

Friday, Oct. 27, 2023

Mayor's Newton Update



Updating Our Village Center Zoning

The City Council Zoning and Planning Committee voted on Monday night 5-1-1 (i.e. 5 “yes,” 1 “no,” and 1 abstention) to forward the amended Village Center Zoning package to the full City Council for its consideration.

The Committee vote follows nearly three years of community and Committee discussion on how best to position our commercial village centers to be healthy and vibrant. The Village Center Zoning covers just 3% of the land area of our city and supports the long-term vitality of our villages by allowing by right the type of development that made them great in the first place – commercial with housing above.

The zoning provides for housing and commercial opportunities near transit, shops, restaurants, and places to gather while helping small businesses by providing clear rules and helping vitality by requiring ground floor retail or restaurants in key locations.

In addition, the updated Village Center Zoning makes Newton compliant with the MBTA Communities Law passed by the State Legislature in 2021 to address the housing shortage. The new Law requires Newton to adopt by Dec. 31, 2023 zoning to allow for 8,330 housing units by right near transit with at least 15 units per acre. (Lexington and Arlington have already passed new zoning to comply with the MBTA Communities Law and Brookline is on the verge.)

The full City Council has set aside a special meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 15 to deliberate Village Center Zoning.

In the meantime, here are five takeaways about the proposed Village Center Zoning:

- **New Buildings will be smaller and more climate friendly.** The Zoning discourages developers from building on large sites and ensures buildings fit the scale of our villages. A special permit is required for any new building on a lot that is over 30,000 sq. ft. The largest buildings (generally reserved for the core of village centers) can only be 4.5 stories with a 15,000 sq. ft. footprint. (For reference, Trio on Washington Street in Newtonville could not be built under the proposed Village Center Zoning by right *or* by special permit because Trio is on a lot that is over 120,000 sq. ft. and even the smallest of the two buildings at Trio exceeds what would be allowed to be built by right *or* by special permit under the new proposed zoning.)

- **The Village Center Zoning incentivizes preservation of existing buildings and discourages teardowns.** The residential zone that transitions from the commercial areas to the surrounding neighborhoods (known technically as a Multi Residence Transit (MRT) zone), allows more units when the existing house is kept and converted to multiple units.
- **The Village Center Zoning puts Newton in compliance with state law.** The MBTA Communities Law requires Newton to update zoning to allow at least 8,330 units of multifamily housing to be built by right near transit. This is a big number, so let me put it into context. This number assumes that every property is a blank slate and will be built to the maximum allowed with no parking spaces.
- **Redevelopment will not happen overnight.** According to the U.S. Census, Newton added just 672 total housing units between 2010 and 2020, a period of time which included very favorable economic conditions. Some areas may never redevelop because the existing buildings are already close to or exceed the size allowed under the new zoning, the site has been recently redeveloped, it's complicated to do because there are multiple owners, or the owner lacks interest in redevelopment. For context, approximately 41% of lots in Newton that would allow for two or more housing units are now single-family homes or non-residential uses.
- **The City Councilors listened so the zoning reflects significant revisions.** Since Version 1.0 was released a year ago, the Zoning and Planning Committee has required protections for residential neighborhoods (greater setbacks, reduced building heights, increased building step backs), increased open space requirements, added a minimum parking requirement in residential neighborhoods, removed areas from the Village Center Zoning maps (most notably some areas in Nonantum, West Newton, Newton Highlands, and Route 9), and changed the zoning on particular parcels to require smaller buildings (for example, allowing only 3.5 stories instead of 4.5 stories for much of Walnut Street in Newtonville).

You can read more about the proposed zoning in my newsletter from September 22, [here](#).

The Planning Department's [web-page](#) on village centers also contains a wealth of information on every aspect of the proposed zoning and the new version 3.1 maps and text will be available next week.

Update on Contract Negotiations with the Newton Teachers Association

People Matter Most of All

The members of the Newton School Committee and I have deep respect and appreciation for our educators and their professionalism and dedication. They are

committed, talented, inventive champions for our students and our schools. Our teachers and para-professionals work hard and deliver a top-notch education for our students.

Here in Newton, residents, parents, and business owners join me in believing that the Newton Public Schools are the bedrock of our community and we know that educators are the foundation of NPS.

Current Pay and Benefits

Given the critical importance of the people who work for NPS, it should be no surprise that our NPS educators – teachers and para-professionals – are paid well and consistently rank among the top in statewide salary comparisons. They also have excellent benefits. See for yourself.

The Superintendent and her team provided information on Monday:

- Current salaries and benefits
- Salary comparisons between Newton and other school districts
- The financial cost of various proposals under consideration

Click here to see the information: [Negotiations Information: Salaries, Benefits, District Comparisons](#)

In every budget I have prepared as Mayor, I have prioritized funding for the education of our children. The School budget always gets the biggest increase in both dollars and as a percentage. This budget year, the NPS budget is \$268 million, which, when combined with City-side spending on NPS (e.g., school nurses in the HHS budget, crossing guards and school resource officers in the NPD budget, building projects and maintenance in the Public Buildings budget), represents 65% of all City spending.

We are in Mediation

The Newton Teachers Association (NTA) contract expired two months ago on September 1, 2023. So far negotiators have been unable to bridge the gap between what the union wants and what NPS and the City can afford. We're grateful for the help of the state-appointed mediator.

What the NTA Wants

The union is asking for increases in salary and benefits that would add \$57 million to the NPS budget over three years, on top of the current budget of \$268 million. This increase is out of proportion in relation to teacher or any other municipal union contracts in other cities and towns.

The union's ask greatly exceeds the City's available budget which already includes a 3.5% annual increase for next year's NPS budget. (We forecast a

3.5% increase in City revenues, primarily from property taxes but also from new growth, grants, state aid, and other revenue sources).

Our Fiscal Reality

As the School Committee's bargaining team reported last summer:

"When the School Committee's budget grows at a rate of more than 3.5% per year, we are forced to seek additional sources of funding such as the recent operating override, which voters rejected, or to make cuts in staff, programs and services.

One of the School Committee's guiding principles in these contract negotiations, therefore, is to make sure that the rate of growth of the salaries and benefits specified in the contracts does not exceed 3.5% each year."

I will keep working with the City Council to transform one-time funds to provide additional sustainable, predictable and dependable support for NPS.

I have outlined a plan for spending this one-time money to boost the NPS budget over the next eight years without causing us to fall off the financial cliff once the funds run dry. (Click [here](#) to read more.) As Superintendent Anna Nolin wrote in her bulletin to the NPS community on Wednesday, she, the School Committee and I are in agreement with moving forward to develop a creative approach to providing additional funding to NPS using these one-time funds.

Looking Ahead

In negotiating a successor contract, my pledge along with the School Committee, remains to continue exercising good faith, under the umbrella of state assisted mediation, to reach a mutually beneficial, fair and sustainable agreement with the NTA.

Let There Be Light

For the first time ever the Newton North field has permanent lights just in time for daylight savings time.

Thank you to Luis Perez Demorizi from Newton's Parks, Recreation and Culture Department for stewarding this complicated project.

Moving Forward at Lincoln-Eliot

The Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School Project at 150 Jackson Road is a very exciting renovation and addition. This project will be the largest capital school investment that is fully funded by Newton in our city's history. This is just one of the many ways in which we are investing heavily in our children, our educators, and in our public school infrastructure.

The City of Newton has been working with our design team, Arrowstreet, and our Owner's Project Manager, Hill International, for several months to work through the prequalification process required by state law for the general and trades contractors for the Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School Project.

(Architect's rendering of the new home of Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School.)

The process for hiring general and trades contractors includes soliciting prequalification packages from a very large number of firms who were interested in submitting a bid. We call references, review past relevant projects, financial capacity, and much more. Through this process, we prequalify only those contractors who have the ability, experience, capacity, and professional standing to complete the quality of work we have come to expect here in Newton. This process yielded more than 100 qualified contractors.

A few weeks ago, we opened the bids for many of the trades (a mix of union and non-union, all of which pay prevailing wage) who would ultimately work for the general contractor. Today, we opened the bids for the general contractors.

The lowest responsible and capable bid for a general contractor was submitted by CTA Construction Managers who is headquartered in Waltham. (By state law, the City must award the project to the lowest qualified and responsible bidder.)

CTA Construction Managers has completed a large number of well-known school projects including Brookline High School, Concord Middle School, Weston High School, and the Willard Elementary School in Concord, to name a few.

We deeply appreciate the time that all the trades and general contractors took to develop and submit their bids and, for those who were not the low bidders, we look forward to working with them on one of our future projects.

In the coming weeks, we will be working with the City Council to move this important project forward. All in the cost of the project at approximately \$54.8M will be \$4.8M higher than anticipated but within our financial capacity.

The schedule for the project remains the same with students moving into the new home for the start of the 2025/2026 school year. As soon as we have a groundbreaking event scheduled, we will send out an invitation for everyone to come join us.

Click [here](#) to find up to date information on the project. You can also follow us on social media at [facebook.com](#), [instagram.com](#), or [twitter.com](#).

Early, In-Person Voting Begins Tomorrow

In-person early voting for the Nov. 7 municipal election starts tomorrow, Saturday, Oct. 28 at City Hall from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and will continue through the

week:

- Saturday, Oct. 28, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- Sunday, Oct 29, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- Monday, Oct. 30, 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, Oct. 31, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, Nov.1, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.



Voter Registration Deadline

The deadline to register to vote in the Nov. 7 municipal election is 5:00 p.m. tomorrow, Saturday, Oct. 28. The City Clerk's Office on the first floor of City Hall, 1000 Comm. Ave., will be open for people to register from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Check your voter status [here](#).

Vote by Mail Now Underway

As of the end of day yesterday, the City Clerk's Office had received 2,500 mail-in ballots.

If you haven't already returned an application to receive a mail-in ballot, time is running out. Stop in at the City Clerk's Office to get an application over the weekend when early, in-person voting is open or on Monday or Tuesday between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. All applications must be signed and returned to the Newton City Clerk's Office, 1000 Comm. Ave., by Tuesday, Oct. 31 at 5:00 p.m.

Ballots must be signed and returned to the Newton City Clerk's Office by mail, or in one of two secure drop boxes located outside the front door of City Hall. Ballots can also be dropped off in person at the City Clerk's Office on the first floor of City Hall.

To be counted, mail-in ballots must be returned by 8:00 p.m. when polls close on election day, Nov. 7. PLEASE give plenty of time for the U.S. Post Office to get your ballot back to City Hall.

Track your mail-in ballot [here](#).

Election Day In-Person Voting on Tuesday, Nov. 7

Vote in person at the polling location in your Ward on election day, Nov. 7 from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Not sure where you vote? Click [here](#). Find a map of Newton polling locations [here](#).

NPS Portrait of a Graduate

Superintendent Anna Nolin and the Newton Public Schools are beginning the process of creating a "Portrait of a Graduate" and they want our help.

The Portrait will be created by a team composed of a wide variety of community and school members.

The Portrait of a Graduate will be a collective vision that articulates our community's aspirations for every student in the Newton Public Schools.

Please consider joining the Portrait Design Team which requires attendance at four evening meetings.

- To learn more about the process and the meetings scheduled for January and February, please visit this webpage: [NPS Portrait of a Graduate](#)
- To indicate your interest in participating as a member of the Portrait of a Graduate Design Team, please complete this Google Form: [Community Portrait of a Graduate Design Team Interest Form](#).

Honoring Our Fire Department Heroes

Thirty years ago this week, Newton firefighters raced toward a burning building to a call that forever changed the lives of so many.

(Photo: With, from left, Firefighters Local 863 President Marc Rizza, Fire Chief of Operations Michael Bianchi, Fire Chief Greg Gentile and retired Newton Fire Captain Mark Roche.)

Eleven Newton firefighters on duty that fateful night were seriously injured in the chemical explosion and intense fire at the H.C. Starck facility; none of them returned to duty.

On Tuesday, we gathered to dedicate a bench in front of Fire Headquarters on Centre Street in Newton Centre to memorialize the 11 injured: Thomas Sweeney, Edward Bagley, Edward Daley, Raymond McNamara, Joseph Dangelo, Kevin Hough, Robert Moyer, Kenneth Nielsen, Joseph Ohvo, Richard O'Neil and Samuel Rizza, Jr.

We give thanks to President Marc Rizza (son of Sam Rizza, Jr.) and Newton Firefighters Local 863 for creating this memorial.

As Fire Chief Greg Gentile said in his remarks, we will never forget their courageous service to this City, nor will we forget their sacrifice.

We are forever grateful for the service of our firefighters.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Learn more about steps the Newton Public Schools have taken to make our schools safe and healthy environments for students at a webinar on Wednesday, Nov. 1 at 7:00 p.m. You will hear a presentation from NPS district safety leaders, Newton Police, Newton Fire, and Newton Health and Human Services. You will have an opportunity to ask questions that night and questions may also be submitted in advance [here](#). Join the forum via zoom [here](#).

P.P.S. We'll be turning our clocks *back* one hour next weekend on Sunday, Nov. 5 at 2:00 a.m. Please know that as of this year, **Massachusetts law now requires cyclists to have a front white light and a rear red light and reflector while riding when it is dark.** For added visibility, a good idea is to use the lights during daylight, too.

P.P.P.S. Join Newton and Brookline Police (and Leo and Bear, community police dogs) at their **Heroes for Hope** event this Sunday, Oct. 29 at The Street (33 Boylston Street, Chestnut Hill-Newton) for a great cause. Raffles, games, activities, prizes, a bean bag toss police challenge, and more will benefit the Massachusetts and Rhode Island [Make a Wish Foundation](#). Come to the Green at The Street in Chestnut Hill in front of The Shake Shack from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. to join the family friendly fun.

P.P.P.P.S. New Philharmonia Orchestra, Newton's symphony, will open its 29th season *Tried, True & New* on Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 4 and 5 with a performance of selections by Beethoven, Sibelius and Tarrh at a new venue, Grace Episcopal Church, 76 Eldridge St., Newton. The Saturday performance begins at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday begins at 3:00 p.m. Find more info about these performances, upcoming events and tickets at [newphil.org](#).

P.P.P.P.P.S. Pathways to Possible will host **Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jennifer Senior**, author of the Atlantic's September cover story, *The Ones We Sent Away*, for an author talk and reception at The Allen Center, on Wednesday, Nov. 8 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. While the event is free and open to the public, pre-registration by Wednesday, Nov. 1 is required. Email community@pathway2possible.org for more information, to submit questions ahead of the event, or to RSVP.

P.P.P.P.P.P.S. Come along on an adventure into the northern winter with Anders Morley, winner of the 2021 National Outdoor Book Award for travel writing. He will show photographs and share anecdotes from *The Land of Snow*, the story of his four-month journey through northwestern Canada on cross-country skis. Join in on Thursday, Nov. 2 from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. at the Hyde Community Center, 90 Lincoln St. RSVP is requested (but not required) by

stopping by the Senior Center at 20 Hartford St., calling 617-796-1675, or emailing seniorprograms@newtonma.gov.

P.P.P.P.P.P.S. The Newton Police Department is partnering with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration for a **Drug Take-Back Day** on Saturday, Oct. 28, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the rear parking lot at Newton Police Headquarters, 1321 Washington St., West Newton. Can't make this event? A drug kiosk is permanently located outside City Hall where you can safely drop unneeded or expired medication.

P.P.P.P.P.P.S. Bring a pumpkin, paints and carving supplies (or use materials provided by organizers) and join the **Halloween in the Park** fun with cider, sweets and music this Saturday, Oct. 28, from noon to 3:00 p.m. at Coletti-Magni Park, 386-392 Watertown St., Nonantum. Then join the Friends of Coletti-Magni Park later that evening at the Park from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. for some early trick-or-treating at the **Candlelit Jack-O-Lantern Walk**.



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