



**Newtonville Area Council - Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, December 22, 2022 7:00 PM**  
**Meeting Location: Online via Zoom**

**Attendees:**

**NAC:** Jennifer Bentley (President), Martina Jackson (Vice President), Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay (Secretary), Nancy Greenberg, Timothy LeBlanc, Aline Sammut

**Absent:** Dana D'Agostino (Treasurer)

**City Government:** Tarik Lucas Rena Getz

**Public:** Approximately 20-25 members of the public

Jennifer called the meeting to order and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

**1. Presentation on the Court Street project by Boylston Properties**

Jennifer explained that the planned presentation by the developer was deferred due to needed project redesign as a result of DPW's refusal to permit use of their back driveway as an entry/egress. The other alternative, Maguire Court (off Craft Street) would intersect with the planned building, and the developer needs to work around a sewer easement. Court Street is a narrow street for which the added traffic would be a burden and the developer is trying to avoid using it, but that may be their only option. A standing invitation to present to the NAC has been extended.

Aline asked whether the developer might appeal the DPW's decision on use of the driveway. Jennifer explained that DPW has decisional authority and, while Mayor Fuller had suggested to the developer that the use might be approved, the decision is not within her scope of authority.

**2. Update on Village Center Zoning map response**

Martina reported on her attendance at community meetings following issuance of the draft zoning maps. She noted that a number of people with views on both sides of the upzoning issue attended multiple meetings as well. Of note, while the Planning & Development Department assured participants that buildings designated as historic would have preservation protections, the 12-18 months demolition delay is not real protection.

As the Newtonville community meeting, one advocate person who does not live near the potential area of development (who Peter Bruce pointed out is a developer and owns an investment property in the area slated for upzoning advocated) in favor of densification. People who live closer to the upzoned areas and the incursions into Washington Park area expressed concerns. Newtonville has the largest number of areas proposed for change to multi-unit, multi-story buildings, and Walnut Street has been proposed for the highest level of upzoning (i.e., VC3). A number of participants expressed concern about a “canyon effect” on Walnut Street due to its narrowness. The issue of allowing By Right development for large mixed use 4-5 story buildings was discussed, although if over 30,000 square feet were involved in a project it would require a Special Permit. Traffic issues were discussed, including whether Newtonville is truly suitable for Transit-Oriented Development since the commuter rail is not accessible and funding for reconstructing the stairs was denied, the station is a flag stop and service runs 8 time less frequently than in Wellesley, plus bus service has been cut back. Concerns included the proposed amount of density and allowing developers to do so much building By Right. In West Newton, Newtonville and Nonantum, Washington and Watertown Streets would be busy pass throughs. During construction local businesses would be displaced, but business owners were not contacted about the proposal, although they were although invited to speak at the start of the sessions. Nonantum/Newton Corner really are not a united village, and Newton Corner contends with the accident-prone traffic circle. She also reported that Councilor Gentile has “chartered (i.e., delayed for one City Council meeting) tabled the Mark Development’s request for permit approval.

Peter Bruce made the point that arguments in favor of densification based on climate change considerations were countered by several people, including the President of the Nature Conservancy. With regard to the supposedly transit-oriented development Trio her reported that per Neil Cronin of the Planning & Development Department, only 2 residents accepted the free transit passes and only ~ \$3,500 of the \$300,000 transit-oriented funding set aside by Mark Development has been used. He pointed out that apparently Newtonville and Newton Corner are slated to have 100+ parcels converted to village center upzoning while other villages have only ~ 20-25 parcels upzoned. In the Newtonville meeting there were 34 speakers with opponents outnumbering proponents 3 to 1. Of the 8 people who liked the proposal for Newtonville, half of them came from outside Newtonville. He added that Trio has created a heat island and the mature trees were replaced by bushes and striplings. He noted that gentrification was also an issue for meeting participants

Carolyn pointed out that significant amounts in mitigation payments that are made in connection with Special Permits will be lost if upzoning allows so much By Right development.

Jennifer said that she has heard the same type of summaries about the other community meetings. The Planning & Development Department has said it will schedule a meeting for concerned organizations and civic groups, but it is not clear how many people will be allowed to speak, how much time they will be given or when the meeting will be held. Jennifer is asking for clarification and said the NAC will apply to present and she encouraged multiple people to speak.

Councilor Wright reported that Planning Director Heath has said only groups and organizations will be permitted to speak. In the past, groups have been allotted 5 minutes speaking time. In order to prepare, most groups want to present at the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting. It is also expected that at these meetings there will be more lenience about displaying slides and images.

Carolyn suggested submitting written comments for the record and volunteered to draft some Pros/Cons.

MaryLee Belleville conveyed concerns that 2 minutes would be too limiting and noted that at various meetings residents were given assurances of their being given the opportunity to comment. She encouraged the public to attend these two sessions and to attempt to speak.

Peter Bruce noted that Peter Harrington has experience and that he prepared a critique of the hearing and has proposals about the “tricks and traps” of the zoning process which was potentially suitable for email distribution. Carolyn, with Aline’s support, suggested distributing his updated piece by email or newsletter (as selected by Jennifer) in January. Aline also asked what could be done about residents not being allowed to express their views.

Martina reported Richard Rasala prepared a detailed, 100+ pages of analysis on the impact of the proposed upzoning on Newton Corner.

Carolyn introduced Marc Hershman, a local architect who has done work on his own time to create images of the projected impact of the proposed upzoning. Marc shared his screen and showed the images he had created making the following points, among others:

- The draft maps of the planned upzoned districts issued by ZAP show what they want Newton to be and, even if they tone it down in response to public pushback, this is what they want to do.
- The most “innocuous” areas on the maps are VC1, which is not just “2.5” (i.e., 3) stories but “3.5” (i.e., 4) with a Special Permit. He contended that 1 or 2 stories would be fine and 3 stories in certain places would be tolerable, above that the village is rendered no longer a village but has become urbanized.

Marc showed photorealistic visuals of the build out of various villages:

- Auburndale: Melrose Street which would border VC1 and VC2 zones and demonstrated the impact. He asked why ZAP is targeting these New England homes. He posited that even the images with the lowest density recommendations would legislate a transformation of Newton, and that while the new structures can be made to look good, the question remains of whether they appropriate in New England in a Village.
- West Newton: Webster Street where, looking at even the “softest” areas of areas there was an egregious impact.
- Newtonville: Madison Avenue and Highland Street, two streets with the lowest density recommendations. There upzoning in the residential areas and the village center transforms the area from a village feel and a “Garden City” ethos to the dynamic of an Urban City, imposing a whole character that is alien to what New England charm and life style are about.
- Nonantum: West Street, a typical street of residential homes was transformed by the serial addition of apartment building structures.
- Thompsonville: John Street with a similar impact.

On the issue of whether the proposed 18 feet height for ground floors (which adds ½ story to a building’s height) is necessary, Marc said he has successfully designed projects where 15 feet floor-to-floor is enough. He added that while there may be contextual requirements, ZAP is talking about transforming village communities to urbanized cities.

Councilor Wright suggests refining the images before supplying them to the Planning & Development Department because they will inevitably be attacked if they are not refined to show side setbacks, etc. She volunteered to work with Marc.

Councilor Norton expressed sympathy to the comments that were made about the aesthetic impact and cautioned against singling out renters as residents. Marc agreed, but noted the need to maintain a balance to the variety of housing types versus tilting to a rental housing paradigm that totally transforms the community. He noted the value of diverse housing options like the post-World War II small homes in Oak Hill for people of lesser wealth which is better than 600/700 sq foot structures where the tenants will be paying high rents.

Rena Getz expressed appreciation for Marc's photorealistic imaging efforts and noted that the Waban Area Council started their imaging process with setbacks and with parking requirements for their visualizations and shared the zoning envelopes and images of the lots in Waban made using Google Earth and importing GIS data from the City, resulting in images with the correct dimensional standards and the allowable builds with transparent and opaque masses.

Naomi Myrvaagnes said she was not casting aspersions on renters but felt the form of rental arrangement being developed is a diversity of anonymous corporate landlords and that development of that type does not create a stable community for Newton and denies people the chance to build equity.

Peter Bruce also praised Marc's efforts, adding that he does not denigrate renters and pointed out that the Armory and Haywood House are good examples housing options for lower income residents. He submitted that Governor Baker's study ("Preparing for Work") assumes more work in Boston than there is apt to be. He added that the Metropolitan Planning Council was the "silent partner" in the library exhibit and the documents. The MTBA Communities Act's proposes to add ~8,300 units in Newton, addition to the several thousand in the pipeline, but Boston office use is down 35% and Green Line ridership is down as well. He noted that in Trio's 140 apartments with 250-300 residents, only 3 use the subsidized T passes. He also noted that at the last community meeting even Allan Schlessinger (a developers' lawyer) expressed the view that the extensions into neighborhoods too extensive, and Court Street residents agreed. He posited that the proposed VC3 is just too big for anywhere in Newton.

Councilor Lucas expressed appreciation for Marc's presentation and advised working on further refinements with Councilor Wright.

Carolyn expressed the view that the proposed paradigm shift will dispossess Newton's high percentage of seniors living in their own homes and would bring about generational changes. She added that seniors thinking the upzoning will make it possible for them to downsize and remain in the community in the new developments are laboring under a cruel economic misconception. She added that the need for grassroots imaging points up how deficient the Planning & Development Department's process has been with their refusal to provide any 3d massing or modeling. She added that the NAC is also working on creating visualizations, especially of the area along Walnut Street and hopes to have the imaging in January.

Aline recommended reading Councilor Wright's recent letter to the Planning & Development Department and that she would like it publicized.

### **3. Other issues (if needed)**

Marina provided an update on NewCAL saying that there has been progress on the internal space, staircase mass and compatibility with the design is a continuing topic of discussion and is changing. There has been a big issue with the proposed plantings and the limited green space and the suggestion was that some green space might become added when the house in back on Highland Street becomes available. The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor walking track has been widened to allow more than 2 people to use it at a time. Many suggestions were made at the last meeting so it is likely more changes will be shown at the January meeting.

Jennifer updated on the Gath Pool, noting that now there would be a 2 pools option per a presentation to the Council on Disabilities, one for use as a lap pool with a diving option and a zero-depth entry pool. There was work on redesigning the splash park and the slides. The bathhouse, due to funding cuts, is the subject of some changes. Work is ongoing on the men's showers change from a gang shower and the women's side was cut to make room for a gender-neutral room, but there are objections that the men's side was left as larger space. The project is not likely to be ready for construction in fall 2023.

There was nothing new to report on the Horace Mann project and a playground was added for the Carr School.

It was noted that several of Mark Development's projects seem to be on "hold" and it was unclear where the Crafts Street is on progress. Presumably there is the same problem with Dunstan East, Riverside, and the Santander Bank location, namely that construction and financing costs have increased. Councilor said there will be a Ward 2 Councilor representation on the liaison committee to that project, but Councilor Norton did not have added information. Jennifer expressed the hope that Mark Development would not do demolition and then halt the project the way they have with Dunstan East.

Peter Bruce asked about having actual solar installations in projects and Councilor Norton explained that Boylston Properties said that due to high costs projects are made merely solar ready.

### **4. Administrative Issues**

#### **a. Brief Financial recap of 2022**

Deferred to the January meeting.

#### **b. Discussion of upcoming meeting dates for 2023**

Noting the previous vote of the NAC setting the regular monthly meeting as the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month with discretion of the President to establish an alternative date if that day would conflict with a civil or religious holiday, the following meeting dates were scheduled for 2023:

- January 26
- February 23
- March 23
- April 27
- May 25
- June 22
- July 27
- August 24

- September 28
- November 16 (due to a conflict with Thanksgiving)
- December 14 (due to the proximity of December 28 to Christmas and New Year)

**c. Approval of October and November meeting minutes**

Deferred to the January meeting.

**Adjournment**

At approximately 8:50 PM, Martina moved, Aline seconded, and it was unanimously:

**VOTED:** To adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

*Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay*

Secretary