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MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 5, 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
Nora Masler, Planning Associate

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: September 9, 2024

CC: City Council
Planning Board
Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer

The Planning Department, and their consultant Utile, presented a multi-step workplan (July 2024-March 2025) combined with a communications and outreach component to explore updates to Newton's residence district zoning in July 2024 (see [memo](#) and [ZAP report](#)). Staff and Utile look forward to the upcoming Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP) discussion where they will present the following:

1. Overview of existing regulations shaping residential development
 - a. Zoning
 - b. Non-Zoning (Stormwater, Historic/Demo Delay, Electrification, Trees, etc.)
2. Single- and two-unit case studies
 - a. Citywide teardown analysis
 - b. Initial case study review – form (economics for October meeting)
3. Next steps

Overview of existing regulations shaping residential development

Zoning

Newton's residence zoning covers most of the city, broken down into single- and multi-residence districts. Single-unit and two-unit development is allowed by-right, and three-units or more are only allowed by special permit. Utile will dive into the specific zoning regulations leading to the typical building forms seen in new development. These will include regulations like setbacks, floor area ratio (FAR), and height (half-story, dormers, basements, etc.).

Non-zoning (Stormwater, Historic/Demo Delay, Electrification, Trees, etc.)

Many of Newton's non-zoning regulations have been updated in the last 4 years, while others like electrification have been adopted but not gone into effect. The combined impact of these changes remains to be seen given that newly completed residential development was approved before one or all these regulations were required.

Single- and two-unit case studies

Citywide teardown analysis

A review of citywide teardowns of single- and two-unit homes between 2017-2022 was shared in April 2024. The presentation and report from that ZAP meeting can be [found here](#). The summary of this analysis showed that teardowns, about 100 per year, are more likely to occur on larger than average sized lots with below average sized homes built in the middle of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, staff analyzed these teardowns against single- and two-unit home sales that did not result in a teardown, about 1,000 per year, dating back to 2017. Not surprisingly, sales not resulting in a teardown typically share the inverse characteristics to those resulting in a teardown.

Initial case study review – form (economics for October meeting)

Utilizing that 2017-2022 teardown dataset, staff and Utile will put forward six case study projects, three single-unit and three two-unit, to explore further. The rationale for choosing these six will be presented along with an initial review of how the many regulations mentioned above led directly or indirectly to the final physical development. The economic factors may be mentioned but will be fully explored and presented at the October ZAP meeting.

Next Steps

We look forward to the conversation ahead regarding the regulatory review and hearing ideas and recommendations from Councilors and the Planning Board. At the October meeting, ZAP can expect to review an economic analysis of the teardown/sales dataset and the individual case studies. These analyses, along with broader market research, will provide the foundation to identify specific aspects of Newton's regulations that may be adjusted to address the Council and community concerns.