

Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2023

Mayor's Newton Update

Historic “Yes” Vote on Zoning

The Newton City Council last night took an historic vote to make major zoning changes for the first time in decades to support businesses and provide housing in our village centers. Through compromise and hard work, the “yes” vote also makes Newton compliant with the state’s MBTA Communities Act and includes the village centers by all three commuter rail stations and four Green Line stations.



The 21-2 vote (Councilors Noel and Leary opposed and Councilor Ryan not present) came as Councilors reached consensus on adopting the village center overlay district (VCOD) zoning for Newton Centre, Newton Highlands, Elliot/Route 9, Waban, West Newton, and Newtonville (comprising the MBTA Communities Law zoning district) – as well as Auburndale.

Including Auburndale in the rezoning is important to me, our State delegation, Congressman Auchincloss and the Council in helping secure MBTA and federal funding to rebuild our three rail stations with elevators and double platforms, making them accessible with more frequent service. Design for the new stations is 75% complete. (Read more about this in my Update from November 14 [here](#).)

Importantly, the vote means we will be submitting this newly adopted zoning to the State on time, demonstrating compliance with the MBTA Communities Law, which requires Newton, as one of twelve rapid transit communities, to have compliant zoning in place by the end of this year, Dec. 31, 2023. (The other 11 so-called “rapid transit communities” who had this first deadline of December 2023 are Braintree, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Malden, Medford, Milton, Quincy, Revere and Somerville.) Another 165 cities and towns have to comply in the next few years.

The final vote came after nearly three years of work, countless revisions and thousands of hours of committee meetings, public meetings with residents and businesspeople in each village center, and staff time. It followed last week’s important City Council vote to remove from the proposed VCOD map all of the village centers *not* included as part of Newton’s proposed MBTA district (Four Corners, Lower Falls, Newton Corner, Nonantum, Upper Falls, Thompsonville).

Last night, the City Council made additional revisions to the VCOD proposal:

- Reducing many of the previously proposed VC3 parcels in the West Newton village center core to VC2 (VC3 allowed 4.5 stories while VC2 allows 3.5

stories)

- Modifying the VC3 one-story affordable housing bonus provision so that the percentage of units would have to be a minimum of 50% as opposed to the previous requirement of 25%
- Including Auburndale Center as part of the village center overlay district as VC2
- Adding a parking requirement of 0.5 spaces per unit for VC3 lots that are over 20,000 square feet

See the updated Citywide map below (*click to expand*):

With the formal adoption by the City Council last evening, the VCOD zoning becomes effective after 20 days.

Rezoning decisions are difficult. Sometimes Councilors had sharp disagreements and frayed emotions. Yet, the City Councilors came together and passed new zoning that will make the approval process for building very much needed new housing clearer and help the vitality of many village centers.

I am grateful to City Council President Susan Albright and Councilor Lenny Gentile who worked together to forge a compromise that they knew was good for Newton and acceptable to their City Council colleagues.

Our City of Newton Planning Department led by Director Barney Heath, Deputy Director Jen Caira and Chief of Long Range Planning Zack LeMel and the entire Planning team showed a depth of knowledge, an attention to detail, and professionalism through the lengthy process that is admirable. City Attorneys Jonah Temple and Andrew Lee provided answers to legal questions that helped shape the final decisions. Carol Moore and City Clerk Jaclyn Norton, who staffs the Zoning and Planning Committee, did outstanding work. I also want to acknowledge and thank so many Newton residents and organized groups took the time to study the various VCOD versions and shared their thoughts

Finally, I want to thank City Councilor Deb Crossley, the Chair of the City Council Zoning and Planning Committee, who poured her fine mind, experienced hand, and good heart into this work. All the members of the Zoning and Planning Committee deserve our thanks for laboring many late nights to weigh various alternatives and remain open to modifications along the way.

The City of Newton took a giant step forward last night. It is truly something for all of us to celebrate.

Martha Bixby Elected to City Council After Recount

Newton's four Election Commissioners certified the official election results at a recount conducted on Saturday, December 2, 2023 of the Ward 6 City Council ward seat. The result is Martha Bixby winning the November 7 election by a 15-vote margin.

These official results show that Bixby received 1,324 votes and Lisa Gordon received 1,309 votes. In total, 2,739 votes were cast for the Ward only City Council seat, including 1 write-in vote and 105 ballots counted as blank in this race.

The recount began at the Newton Free Library's Druker Auditorium at 9:00 a.m. Saturday and lasted over eight hours. Election workers recounted each ballot by hand, individually, as observers representing the two candidates looked on. Lawyers representing each candidate conferred on ballots challenged by the observers, and the Newton Election Commissioners made the final decisions on the challenged ballots.

After all the ballots were recounted, the Election Commissioners deliberated and decided they were satisfied that all ballots cast on election night that should have been counted were properly counted. They finished up with a signed written statement on the final results of the recount and a vote to certify the amended results as the true record of the election for Ward 6 City Councilor.

I am grateful for the careful work by City Clerk Carol Moore, Election Supervisor John Doyle and the entire election staff.

Having certified the results of the Ward 6 City Council ward only race on Saturday, the Election Commission met again this afternoon, Tuesday, Dec. 5, to certify the complete results of the Nov. 7 Municipal Election for City Councilors and members of the School Committee.

Election of City Council President and Vice President

With the makeup of the City Council finalized, the City Council is scheduled to meet this Thursday at 7:45 p.m. in Room 204 at City Hall (1000 Commonwealth Avenue) to elect their President and Vice President for the 2024-2025 term. You are welcome to come in-person and watch the deliberations, or watch virtually at this link: <https://newtonma-gov.zoom.us/j/83811838277>.

Kudos to Newton Businesses

Seven Newton employers are among the Boston Globe's list of top places to work in Massachusetts.

Kudos to:

- Bright Horizons Family Solutions, a family care service with corporate headquarters at 2 Wells Avenue (our only office park) with 1,996 employees in Massachusetts.
- RMR Group, a real estate investment company at 255 Washington Street in Newton Corner with 278 employees in MA.

- Wingate Companies, a property management company with corporate headquarters at 100 Wells Avenue with 700 employees in MA.
- The Village Bank, corporate offices at 320 Needham Street with 150 employees in MA.
- Visiting Angels, a senior homecare company at 29 Crafts Street with 110 employees in MA.
- Good Shepherd Community Care, hospice and palliative care at 160 Wells Avenue with 215 employees in MA.
- Boston Showcase, restaurant and food service design and supply at 66 Winchester Street with 61 employees in MA.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Join the New Philharmonia Orchestra and the Boston Ballet School for **Celebrations! Holiday Concert**, this Sunday, Dec. 10, at Brown Middle School, 125 Meadowbrook Road. A holiday tradition in Newton for more than a decade, the New Phil musicians and Boston Ballet School dancers perform selections of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, as well as holiday works including *Let There Be Peace on Earth* sung by Newton North student Simona Karadoneva, a winner of the Boston Pops Fidelity Investments Young Artists Competition 2023. Find more information and buy tickets at newphil.org.

P.P.S. Join Santa and some elves—Olaf, Rudolph, Frosty and more—at the Nonantum Children's Christmas Party Association **Christmas Parade** on Sunday, Dec. 17. The parade starts at noon (click [here](#) for the route) spreading holiday cheer across Nonantum before ending at Coletti-Magni Park, 386-392 Watertown Street, for a visit and photos.

P.P.P.S. Want to learn more about the **METCO program** in the Newton Public Schools? Join us at a community forum featuring METCO students tomorrow, Wednesday, Dec. 6 at 6:30 p.m. at Newton South High School. METCO is a program funded by the state of Massachusetts to expand educational opportunities, increase diversity, and reduce racial isolation by permitting students from Boston to attend public schools in other communities that have chosen to participate. Newton has a proud tradition of having the most METCO students of all the host school districts, with approximately 420 METCO students.

Past P.S.s Happening Soon:

P.S. Newton Health and Human Services is partnering with the MGH Blood Donor Center and hosting a **mobile blood drive at City Hall** on Thursday, Dec. 7, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at City Hall. Click [here](#) to register.



P.P.S. All Over Newton's Third Annual **Newton Centre Holiday Shop & Stroll** is this Sunday, Dec. 10 from noon to 4:00 p.m.



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