

Dartmouth's favorite cafe Mirasol's, welcomes back staff after positive COVID-19 test

Mirasol's Cafe has long been one of the most popular destinations in the area with hundreds of people flocking to the eatery daily for its Latin themed menu, "sexy" sandwiches, freshly-baked muffins and cookies, and of course, the famous "super-charged, super sexy CHiPPi."

If you are like me, you can't imagine a week going by without a visit to the cafe, some banter with the baristas, and some socializing. With the arrival of the worldwide pandemic, life, as we know it, has changed and that meant less of those things.

This struck close to home on May 11 when Owner Rich Romero publicly announced that a staff member had underlying symptoms of the virus. The employee was sent home and the cafe closed its doors the following two days while the entire staff was tested and utilized an independent company to disinfect and sanitize the entire facility. This, in spite of the fact that the Dartmouth BoH and Massachusetts Department of Public Health had already cleared the cafe and given the go-ahead to open.

That particular employee has since recovered and fulfilled the conditions needed to return to work, which were two negative tests in a row and a doctor's approval.

The cafe has altered the way business is done and how customers are interacted with. All employees' temperatures are checked not only at the beginning of their shift, but randomly throughout that shift, and then at the end of it.

The current hours are Wednesday through Saturday from 8:00am-3:00pm for walk-up to-go orders, "call ahead and pay ahead" with curbside pickup or delivery through third-party delivery such as GrubHub.

The menu is a limited one for now and consists of half-gallons and full gallons of CHiPPi only, iced vanilla Chai by the half-gallon, select breakfast and bagel sandwiches as well as Quesadillas, dark roast, light roast, and decaff coffee by the half-gallon, muffins and cookies by the half dozen, coffee beans by the pound, and take home flavors and espresso.

Other precautions include requiring customers to wear a mask, utilizing plexiglass at the register which was moved closer to the door as well as 6' apart floor markings for the queue inside. Once an order is placed, your order is brought to your car. As anyone who is a regular of the cafe knows, finding parking in the spot is like striking gold, so to lessen the time customers are spending occupying a parking space it is suggested that people call-ahead.

New Bedford sees lowest COVID-19 daily count since early in pandemic

New Bedford health officials reported one additional COVID-19 related deaths since Monday bringing the total to 72.

Mayor Jon Mitchell's office reported 9 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases in New Bedford on Tuesday, **bringing the total positive cases in the city to 1,883, up from 1,874 on Monday.**

Mayor Jon Mitchell announced that the City of New Bedford will establish a restaurant reopening advisory group, co-chaired by City Planner Tabitha Harkin and local businessman and restaurateur Stephen Silverstein, owner of The Black Whale and founder of Not Your Average Joe's. Full details [here](#).

3 additional cases of COVID-19 have been identified in Fall River, according to the Mayor's Office. This brings the total in Fall River to 1,338. Full details [here](#).

NOTICE: ABC Disposal statement regarding New Bedford bulky items and appliances



Notice

City of New Bedford

Bulky Items / Appliances

Challenges posed by COVID-19 resulted in backlog of pickups for Bulky items.

**As a result, property owners may continue to bring (3) bulky items
per week to the Transfer Station @ 1103 Shawmut Ave.**

**Starting Wednesday, June 3rd, 2020, thru June 30th, 2020,
the Transfer Station will be open for drop offs of bulky items,
Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 3:00pm and Saturday 7:30am to 3:00pm.**

**Thank you for your patience as we continue to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak
and the safety of our employees as we continue to provide the City with Curbside Collection.**

New Bedford officials reports three more COVID-19 related deaths since Saturday

New Bedford health officials reported three additional COVID-19 related deaths since Saturday bringing the total to 71.

Mayor Jon Mitchell's office reported 22 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases in New Bedford on Monday, bringing the total positive cases in the city to 1,874, up from 1,852 on Saturday.

Mayor Jon Mitchell announced that the City of New Bedford will establish a restaurant reopening advisory group, co-chaired by City Planner Tabitha Harkin and local businessman and restaurateur Stephen Silverstein, owner of The Black Whale and founder of Not Your Average Joe's. Full details [here](#).

33 additional cases of COVID-19 have been identified in Fall River, according to Mayor Coogan. This brings the total in Fall River to 1,321. The death toll from the coronavirus in Fall River remains at 38 as the city does not get fatality updates on the weekend. Full details [here](#).

Warren calls for universal

COVID-19 testing of all incarcerated individuals and staff at Federal prisons

United States Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Cory Booker (D-N.J.) sent a letter to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) urging the BOP to immediately conduct universal COVID-19 diagnostic testing of all incarcerated individuals and correctional staff-including those at privately-managed facilities-and to publicly release comprehensive data on the number of incarcerated individuals and staff who have been tested for COVID-19 and the results of these tests in its daily reports of COVID-19 cases in federal prisons.

“If we’re committed to ending this deadly pandemic, then we need to get serious about testing, especially at federal prisons, where inmates and staff are particularly vulnerable to the virus,” said Senator Warren in a statement alongside the letter. “With the federal prison population’s average infection rate being more than 5 times higher than the national average, BOP must act now to save lives and protect the health and safety of incarcerated individuals, correctional staff, and the general public.”

Since the beginning of the outbreak, public health experts have warned that incarcerated individuals are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, as they are confined in close quarters and are unable to take precautionary steps to protect themselves, including social distancing and increased personal hygiene. According to BOP’s most recent public reporting, 1,693 individuals incarcerated in the federal system have been infected and 64 have died as a result of COVID-19. Additionally, 187 BOP staff have been infected.

The nearly 170,000 individuals incarcerated in the federal

system and around 36,000 correctional staff are dependent on BOP to effectively manage the COVID-19 crisis and implement measures to protect them from infection. However, little information has emerged about the COVID-19 diagnostic testing being conducted by BOP, and earlier this month, BOP announced that “of the roughly 2,700 inmates tested, approximately 70% have tested positive for COVID-19.” This extremely high positive test rate suggests that BOP is not testing sufficient numbers of incarcerated individuals and staff.

“Widespread and continued diagnostic testing is crucial to controlling the COVID-19 pandemic,” the senators wrote in the letter. “Because many of the individuals carrying COVID-19 may be asymptomatic, widespread testing is critical to understanding the extent of the outbreak in the incarcerated population, and making informed decisions to limit further spreading of the virus.”

Senators Warren and Booker called on BOP to immediately implement COVID-19 diagnostic testing of all incarcerated individuals in BOP custody and BOP correctional staff, and mandate that all incarcerated individuals and staff in privately-managed facilities be tested. The senators also urged BOP to publicly release information about its COVID-19 testing policies and the testing capabilities of each BOP facility, and to release the numbers of incarcerated individuals and staff who have been tested for COVID-19, along with comprehensive data on the results of those tests in its daily reporting of COVID-19 cases in federal prisons.

Last month, Senator Warren, along with Senator Markey and Congresswoman Trahan, wrote to BOP urging it to immediately implement widespread COVID-19 testing of all incarcerated individuals and staff at Federal Medical Center Devens (FMC Devens) and release to home confinement vulnerable individuals who do not pose specific and substantial safety threats. Booker has introduced legislation that would incentivize states to provide COVID-19 testing and treatment for

vulnerable people in state facilities, and legislation that would release to home confinement thousands of people behind bars in federal facilities that are vulnerable to COVID-19 complications.

In March, Senators Warren and Booker, and a group of their Senate colleagues, wrote to BOP requesting information on the steps it was taking to prevent and manage the COVID-19 outbreak in federal prisons. Senator Warren, along with Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.), has also written to President Trump calling on him to adopt and release decarceral guidelines to reduce the population of people in federal custody in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

OPINION: An open letter to the New Bedford community by High School Upperclassmen: what we need from our educational experience amidst COVID-19

Ashley Cowles is a graduating senior at New Bedford High School and wrote this op-ed on distance learning from a student perspective. To reinforce her own fears about education during COVID-19, she gathered student perspectives on distance learning. Given the inconsistencies in education students are experiencing through distance learning, she believes the community, specifically educators and school leaders, could benefit from hearing their concerns.

"I woke Monday morning to the dreaded but anticipated news: Massachusetts schools would shut down for the remainder of the school year. Learning would continue through remote online platforms. My stomach dropped. Just like that, my senior year had been pulled out from under my feet. After nearly four years of hard work, memories, and musings of the future, my high school experience would remain distantly suspended like a held-in sneeze.

After the initial shock came a sudden and debilitating flood of fears about the remainder of the year. I still have three AP exams in May. While distance learning had kept us clumsily afloat until this point, it in no way replaces the in-person test prep I rely on to be successful. I couldn't handle another two months of unopened emails, busywork, and ridiculous self-teaching expectations.

Knowing I couldn't be alone in my anxieties, I reached out to my peers to see how they were handling the news. Unsurprisingly, they feel similarly.

In general, students are happy with our district's reaction to the crisis. One junior from my AP literature course explained how the school's initiative to continue providing meals to students helped her family after her mother couldn't grocery shop. Another senior peer praised the school's decision to authorize a "credit/no credit" system, stating, "Pass/Fail offers students who can't prioritize their education right now an opportunity to still get their diploma." As our district is familiar with low-income families, it's no surprise the school department has a grip on broader equity issues.

However, when the conversation turns to our individual learning experience, we have concerns about communication and consistency. We've noticed that while some teachers are still reaching out to students, others have fallen silent. A junior

posed that without routine communication from educators, it's easy for students to "fall off the wagon," especially while stuck at home. It's clear that the inability to meet face to face has revealed discrepancies in effort on behalf of individual educators. Here the true responsibility of educators reveals itself; it's up to you to ensure us students are keeping up. In the words of a peer, in a time when it's easier to shut down and "stay in bed all day," we as students rely on that accountability.

In the same vein, you should understand that accountability does not equal busywork. One junior insisted that school was "so much more" than learning content. She protested the massive amount of work one teacher had assigned with barely any guidance and hard deadlines. "I have to watch my brothers," she stated, as her parents were still working and daycare facilities had closed. She went on to point out that some teachers weren't taking into account the new responsibilities of their students during a crisis. Here, individual interpretation comes into play; while my peer's teacher may assume she's doing the right thing by keeping kids busy, she is actually impeding their ability to safely operate in a crisis.

It seems that COVID is exacerbating issues that had previously plagued NBHS, namely, communication. With no past experience, training, or new guidelines to reference, teachers are at a loss, and many struggle to connect with students effectively. As a result, students are facing inconsistencies in contact and workload that impede learning. One junior argues: teachers are "limited by their own capabilities."

To alleviate the pressure put on educators, students have suggestions. Ultimately, we're calling for school leaders to be straightforward in their expectations of teachers; thus far, any direction has been overly general. One junior suggests that while a large responsibility falls on teachers during this crisis, "clearer guidelines" will eliminate any

harmful interpretation of how education should continue, and make sure students are still learning while remaining sensitive about our current situation.

At the end of the day, we recognize that this crisis has thrown us all for a loop and that the district has done what they could given the circumstances. However, educators and department heads have to understand that unless we better coordinate the distance learning experience, students will continue feeling isolated and overwhelmed during an already taxing ordeal. Now more than ever, we need to generate a conversation that is ongoing; one that fosters better communication among student, educator, and school leader, and ensures educators are getting the resources necessary to operate without causing harm.

Some experts anticipate the COVID crisis extending into the fall, along with school cancellations. If we establish a strong foundation now, we can create a more efficient learning model that will prepare us for this possibility.”-Ashley Cowles.

New Bedford restaurant reopening advisory group established

Mayor Jon Mitchell announced that the City of New Bedford will establish a restaurant reopening advisory group, co-chaired by City Planner Tabitha Harkin and local businessman and restaurateur Stephen Silverstein, owner of The Black Whale and founder of Not Your Average Joe's.

“When restaurants reopen in New Bedford, we want to ensure they can do so safely and profitably,” said Mayor Jon Mitchell. “I’m grateful to Steve Silverstein, Tabitha Harkin, and the reopening group comprised of business leaders and industry professionals for their willingness to provide their expertise and recommendations to the City as we look toward our next steps in reopening our local economy.”

On May 18, Governor Charlie Baker announced his plan to reopen the Commonwealth of Massachusetts “to methodically allow businesses, services, and activities to resume, while avoiding a resurgence of COVID-19.” On May 21, Mayor Jon Mitchell announced that the City of New Bedford would follow and implement the first phase of Governor Charlie Baker’s reopening plan, with adjustments warranted by the current risk level of disease transmission in the city and region, including for large workplaces and houses of worship.

Based on the Governor’s announcements about forthcoming phases in the reopening process, guidelines around the reopening of businesses in the restaurant and hospitality industry are expected to be announced as part of the second phase of reopening. New Bedford’s restaurant reopening group will make recommendations to the Mayor about how to implement the reopening of restaurants in the city so that guests and workers can remain safe, and local business owners can operate profitably while ensuring safe and healthy conditions at their establishments.

Once the state’s guidelines on reopening restaurants in Massachusetts are released, Mayor Mitchell will announce how New Bedford’s restaurants will reopen, based on the state guidelines and the recommendations of the working group. This will include how New Bedford restaurants will be able to operate, including outdoor dining adjustments, social distancing measures and enhanced hygiene protocols for dining establishments.

The state's reopening plan can be found at www.mass.gov/info-details/reopening-massachusetts. As the Governor made clear, his reopening decisions are based in part on the progress the state has made in lowering the number of new positive cases and the positive test rate.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the state of the virus in New Bedford has remained different from that of the state as a whole. Current information on trends in New Bedford may be found on the city's website: www.newbedford-ma.gov/health-department/coronavirus/.

Housing committee votes big for Massachusetts rent control bills

Chris Lisinski
State House News Service

A Beacon Hill committee has endorsed two bills that would clear the way for rent control to return to Massachusetts more than two and a half decades after voters narrowly banned the practice statewide.

The Joint Committee on Housing favorably recommended the legislation on Thursday, advancing it with support from three-quarters of its members as it faces certain opposition from Gov. Charlie Baker.

One bill (H 1316), filed by Cambridge Democrat Rep. David Rogers, would allow any Massachusetts municipality to impose a limit on how much landlords can increase rent each year. The

cap would only apply to tenants who earn 80 percent or less of the area median income.

The other bill (H 3924), co-authored by Democratic Reps. Mike Connolly of Cambridge and Nika Elugardo of Boston, includes rent control as one option among several tenant protection policies that cities and towns could choose to implement.

Neither proposal requires local officials to adopt rent control. If the bills are approved, communities could opt in with a local vote, but those that do not support it could maintain the status quo.

If lawmakers want to advance the proposals further, they will need to decide whether the local approval would occur through a vote of the local governing or legislative body or a community-wide referendum.

Sen. Brendan Crighton, one of the committee's co-chairs, told the News Service that his panel wanted to "move it along in the process so we didn't run out of time."

"We're dealing with unprecedented times here, and obviously, we're getting into June soon. We felt like getting the bill out of committee rather than having it stuck there for a prolonged period of time made sense," he said. "I certainly think at this time, we need to keep an open mind about tenant protections, but some of the finer details still need to be worked out."

The committee voted 13-2 to give a favorable report to the Connolly and Elugardo bill, according to Crighton's office. Republican Reps. David DeCoste of Norwell and William Crocker of Barnstable voted against it during a Thursday poll, while Sen. John Keenan, a Quincy Democrat, neither supported nor opposed the legislation.

On the Rogers bill, the committee voted 12-1, with Crocker in opposition and DeCoste, Keenan and Weymouth Republican Sen.

Patrick O'Connor not taking a position, Crighton's office said.

It remains unclear if either of the proposals are a priority for legislative leaders, but the committee's support gives the controversial idea some momentum.

While its implementation was limited, rent control had been allowed in Massachusetts for years, but in 1994, voters approved a landlord-backed ballot question prohibiting any local practice by about 51 percent to 49 percent. Boston, Brookline and Cambridge, the only communities with rent control in place at the time of the ballot question, voted in favor of keeping the practice.

Progressive lawmakers and community groups have been pushing for a return to rent control since last year, pitching it as a solution to the statewide housing crisis that officials across the political spectrum acknowledge is disproportionately straining low- and moderate-income tenants.

"The affordability and displacement crisis is growing faster than we and many nonprofits can handle it," City Life / Vida Urbana Executive Director Lisa Owens said at a January committee hearing. "The need for bold, comprehensive solutions has never been greater."

Baker and landlord groups oppose efforts to bring back the policy. At the same committee hearing, Greater Boston Real Estate Board CEO Greg Vasil said rent control "would be a cold shower to production at a time when we need more production."

Last year, Baker described rent control as "exactly the wrong direction we should go" and said limiting prices could cut into development of new housing.

The governor has been pushing for years to lower voting thresholds for local zoning changes, arguing that many potential projects never get off the ground because they

cannot secure a two-thirds majority.

Crighton's committee also endorsed that Baker bill (H 3507) in December.

The Housing Committee also favorably reported a local bill sought by Somerville officials (H 4517) that would give tenants a chance to purchase, alongside non-profits, their residential buildings once the owner agrees to a sale.

Members sent a fourth bill in Thursday's poll (H 1257) concerning housing authority jurisdictions to a study.

SNAP recipients can now buy groceries online

Colin A. Young

State House News Service

After securing the go-ahead from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and running tests on the system, the Department of Transitional Assistance announced Friday that Massachusetts residents who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits can now buy groceries online through Amazon and Walmart with electronic benefit transfer cards.

DTA said the benefits can be used to buy SNAP-eligible foods online, including fresh produce, frozen foods, dairy and eggs, plant seeds and more. Online purchases can be delivered through Amazon and some Walmart locations, and many Walmart stores also offer curbside pickup.

"The Administration has been working to use all tools available to address food insecurity exacerbated by this

public health crisis,” Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders said. “SNAP is one of the best tools available to fight hunger, putting money directly into the hands of our residence (sic) and local economy. This innovative option enables families across the Commonwealth to purchase food directly and safely.”

Massachusetts lawmakers offer vast expansion of voting options

Matt Murphy

State House News Service

Every registered voter in Massachusetts would receive an application by mid-July to request a ballot to vote by mail in the 2020 elections under a plan released Friday by House and Senate Democrats intended to create more options for voters to safely participate in the electoral process during the coronavirus pandemic.

The proposal for expanded voting-by-mail would be coupled with in-person early voting before both the primary and general elections in September and November, and traditional voting at a local polling station during both elections.

With the bill, Massachusetts state lawmakers are inserting themselves directly into a fiery national debate over the integrity of mail-in voting, with President Donald Trump at the center of the conflagration. Trump has suggested that mailboxes would be robbed and ballots would be forged or fraudulently signed as states moved to vote-by-mail, despite

five states already using this system without trouble before the pandemic.

The co-chairs of the Election Laws Committee Rep. John Lawn of Watertown and Sen. Barry Finegold of Andover released a bill on Friday night, giving members of their committee 48 hours to review and vote on whether to recommend the bill to the full House and Senate.

Lawn said the plan is for House Democrats to caucus on Tuesday, and to take up the legislation on Wednesday when they meet, remotely, in a full formal session.

"We've been voting by mail since the Civil War when soldiers went away. President Trump has voted by mail the last few elections, as has the vice president. We understand we don't need a polarizing issue right now to call our elections into question, but we do need to provide options, especially for our seniors, and we think we've addressed that," Lawn said.

The bill directs Secretary of State William Galvin to mail an application by July 15 to every registered voter in the state so that they can, if they choose, request a ballot for both the primary and the general election. There were over 4.58 million residents registered to vote in the March presidential primary.

Galvin would also be instructed to create an online portal for registered voters to request a mail-in ballot electronically, instead of returning their ballot application by mail.

For voters who choose not to participate by mail, the proposed legislation would, for the first time ever, create a seven-day window for in-person early voting before the primaries, and a 14-day early voting period before the general election, including two weekends.

The third option for voters would be to show up as they normally would on election day at their local polling

location, but Lawn said the bill would give city and town clerks the flexibility to eliminate the exit desk where poll workers typically check a voter out after they fill in their ballot and before they slide it into the counting machine.

By requiring only a check-in desk, Lawn said the hope is to relieve some of the pressure on clerks to find poll workers during the pandemic.

Many election reform advocates and some elected officials have been calling for ballots to be mailed automatically to every registered voter, but other critics said it would create complications, for instance, with unenrolled voters who can choose which primary they would like to vote in.

Lawn was among those who wanted to go the extra step and simply mail ballots to all voters, but described the committee's bill as a compromise.

"We definitely understand the complication of mail-in ballots without an application and this is common ground that we found and we think the right way to go," Lawn said.

Galvin had hoped to begin printing ballots as soon as June 2, and floated a legislative proposal of his own similar to this one that would have greatly expanded the early voting windows around the Sept. 1 primary and Nov. 3 general election and allowed registered voters to request a ballot either electronically or in writing.

"We've worked with the secretary. I would not say we're in 100 percent agreement on everything, but we've worked together," Lawn said, when asked if Galvin backed this latest bill.

"This bill is going to give people many options to feel safe while voting in the fall," said Election Laws Senate Chairman Barry Finegold. "First, it aggressively encourages people to vote early by mail. Second, it provides voters with the ability to vote early in person. Third, it allows those who

have health concerns related to COVID-19 to vote by absentee ballot. Fourth, it puts protective measures in place to let people to vote safely in person on Election Day. I am grateful to all of the partners who made this legislation possible, including Chairman Lawn, Election Laws Committee members, Secretary Galvin's office, and the advocates who came together to craft this comprehensive bill."

The Legislature authorized the expanded use of mail-in voting for two special Senate elections held last week and two more special elections for House seats that will take place on Tuesday.

Galvin said that more than 30 percent of the ballots cast in the Senate specials in western Massachusetts and on the Upper Cape and Plymouth areas were mail-in, with the numbers as high as 60 percent in some communities.

"These vote by mail rates reveal not only how popular the system is, but how practical it is too.

Amidst a pandemic, people should never have to choose between their health and their vote," said Cheryl Clyburn Crawford, the executive director of MassVOTE.

The issue of mail-in voting ignited this week when President Trump said there was "NO WAY (ZERO!)" chance that it could be done without being "substantially fraudulent," prompting Twitter to tag the president's tweet as misleading, and add a link for readers to "get the facts" about mail-in voting.

Gov. Charlie Baker, who is not on the ballot this fall, so far has not indicated whether he would support expanded vote-by-mail. While the issue has grabbed headlines and activists have argued a decision on voting options must come soon from Beacon Hill, Baker has suggested multiple times that he has not given it much thought and that there was time before a decision needed to be made.

The Center for State Policy Analysis at Tufts University has

estimated that universal vote-by-mail could cost the state between \$12 million and \$30 million for the general election alone, though money from the CARES Act could be put toward that purpose. Lawn said Galvin also has some funds that could be used to upgrade the technology to accept ballot applications.

“We still have to work out some of the cost but we do have CARES Act money,” Lawn said.