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Barney S. Heath  
Director

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**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** April 4, 2024  
**TO:** Councilor R. Lisle Baker, Chair, Zoning & Planning Committee  
Members of the Zoning & Planning Committee  
**FROM:** Barney Heath, Director, Department of Planning and Development  
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director Department of Planning and Development  
Zachery LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning  
**RE:** **#85-24 Request for discussion and possible amendments to enhance the preservation of existing homes.**  
COUNCILORS BAKER, OLIVER, MALAKIE, KALIS, GETZ, LUCAS, LOBOVITS, AND WRIGHT requesting a discussion and possible amendments to Chapter 30 Zoning or other City Ordinances to enhance the preservation of existing homes over their replacement by larger and more expensive structures.  
**#41-24 Amend the setbacks in the MR zones to encourage preservation of existing buildings.**  
COUNCILORS ALBRIGHT, DANBERG, KRINTZMAN, AND LEARY seeking a discussion with the Planning Department to consider ordinance amendments that would revise the metrics in the multi-residence (MR1, MR2 and MR3) zones, to regulate the size of new buildings better, enable a wider range of housing options close to public transit, and better incentivize preservation and renovation of existing housing stock.  
**MEETING:** April 8, 2024  
**CC:** City Council  
Planning Board  
Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer

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At the March 11, 2024 Zoning and Planning (ZAP) meeting, staff presented a brief update on developing a dataset to review teardowns in Newton (see ZAP report [here](#)). The productive conversation helped guide Planning to develop the following, which is shared here in Attachment A.

1. Analysis of the demolition of single- or two-unit homes being replaced by **by-right** single- or two-unit homes between 2017 and 2022. An additional filter was new development must be up to date in the Assessor database.
2. Comparison of the zoning allowed square footage for single- and two-unit homes in neighboring communities.
3. Review of community, regional or national, efforts to combat teardowns and incentivize the preservation of existing homes/construction of smaller, single- and multi-unit, homes.

**Next Steps**

Next steps will be determined based on ZAP input. Regardless, given the scope of possible changes, Planning staff recommend a broad communications and outreach component moving forward.

**Attachments**

**Attachment A**            April 8, 2024 ZAP Presentation

# Teardown Analysis (2017 - 2022)

Newton, MA

ZAP: April 8, 2024  
Docket # 85-24 and 41-24

## Defining the Dataset (~500 projects)

Teardowns (2017-2022)		
	Teardown	New Construction
CONDOMINIUM*	2	90
SINGLE FAMILY	414	366
TWO FAMILY	67	27

- **Only by-right pre-existing one- or two-unit homes replaced by newly constructed by-right one- or two-unit homes**
- Newton Assessor Database has updated information for new construction

\* Only contains two-unit condominiums

## Key Takeaways - Citywide Comparison

- Teardowns occur on properties that have:
  - **Larger parcels** (allow bigger buildings per FAR)
  - **Smaller pre-teardown homes** (greater value creation for new home[s])
  - **Lower assessed values** (greater value creation for new home[s])
  - Teardowns of single-family homes more likely to be post-war construction

## Larger parcels (allow bigger buildings per FAR)

- Teardown parcels have a greater allowed building square footage between 2% - 29%

Median Parcel Size (square feet)		
Zone	Citywide	Teardown
MR1	7,530	9,202
MR2	5,892	8,000
MR3	7,414	7,558
SR1	17,416	18,360
SR2	10,799	12,171
SR3	7,800	8,991

\* Source: Newton Assessor Database April 2017 and February 2024

## Smaller pre-teardown homes (greater value creation for new)

- Teardowns have between 300 - 800 less Gross Living Area than those across the City
- Pre-teardown buildings have significantly less finished basement space than new construction, 200 sf to 1,250 sf respectively

Average Gross Living Area (square feet)^			
	Citywide		Teardowns
	FY2017	FY2024	FY2017
CONDOMINIUM	1,953	2,160	2,096
SINGLE FAMILY	2,818	3,031	2,038
TWO FAMILY	2,975	3,032	2,709
			FY2024
			5,475
			5,460
			6,192

^Building size is based on the Gross Living Area, which is calculated by adding the Assessor Database a) Living Area b) Finished Basement and c) Finished Attic

# Lower pre-teardown assessed values (greater value creation for new)

Attachment A (#85-24/41-24)

- The increase in value of new construction is between 2.7 and 3.7, exceeding the 2.4 threshold used in the [2019 build out analysis](#)

Median Assessed Value (FY24 Dollars)				
	Citywide		Teardowns	
	FY2017	FY2024	FY2017	FY2024
CONDOMINIUM^	\$ 1,326,556	\$ 1,743,450	\$ 825,666	\$ 3,018,850
SINGLE FAMILY	\$ 1,078,831	\$ 1,367,100	\$ 854,372	\$ 2,641,300
TWO FAMILY	\$ 877,950	\$ 1,121,700	\$ 851,182	\$ 2,319,000

^CONDOMINIUM are only for two-unit building and is taken from the combined value of each unit

\* Source: Newton Assessor Database April 2017 and February 2024



# 100-102 Langley Road

Before - Two-Family (4,122 GLA sf)



Source: Newton Assessor Database

After - Condo (8,038 GLA sf)



Source: <https://www.upscalenewton.com/properties/100-langley?hslLang=en>





# 40-42 Athelstane

Attachment A (#85-24/41-24)

Before - Condo (1,839 GLA sf)



After - Condo (5,972 GLA sf)





# Comparable Communities

(Allowed Building Size)

# By-Right Single-Family Home (max. Square feet)

Lot Size	Newton*	Lexington <sup>¶</sup>	Needham <sup>†</sup>	Wellesley <sup>‡</sup>	Brookline <sup>§</sup>
5000	2,300 - 2,400	3,800	1,900	2,167	750 - 1,750
7000	3,010 - 3,360	4,640	2,660	4,375	1,050 - 2,450
10000	3,300 - 4,100	5,150	3,800	3,600	1,500 - 3,500
15000	4,650 - 5,700	5,700	5,400	4,300	2,250 - 5,250
20000	5,600 - 7,600	6,200	7,200	5,900	3,000 - 7,000
25000	6,500 - 9,000	6,700	9,000	5,900	3,750 - 8,750

\*Range is based on the allowed FAR in the SR1, SR2, and SR3 districts

<sup>¶</sup>Range is based on the allowed Gross Floor Area for One- and Two-Family Dwellings

<sup>†</sup>Range is based on the allowed FAR in the SR-B districts

<sup>‡</sup>Maximum is determined by Wellesley Large House Review (not SP) threshold for SR districts (SR10, SR15, SR20)

<sup>§</sup>Range is based on allowed FAR in the S districts (S-40, S-25, S-15, S-10, S-7, S-0.5P, S-0.75P, SC-7, SC-10) excluding S-4 12

# By-Right Two-Family Home (max. Square feet)

Lot Size	Newton*	Lexington <sup>¶</sup>	Needham <sup>†</sup>	Wellesley <sup>‡</sup>	Brookline <sup>§</sup>
5000	2,900	3,800	4375	3,600	3,750 - 5,000
7000	3,710	4,640	5950	3,600	5,250 - 7,000
10000	4,800 - 5,300	5,150	8250	3,600	7,500 - 10,000
15000	6,450 - 7,200	5,700	12000	3,600	11,250 - 15,000
20000	7,600 - 8,600	6,200	15500	3,600	15,000 - 20,000
25000	9,500	6,700	18750	3,600	18,750 - 25,000

\*Range is based on the allowed FAR in the MR1, MR2, and MR3 districts

<sup>¶</sup>Range is based on the allowed Gross Floor Area for One- and Two-Family Dwellings

<sup>†</sup>Range is based on the allowed Lot Coverage and Stories in the GR district

<sup>‡</sup>Maximum is determined by Wellesley Large House Review threshold for GR district

<sup>§</sup>Range is based on allowed FAR in the T districts (T-6, T-5). Larger lots in these zones are very rare.

# Comparable Communities

(Proposals to Reduce Allowed Building Size)



# Needham

2017

- [Implement FAR Requirements for Single Residence B Districts](#) (Warrant Article 26) in SR-B district (majority of residential area)

2024

- [Citizen petition](#) to modify definition of FAR to include finished basement space and any above grade space with ceiling height of 5 feet or more

# Lexington

2023

- Gross Floor Area reduction for new single- and two-unit homes

Lot Are (sq. ft.)	Previous Allowance	Maximum Gross Floor Area (sq. ft.)	Current Allowance	% Decrease
0 to 5,000	0.8 * lot area	0.76* Lot Area		5%
5,000 to 7,500	4,000 + 0.55 * (lot area - 5,000)	3,800 + 0.42 * (lot area - 5,000)		9%
7,500 to 10,000	5,375 + 0.23 * (lot area - 7,500)	4,850 + 0.12 * (lot area - 7,500)		13%
10,000 to 15,000	5,950 + 0.2 * (lot area - 10,000)	5,150 + 0.11 * (lot area - 10,000)		18%
15,000 to 30,000	6,950 + 0.16 * (lot area - 15,000)	5,700 + 0.1 * (lot area - 15,000)		20%
More than 30,000	9,350 + 0.16 * (lot area - 30,000)	7,200 + 0.1 * (lot area - 30,000)		22%

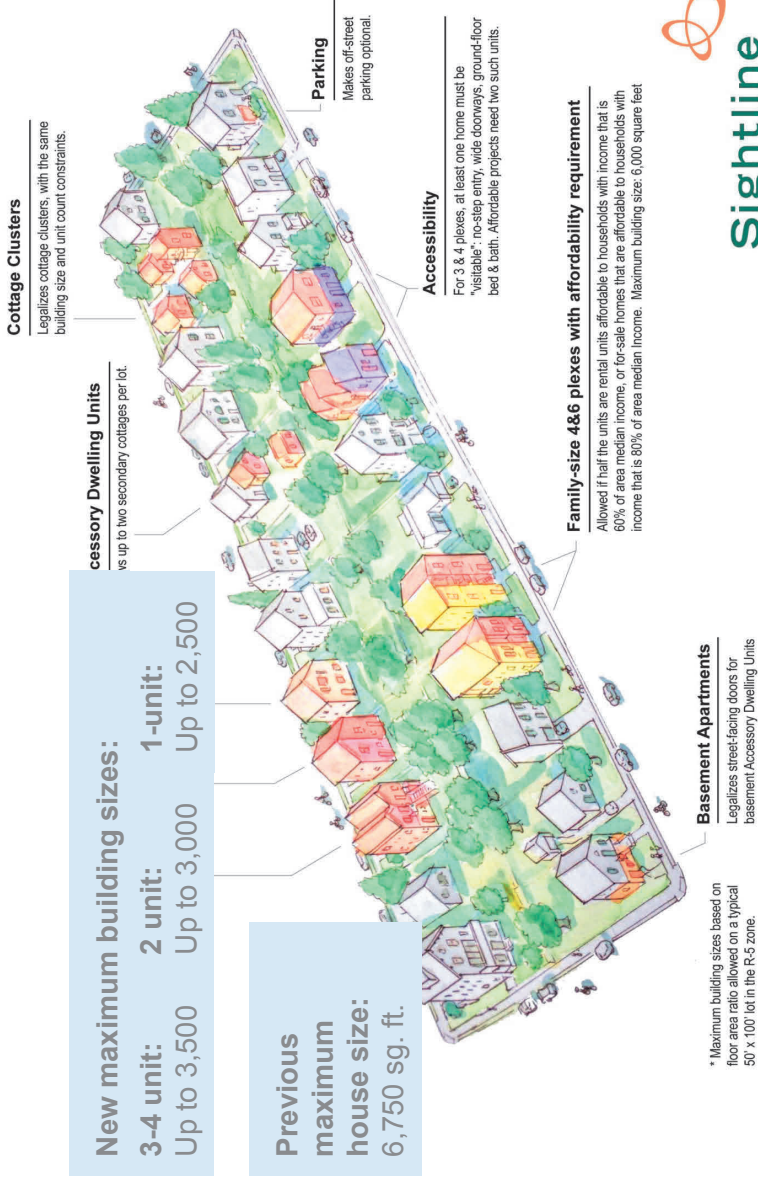
# Portland, Oregon

2020

- Reduction in allowed single-unit house size.
- Two-, three-, and four-unit homes have greater allowed size than single-unit

## Portland's Residential Infill Project Re-legalizing "middle housing" citywide

Attachment A (#85-24/41-24)



A rendering, by Alfred Twu, of the housing options Portland's residential infill project would legalize.

# Next Steps

# Proposals Moving Forward

- **Data Analysis Refinement**
  - Review additional “good” and “bad” teardowns
- **Present to ZAP/City Council**
  - Receive input towards possible zoning recommendations
  - Plan for necessary outreach/communication

# Proposals Moving Forward

- **Short-Term**
  - Remove FAR increase by Special Permit (Section 3.1.19.A.2 and 3.2.11.A.2)
- **Long-Term**
  - TBD - based on City Council guidance and community outreach

## Parallel Efforts

- **Grading/Earthworks**
  - Possible changes to how height is measured by using existing grade
- **Historical / Demo Delay**
  - Look at waiver process for further preservation incentives
- **Adaptive Reuse (VCOD)**
  - Monitor projects utilizing VCOD adaptive reuse provisions