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June 26, 2023

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Dear Councilor Crossley,

On behalf of the League of Women Voters, Newton's (LWVN) 2022-23 Board of Directors, I am writing in support of the Zoning Ordinance regarding village centers and the implementation of the Massachusetts Housing Choice Bill (MBTA Communities)

According to the Planning & Development Department ^{Reference A}, the Village Center Overlay District (VCOD) zoning is consistent with city-wide goals to:

- I. Increase housing options – Easier to build housing of varying types and sizes
- II. Support local businesses – Simplify rules for opening and growing a business
- III. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions – Fossil free development per the Electrification Ordinance
- IV. Create more affordable/accessible housing – Smaller units and more inclusionary units

*“Through its actions and activities, LWVN members strive to [learn](#) more about our community and the issues that we care about, to **educate and inform** the citizens of Newton on issues of political interest to them and to the community, to **energize an informed citizenry to participate** actively in the political process, and to work to **ensure transparency and good government.**”*

Therefore we thought it important to participate in the City's extensive community engagement process, which for us began with our September 2021 Forum –Zoning Redesign Virtual Forum: Reimagining our Village Centers through to our end-of-year-observer report of the Zoning & Planning (ZAP) in May 2023. ^{Reference B}

As a result of our educational efforts and observations, it is our understanding that the VCOD is structured to promote safe and secure housing at a range of price points, while incentivizing increasing supply of smaller units, retaining our Inclusionary (IZ) ordinance requirements and in addition, provides a density bonus to encourage greater affordability. It most clearly concentrates the opportunity for compact development near transit and where key infrastructure exists, building upon Newton's unique existing patterns of development. This provides customers to support our local economy with minimal increase in car trips, by supporting walkable centers. It is also part of a regional plan (MBTA Communities) to address the critical housing shortage by increasing supply statewide, at a time when the state administration is focused on housing supply and transportation needs.

The League of Women Voters has multiple positions at the local, state, and national levels ^{Reference C,D, and E} in the areas, listed below, that enable us to advocate for these changes in Newton's zoning, some examples.

Housing

- Creating and maintaining a full spectrum of housing types to reflect and enhance the diversity of Newton's population and neighborhoods....
- Providing a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family....

Economic Development

- Retaining & creating businesses that contribute to the vitality of the community....
- Housing designed to meet human needs and should be built with amenities that will encourage economic integration within apartment buildings....

Zoning

- Zoning practices are consistent with regional long-range professional planning....
- Regional and metropolitan planning should be promoted to prevent haphazard urban growth, and housing for low- and moderate-income families should be provided.

Transportation

- Support a transportation system to move people and goods which includes a variety of transportation modes, with emphasis on increased public transportation services and other viable alternatives to reduce vehicle miles traveled; is efficient, convenient, and cost effective; is safe and secure; serves all segments of the population and diverse geographic needs; minimizes harmful effects on the environment; is integrated with land use; and is supported by extensive public education.

As a result of our almost two-year education process and with the League's local, state, and national positions, we are certain that the League of Women Voters, Newton is in a strong position to advocate for the adoption and implementation of the Village Center Overlay District ordinance and Housing Choice /MBTA Communities Act.

Sincerely,

Marcia Johnson

President, 2022-23 LWVN Board

We envision a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge, and the confidence to participate.

REFERENCES

- A. June 16, 2023, Department of Planning & Development's memo to Chair Councilor Crossley and the Zoning & Planning Committee.
- B. LWVN – Actions Taken
- Village Redesign Forum – Reimagining our Village Centers – September 2021
 - The League Presents: Zoning Redesign, part 1 – May 2022
 - Village Centers Zoning Updates – Phase II – August 2022
 - Presentation on Proposed Changes to Village Center Zoning – September 2022
 - Give Your Feedback on Proposed Changes to Village Center Zoning- October 2022
 - Zoning Redesign Part 2: MBTA Communities - October 2022
 - Annual Meeting Workbook – 2023 Zoning & Planning Observer Report, page 12
- C. LWVN – 2022 Approved Positions
- Support maintaining and creating the full spectrum of housing types to reflect and enhance the diversity of Newton's population and neighborhoods (*adopted 2011*).
 - Support Economic Development policies that retain and create businesses that contribute to the vitality of the community (*adopted 2011*)
 - Support of zoning practices consistent with regional long-range professional planning (*amended 2011*). Support zoning ordinances that are clear and understandable. We encourage the City to consider new zoning practices in its ordinances (*adopted 2011*)
- D. LWVMA – 2020 Where We Stand
- Transportation and land use planning should be integrated to promote reduced vehicle mile traveled through a jobs/housing balance and requirements that land use development facilitate use of transit and other alternatives to single occupant vehicles.
- E. LWVUS - Impact on Issues a Guide to Public Policy Positions 2022-24
- The following considerations can be applied to programs and policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.
 - Regional and metropolitan planning should be promoted to prevent haphazard urban growth, and housing for low- and moderate-income families should be provided as a part of all planned neighborhoods or communities.
 - Housing should be designed to meet human needs and should be built with amenities that will encourage economic integration within apartment buildings as well as within neighborhoods.