.

The Harold H. Johnson Elementary School opened in 1949 on the site of the former Oak Grove School and served as a

neighborhood school before closing in June 2024. At the time, school and town officials cited the costs of upgrades, including compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as a main reason for the closing.

In December 2023, the School Department transferred control and care of the property to the Select Board. Since then, the board has conducted several surveys and workshops to best determine the future use of the property.

The Select Board is also overseeing the care of the playground equipment and fields. The most recent project was to replace a swing set bar damaged over the winter. According to a recent bulletin on the town's website, the town plans to reinstall a swing set once the weather gets warmer.

Updates on the Johnson School project are available at <https://www.natickma.gov/2113/PROJECT-Johnson-Future-Use>



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# Community Senior Center springing to life in May

Here's a sampling of events at the Natick Community Senior Center in May.

## Unlock the Secrets to Better Sleep, May 5, 11 a.m.

Prioritize sleep health with a workshop designed to help achieve restful nights and energized days. Sleep plays a vital role in overall well-being - yet many older adults face challenges such as insomnia, restlessness and disrupted sleep routines. In this session, discover practical, research-backed strategies to improve sleep quality and enhance nighttime safety.

## Meaningful Connections Memory Café, May 21, 11:30 a.m.

The Meaningful Connections Memory Cafe is a welcoming social gathering designed specifically for those living with dementia and their care partners. The focus is on connecting with others who are going through similar experiences, reducing isolation and enjoyment. This month, Richard Hughes will bring silent movies to life using music. Call Katie by Monday, May 18 at 508-647-6540, ext. 1908 to learn more and to register.

## Line Dancing, Tuesday May 12 and Tuesday June 9, 2:15 p.m., \$10

Fun, beginner-friendly dances led by Lisa Abbascia, with fun music and an upbeat social atmo-

sphere. Come dance, laugh, and enjoy time with friends. No partner needed.

## Stability and strength training, Mondays and Wednesdays, May 4 to June 29, 2 p.m., \$80

Stay strong, steady, and confident in this low-impact class designed for older adults. Through guided exercises, build muscle strength, improve balance, and enhance coordination. The class focuses on safe, functional movements that support better posture and help reduce the risk of falls. Suitable for all fitness levels, with options and modifications so participants move comfortably at their own pace. Bring 1 to 3 pound hand weights and an elastic band.

## Bolly X, Bollywood Dance Inspired Workout, Thursdays, May 7 to June 25, 9 a.m., \$48, drop-in class, \$7.

Instructor Purnima takes pride in making the magic of Bollywood accessible to people of all ages and abilities. With her youngest student at 3 and oldest at 97, she believes everyone can create joy and happiness through BollyX. Experience the infectious positive energy along with the benefits of dancing to BollyX.

## Opera and music appreciation, Fridays May 1 to 22, \$30

Join Ron Williams as participants expand their reach and take a look at symphonies, jazz

and other world music. Williams is an award-winning artist familiar to opera and concert audiences throughout New England. He made his Boston Lyric Opera debut in 1992 after touring opera houses through Europe.

## Guitar lessons, Fridays May 1 to June 26, 11 a.m., \$60

Take guitar skills to the next level in this intermediate class for players who know the basics. Join Memo Rubio, musician, singer, composer, and producer, for fun, hands-on instruction. Students must bring their own instrument. No class on May 29 and June 5.

## Acrylic painting, Friday, May 8 to June 26, 12:15 p.m.

Learn about composition, light and shadow, and other key visual concepts while also learning how to mix colors, apply paint to different surfaces, and create texture and depth that will help in creating dynamic and engaging works of art. No experience is necessary. A supply list will be provided at registration.

## Lunch with Friends, Wednesday, May 6, noon, \$7

Good food and friendly faces. Today's lunch features Mexican bowl (Mexican rice, black beans, and steak, pico de gallo and lettuce, mild salsa, chipotle ranch and sour cream on the side), plus dessert. Dine-in only. Lunch is provided by Cinco Chiles Taqueria.

## Theatrical production, Women of '76, Thursday, May 14, 2 p.m.

Step back in time to discover the untold stories of five courageous women, patriots and loyalists, American and foreign-born, who witnessed and shaped the American Revolution. Meet a Massachusetts housewife who led an all-female militia, a German baroness in British camps, a Georgian farmer's wife who faced Redcoats alone, and two other forgotten heroines who helped shape a nation.

## Mother's Day celebration, Tuesday May 5, 2 p.m. \$3

A heartfelt Mother's Day celebration honoring the amazing mothers and mother figures in our lives. Enjoy the soothing melodies of harpist Shelly Otis while sharing a relaxing and joyful afternoon. Celebrate, connect, and make wonderful memories in an atmosphere filled with music, laughter, and appreciation. Pastries and muffins will be served, along with other refreshments.

## Natick and the Road to Revolution, 1650 to 1780, Wednesday, May 13, 2 p.m.

Join Niki Lefebvre, Director of the Natick Historical Society, for a discussion on the dispossession of rights and lands in Natick before the American Revolution, and new research highlighting Indigenous men

who fought for the Patriots.

## Johnny Cash, Songs and Stories with Matt York, Monday, May 11, 2 p.m.

New England musician and author Matt York performs the songs of Johnny Cash while sharing stories from his career, from the 1950s to 2003, including his rise to fame and marriage to June Carter. A two-time Boston Music Award nominee for Best Country Artist, York is also the author of *The Words and Wisdom of Willie Nelson*.

## Indian Classical Dance, History and Demonstration, Thursday, May 28, 3 p.m., \$3

Step into the vibrant world of Indian classical dance. Dancers in traditional attire will fill the room with music, graceful movements, and colorful storytelling. Learn the meaning and history behind each dance and watch centuries-old traditions come alive through rhythm, expression, and celebration. Presented by Shriya Joag and students of Meenakshi School of Dance.

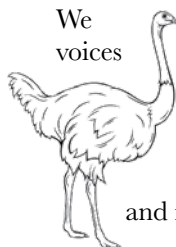
*The Natick Community Senior Center is located 117 E. Central St. and is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The center can be reached at 508-647-6540. For more information, to register for programs or to see a complete schedule of events, visit [www.natickma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/21907/May---June-2026](http://www.natickma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/21907/May---June-2026).*



## PEDALING

*continued from page 3*

began chemotherapy at 40 weeks," said Shannon Carlson, mom of Finn Carlson, the 2023 Natick PMC Kids Ride Pedal Partner. "Each year as a family, we ride to honor all those who continue to fight, and for those who we lost too soon. We ride with thankful hearts for all the doctors, nurses, and staff at Dana-Farber's Jimmy Fund Clinic who took care of Finn for the first five years of his life. We ride to raise our voices and raise funds for a cure."



The race offers the chance for kids to bring their bikes and ride along paved

paths in the orchards of the Belkin Family Lookout Farm.

The farm's orchard offers two route options. The Mini Fruit Loop is designed for the littlest riders on more than two wheels, such as balance bikes, big wheels, trikes or training wheels.

The Adventure Express is a 1.1 mile circuit through the orchard pathways for riders on two wheels. And riders can use up all their energy by biking multiple loops.

"As parents we look for ways to model impact and service to the community for our kids. This ride turns kids' energy into impact for kids at Dana Farber Cancer Institute. It's all about kids helping kids," said Julie Shank, Parent Coordinator of Natick's Pan Mass Chal-



Giving back starts early for these youngsters. Courtesy photo

lenge Kids Ride.

At the end of the ride, Belkin Family Lookout Farm hosts an after-party with music, food, apple cider doughnuts, a raffle, and other attractions. All riders

receive free admittance to the re-opened Kids Play area on the day of the event.

Registration for the Natick Pan Mass Challenge Kids Ride is open at [kids.pmc.org/](http://kids.pmc.org/)

natick. The registration fee is \$20 with a required fundraising commitment of \$40 per rider. For sponsorship opportunities contact [pmckids.natick@gmail.com](mailto:pmckids.natick@gmail.com).

NATICK SPORTS

# Coach and CEO rallies with plan to help Natick Little League

BY MATT HYLEN

Natick Little League (NLL) is in for another fantastic season thanks to Little League Coach and Sincere Co. CEO Matt Douglas.

Douglas has created an innovative method of funding NLL, which he calls Rally for Natick.

Rally for Natick is a donation website that Douglas created himself in 2025. The platform was created by Douglas using the help of AI and his own personal experience as a CEO.

Before the idea of the website came to life, Douglas first was able to sit in on a meeting with the Natick Board of Directors. "I believe that when you join a new organization, whether that's a job or a community organization, that your first role is to listen," Douglas explained. "So I spent the first few monthly meetings really trying to listen."

This is when the issue regarding funding came into play for Douglas.

"One of the things I heard over and over again was, which is typical I feel in any organization, was money," Douglas said. "There were discussions about big projects, small projects, insignificant spending... but the common thread was about money."

Douglas then quickly got to work, trying to think of

ways in which he could contribute to NLL's fundraising efforts. "I worked with the folks at Natick Little League and asked for all different kinds of data on who has given money in the past and I put together a master spreadsheet," Douglas detailed. "I was surprised when I saw that in the last seven years, there were only six different businesses that had given more than three years of those seven, with three of them giving consistently over the last 5 years."

Though those donations were greatly appreciated, Douglas felt that something needed to be put into place in order to gain more donors. With Douglas having more than 20 years of experience in subscription-based businesses, he felt he could transform this knowledge into a potential solution for NLL fundraising.

"How could I build something for Natick Little League that would be sustainable and have a long-term legacy?" Douglas asked himself when he considered his expertise and the issue at hand. "So I started thinking about how I could build a recurring donation site that would enable us to go out to our supporters of the past and potential future supporters and have a way for them to simply and easily donate money to Natick Little League."

After hours of research and

building using the help of an AI site called Lovable, Rally for Natick was born and unanimously approved by the Natick Board.

Douglas' creation of Rally for Natick is a fully subscription-based donation website where businesses can purchase recurring plans that will go directly to Natick Little League.

"I think one of the things that's really interesting is that the donors we've already gotten onto the platform are going to recur," Douglas said. "So rather than having to chase them every year...they can sign up in less than 60 seconds."

Douglas created three different 100% tax-deductible subscription plans that local businesses and companies can choose from: Gold Supporter (\$199/year), Platinum Supporter (\$799/year), and Diamond Supporter (\$1,499/year). Each plan has its specific benefits, based on the amount of support pledged.

Not only has the website seen immediate success, but businesses are even figuring the amount they are donating into their budget. "There's no reason to believe that donors won't donate every year," Douglas said. "That's our goal. Our goal is to continue to get every business in the Natick and Framingham area to become a recurring donor for Natick Little League."

With the early success, Dou-



Rally for Natick creator Matt Douglas with his son, Quinton. Photo courtesy of Matt Douglas

glas has set out a plan for when Natick Little League should really start reaping the rewards of the generous donors. "I am really focused on 2030," he stated. "There are some big initiatives we want to get done, such as new dugouts, new scoreboards, lights on Honeywell Field."

"What's a better place to donate than kids who are playing softball and baseball, right?" Douglas said.

Natick Little League will open its season with its annual Opening Day Parade at 3 p.m. May 3. Diamond supporters will be recognized at that traditional kickoff.



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NATICK SPORTS

# Girls hoop team took best shot and scored big

BY MATT HYLEN

Grit. Defense. Teamwork. Those are the values the Natick Girls Basketball team holds close as they finished another remarkable season in 2025-26.

Natick's Head Coach Oryx Cohen has done a phenomenal job leading by example and coaching the team the right way ever since Natick High took a chance on him three years ago.

However, this year had presented him with a new challenge. "We had some amazing seniors who graduated that



helped us have a huge turn-

around season," Cohen explained. With only one senior on the team coming into the 2025-26 season, players would have to step up in order to lead the team to where it expects to be.

Enter Bridget Pole and Katie McMahon. Pole (junior) and McMahon (senior) both stepped up huge for this team, not only on the court, but off the court as well.

"Everyone just gets along really well. We're a really close group," Pole explained. McMahon also described the team as "a fun experience. Watching the players and team grow, our team environment is super great."

This type of team camarade-



The Natick Girls Basketball team completed another strong season. Photo courtesy Oryx Cohen



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rie and desire to improve carried into the season, making it one to remember. "Pretty much everybody on the team now plays basketball year-round," Cohen said. "So I expected us to be even better than we were last year."

Coming into the season, expectations were already sky high for the Red Hawks. Having won the Bay State Carey Division and Roundball Classic last season, the team has come into the season with an understanding that there is a new standard.

"We kind of have a target on our back going into this season," Pole said. "We lost a few of our seniors, so our team is pretty young. However, I think we have done a great job adjusting to that and adjusting to the pressure while living up to what we want Natick Basketball to be like."

The Red Hawks found a way to fight through the adversity and pressure and started the season off extremely strong. "Our younger players have really stepped up. It's great to see us kind of proving ourselves to people who doubted how we were going to be this year with our record so far," McMahon said.

"Our main thing this year

was our defense," Pole added. "We're a really high-pressure, high-intensity team. We also really like to run and beat teams down the floor, which is a huge advantage for us when we're playing other tough teams."

Not only is their record atop the league impressive enough, but the Red Hawks have already come away with a trophy, as they secured a tournament win at the Commonwealth Motors Christmas Classic for the second time in program history.

"Honestly, it feels amazing," Coach Cohen described. "When you win a tournament like that, it's something no one can ever take away from you. The team worked extremely hard for it. Our team played three really tough games and showed a lot of reliance and character while responding to adversity in each of those three games."

McMahon also received a scholarship as a result of the tournament, which is given out to a senior each year on every team, according to Coach Cohen. A big honor for a well-deserving player.

Despite all the success the Red Hawks found this season, what is most impressive about

this team is the way they remained focused under pressure. Often, when a team finds this kind of success midseason, the goals and expectations that are set can get lost in the fray.

Not for the Red Hawks. This team understood what they could accomplish this season and did not waver from the ultimate goal of defending their state title. They were ready to compete at the highest level and were able to achieve all of their goals.

As a result of what was a tremendous season, Coach Cohen was eager to shout out many other players who have made a significant impact on the team's success.

With players like CC Curran (sophomore) stepping up in a starting role, Sam Dunlap (freshmen) bringing energy as the sixth woman, Harper Higgins (freshmen) showing early signs of stardom, and Emilia Sousa being the defensive ball hawk, this team had every making of a well-rounded team with little weakness.

This team is built for sustained success and has genuine

**GIRLS HOOP**

continued on page 17



# Natick Real Estate Market Update: Why Late Spring Could Be a Smart Time to Sell



John McHugh

### Current Market Snapshot

At the time of this writing, the average sale price in Natick is just over \$1.2 million, with 299 homes sold in the past 12 months. Inventory remains limited, though signs of improvement are emerging as more listings gradually enter the market. Meanwhile, the average list price also sits just above \$1.2 million, and homes are taking approximately 35 days to receive an offer.

### Buyer Demand Remains Resilient

Strong home values continue to define the market, and well-positioned properties are drawing serious, well-qualified buyers. What distinguishes today's environment is a subtle but meaningful shift in buyer and seller psychology, driven by changing financial and lifestyle priorities.

### Shifting Seller Motivations

Over recent years, many homeowners delayed selling to avoid giving up historically

**Did you know?**

<b>Homes that sell within the first 30–40 days often achieve closer-to-asking prices.</b>	<b>Well-staged homes frequently sell faster than unstaged properties.</b>
<b>Spring listings receive significantly more online views and in-person showings.</b>	<b>Strategic preparation often delivers a better return than later price reductions.</b>
<b>Minor cosmetic updates can strongly influence buyer perception.</b>	<b>Buyer competition tends to increase before summer inventory peaks.</b>

low mortgage rates. That hesitation played a significant role in restricting inventory. More recently, lifestyle changes—such as upsizing, downsizing, or relocating for career or family reasons—have prompted renewed movement despite higher borrowing costs.

### Why Sellers Still Hold the Advantage

Even with increased activity, supply remains constrained. Currently, only 28 homes are

available for sale in Natick. This level of scarcity continues to favor sellers, especially when homes are presented thoughtfully and priced strategically. Buyers remain active but are now more discerning, making preparation and pricing more critical than in previous cycles.

### Timing Matters

Historically, April and May rank among the strongest months to list a home. During this period, demand is high,

and competition has yet to reach peak summer levels. For Natick homeowners, this combination creates an attractive opportunity marked by motivated buyers, limited competition, and stable pricing conditions.

### Strategy Wins in Today's Market

Today's market rewards deliberate strategy. Homes positioned correctly—both visually and financially—are selling efficiently. When conditions are steady and buyers are serious, sellers can move forward with greater confidence and clarity.

John McHugh has been a Senior Agent with Coldwell Banker for 25 years. He can be reached at [JohnSellsNow@gmail.com](mailto:JohnSellsNow@gmail.com) or 978-902-5646.

Visit his website for home-buying/home selling tips and to search all properties: [JohnMcHughRealEstate.com](http://JohnMcHughRealEstate.com)

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## REAL ESTATE INSIGHTS

### A Key Seasonal Window Opens

With May approaching, the Natick real estate market is entering one of the most important windows of the year. For homeowners considering a sale, late spring consistently delivers elevated buyer activity, strong showing volume, and favorable pricing dynamics that merit close attention.

## GIRLS HOOP

*continued from page 16*

chemistry. Cohen stated.

“The players know exactly what their roles are. There is no selfishness, no ‘I need to score

now.’ It’s all within a team culture in which they share the ball. There’s just been so many beautiful plays where they’re making the extra pass. That’s what makes this team special.”

By season’s end, Natick Girls Basketball finished 18-5 and

became back-to-back Carey Division champions for the first time in program history. The team also made it to the Elite 8 for the third time in program history.

Natick Girls Basketball also came away with multiple awards

and achievements.

Sophomore Kayla Dunlap led D1 in scoring with 21 points per game and was selected a Bay State All Star for the 2nd consecutive year. She was also selected as the Bay State Carey Division MVP.

Junior Denai Williams had a breakout season as well and was selected as a Bay State All Star for the first time. Finally, Pole had another amazing season and was selected to be a Bay State All Star for the second straight year.

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# REAL ESTATE CORNER

## Nina Sable Homes: Getting Pricing Right in Today's Market



Smart pricing is key to a successful sale. Sable Homes uses expertise and insight to help you get it right.

BY JENNIFER RUSSO

You've probably noticed something about local housing sales lately: homes aren't flying off the market the way they were a couple of years ago. Across MetroWest towns like Framingham, Natick, Hopkinton, and Westborough, home values are still strong, but buyers have more options than they did even a year ago. Inventory has crept

up, and homes are taking a bit longer to sell, often a few weeks instead of a few days.

That might not sound dramatic, but it changes how buyers behave. They're more willing to wait, compare, and negotiate. And that means sellers need to be more strategic. That shift is exactly where Nina Sable Homes has been helping local sellers stand out.

Based right here in the MetroWest area, Nina Sable has built her business on a pretty simple idea - pricing a home correctly from the start matters more now than ever.

"In the past, you could price high and see what happened," she says. "In today's market, that

strategy can actually cost you time and money."

And you can see why in the numbers.

Across Massachusetts, the market has clearly shifted into a more balanced phase. While the median sales prices remain strong, prices actually dipped about 2.6% year over year. That's not a crash by any means, but it's a signal that buyers are pushing back more than they were during the peak years.

At the same time, homes are taking longer to sell. Inventory is creeping up, with Massachusetts currently listing over 12,000 homes on the market. More homes means more competition - especially in desirable MetroWest towns.

So, how can Sable Homes help you sell your home? Nina's approach leans heavily on hyper-local knowledge. Instead of relying on broad statewide

trends, she looks closely at what's happening street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood. What did similar homes actually sell for, how long did that take, and where may the seller have missed the mark?

One of the biggest misconceptions she sees is sellers assuming they should leave room to negotiate by pricing high.

"What usually happens is the opposite," Nina explains. "If a home sits for too long, buyers start to wonder what's wrong with it."

That hesitation can lead to price reductions and, in many cases, a final sale price that ends up lower than if the home had been priced correctly from day one.

Instead, Nina often recommends a more intentional pricing strategy. One that aligns closely with current market value and is designed to generate early interest. When that happens, it's not uncommon to still see multiple offers, even in a calmer market.

Another factor is presenta-

tion. Today's buyers are especially drawn to homes that feel move-in ready. Nina is an expert in the balance of data and instinct. The numbers matter, but so does understanding the local buyer mindset. What people are looking for and reacting to right now, not six months ago.

For homeowners thinking about selling in 2026, the takeaway is pretty clear: the market is still strong, but it's less forgiving. The good news? Buyers are still out there. They're just a little more thoughtful than they used to be. And with the right approach, sellers can absolutely meet that moment and come out ahead.

That's exactly where Nina Sable Homes makes the difference, bringing the local insight, pricing precision, and market awareness it takes to turn today's conditions into a successful sale.

Learn more about Sable Homes at [www.sablellshomes.com](http://www.sablellshomes.com) or reach out to the team at 508-733-8935.

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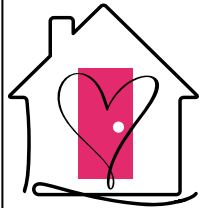
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04/16/2026	2 Phillips Pond Rd.	\$1,460,000
04/16/2026	5 Reynolds Ave.	\$1,180,000
04/15/2026	25 Irving Rd.	\$2,330,000
04/15/2026	57 Village Brook Ln. #5	\$360,000
04/15/2026	46 Silver Hill Ln. #1	\$305,000
04/15/2026	6 Floral Avenue Ext.	\$1,810,000
04/14/2026	340 N. Main St.	\$1,010,000
04/10/2026	10 Oak St.	\$835,000
04/10/2026	36 Winnemay St.	\$1,280,000
04/10/2026	50 Wethersfield Rd.	\$1,330,000
04/09/2026	34 Walden Dr. #5	\$470,625
04/09/2026	4-4B Lincoln St.	\$960,000
04/08/2026	142 Mill St.	\$925,000
04/07/2026	37 Longfellow Rd.	\$1,910,000
04/07/2026	21 Kelsey Rd.	\$679,900
04/06/2026	16 Harvard St.	\$710,000
04/03/2026	3 Macarthur Rd.	\$1,020,000
04/03/2026	189 Eliot St.	\$1,810,000
04/03/2026	53 Harvard St.	\$819,000
04/02/2026	83 Eliot St.	\$1,900,000
04/01/2026	6-6A Lincoln St.	\$850,000
04/01/2026	16 Wayside Rd. #14	\$1,500,000
03/31/2026	62 Oakland St. Ext.	\$1,200,000
03/31/2026	15 Village Way #8	\$287,500
03/31/2026	11 Avon Ln.	\$1,780,000
03/30/2026	27 2nd St.	\$1,830,000
03/30/2026	52 Bacon St.	\$580,000
03/30/2026	28 Sylvester Rd.	\$826,000
03/30/2026	293 Bacon St. #A	\$1,070,000
03/27/2026	34 Marion St.	\$785,000
03/27/2026	48 Algonquian Dr.	\$1,900,000
03/27/2026	8 Walden Dr. #13	\$450,000
03/27/2026	29 Water St.	\$1,610,000
03/26/2026	9 Bellevue Rd.	\$1,280,000
03/25/2026	23 Village Rock Ln. #22	\$280,000
03/25/2026	11 Morgan Dr. #404	\$725,000
03/20/2026	16 Arlington Rd.	\$1,840,000
03/20/2026	12 Bay State Rd.	\$1,150,000
03/19/2026	44 Harwood Rd.	\$1,900,000
03/19/2026	5 Lanes End	\$1,050,000
03/17/2026	5 Village Rock Ln. #24	\$299,000

Source: zillow.com Compiled: Local Town Pages

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The 6-bed, 3-bath, 3,000-square-foot house at 36 Winnemay Street in Natick recently sold for \$1,280,000. Image credit: www.zillow.com

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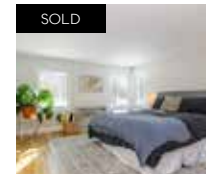









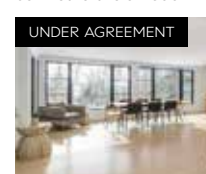

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