



**Zoning & Planning Committee**  
**Agenda**  
**Special Meeting**

**City of Newton**  
**In City Council**

**Thursday, April 4, 2019**

**7:00PM**  
**Room 211**

**Items Scheduled for Discussion:**

- #220-18**      **Discussion relative to the Washington Street Corridor Action Plan**  
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING requesting monthly progress discussions on the Washington Street Corridor action plan.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan S. Albright, Chair

---

The location of this meeting is accessible and reasonable accommodations will be provided to persons with disabilities who require assistance. If you need a reasonable accommodation, please contact the city of Newton's ADA Coordinator, Jini Fairley, at least two business days in advance of the meeting: [jfairley@newtonma.gov](mailto:jfairley@newtonma.gov) or (617) 796-1253. The city's TTY/TDD direct line is: 617-796-1089. For the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS), please dial 711.



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

**City of Newton, Massachusetts**  
Department of Planning and Development  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, Massachusetts 02459

**#220-18**  
Telephone  
(617) 796-1120  
Telefax  
(617) 796-1142  
TDD/TTY  
(617) 796-1089  
[www.newtonma.gov](http://www.newtonma.gov)

Barney S. Heath  
Director

---

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** March 29, 2019

**TO:** Councilor Albright, Chair, Zoning and Planning Committee  
Honorable Newton City Councilors

**FROM:** Barney S. Heath, Director of Planning and Development  
James Freas, Deputy Director of Planning and Development  
Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning  
Lily Canan Reynolds, Community Engagement Manager

**RE:** **#220-18 Progress reports on Washington Street Visioning Project**

**MEETING DATE:** April 4, 2019

**CC:** Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer  
Planning and Development Board  
Urban Design Commission

---

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019 the Committee will continue its review of the Washington Street Vision Plan and Zoning focusing on revisions and guidance for the Final Draft documents, which will be released on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019. At the meeting special attention will be given to Councilor comments on transportation elements of the Vision Plan. In addition, staff will present on the transportation ideas for improved safety and mobility options on Washington Street. (This presentation was also given to the Public Safety & Transportation Committee on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019.) The Councilor comments that were discussed at last week's meeting were those of lower complexity and are attached for reference with notes on next steps.

Revisions to the Draft Vision Plan have already begun, including the preparation of one-page excerpts from the Vision Plan that highlight key concepts. Two of these drafts, "What is a Vision Plan?" and "Why Plan Now?", are attached here for the Committee's review and comment.

The remainder of this memo provides background information the Committee's discussion of transportation relative to the Washington Street Vision Plan.

Over the last eleven months the City has been in conversation with the community about the future of the Washington Street area. A consistent theme has been a call for a safer street that better facilitates the activities of daily life – getting to and from work and school, spending time in the village centers of West Newton and Newtonville, and crossing from one side of the street to the other. The public has articulated clearly the experiences they want on Washington Street:

1. Vibrant village centers with thriving local businesses and shops
2. A place for people to gather, meet, walk, sit, eat, people watch, etc.
3. Safe, steady flow of cars with manageable congestion and traffic
4. Convenient ways for people to cross the street safely
5. Safe options for bicycling

A guiding principle for the Washington Street Vision Plan is to purposefully design for the future Newton wants. This is especially important for transportation where the design of the roadway will have lasting impact on people’s experience of the area for decades.

Today, Washington Street functions as a major four-lane throughway. It currently demonstrates an outdated design for streets, harkening back to the era of the highway and is focused on moving cars quickly through Newton. It is unsafe in many places. People who need to cross Washington Street on foot are faced with racing across approximately 70 - 95 feet of roadway of fast-moving cars with few pedestrian crosswalks. There are no bicycle lanes. There are minimal bus shelters.

The street will not get better by itself. However, a new layout can bring the improvements that the community wants to see. Our task is to employ roadway design elements to support the desired experiences. Chapter 4 of the Draft Two Vision Plan describes supportive design elements that will help to improve Washington Street.

Supportive Design Elements	Not Supportive Design Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wide sidewalks with trees, lights, and benches to enable people to enjoy the street</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide roads that can’t be crossed, contribute to speeding and are dangerous for pedestrians</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Efficiently managed street parking in village centers to facilitate thriving businesses and slow vehicles</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sea of parking lots that make uninteresting and unsafe walking environment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Narrowed and/or reduced number of travel lanes, crosswalks, bumpouts and/or signal equipment to increase safety and enable safe street crossings</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimal trees and greenery, adds to the heat island effect and polluted air</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bike, pedestrian and transit-friendly design to reduce vehicle trips</b></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic calming on residential side streets to discourage cut throughs and speeding</li> </ul>	

Washington Street, a four-lane road with a parallel highway and commuter rail system, provides an unparalleled opportunity to employ the full range of design elements in pursuit of the vision, while maintaining people’s ability to get where they want. The Vision Plan specifically recommends the following overarching concepts.

1. **Convert road from four to three lanes** – Enhances safety and experience while maintaining throughput
2. **Implement bike, pedestrian and transit improvements** - Increases the ability for people to travel to/ through the corridor
3. **Neighborhood traffic calming** – Preserves integrity and safety of neighborhood streets amid growth

It is important to clarify that while the Vision Plan provides guidance for future changes, it is only laying the groundwork for a complete detailed planning process that the City will need to undertake. That will include a fully updated traffic feasibility study; concept, 25% and 100% design phases; and multiple public meetings and City Council presentations. Further, the City will pursue TIP funding through MassDOT, following their process and timeline in parallel. One of the first implementation steps of the Washington Street Vision will be beginning this detailed transportation planning process in 2019-2020 using \$2 million that has been allocated in the CIP for design.

Attachment A: Notes from Discussion at Zoning and Planning Committee March 25, 2019

Attachment B: “What is a Vision Plan?” and “Why Plan Now?” one-page excerpts from Vision Plan

Notes from Discussion at Zoning and Planning Committee March 25, 2019

Topic	Comment / Question	Complexity of Discussion [* low]	Page	Discussion	Next Step / Recommendation
<b>Building Shape</b>	Looking at the precedent images, I don't think the photo on the right-hand side belongs. This image looks much more like the boxy (sp?) characterless buildings that residents pretty clearly don't want. Am I misunderstanding something about it?	*	Pg. 115	Need more description of precedent images	Include explanatory line about images and what they indicate
<b>Building Shape</b>	The sketched graphic of the preferred vision doesn't seem to match the look and feel (or height) of the precedent images here. Which is more accurate to the vision for this site?	*	pg. 149	Consider which sketches are included; show façade variation better; question whether illustrations help understand 20-year potential	Consider removing the birds eye view sketches
<b>Building Shape</b>	I really like: Keeping the height between the Armory and Lowell Street to two and a half stories, so there is a pause between Newtonville and West Newton.	*		This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process	Zoning shown in Draft 2 should continue the existing scale in these areas
<b>Building Shape</b>	I really like: Narrower variegated buildings, so we don't get any more blocks long malls like the Washington Place project already approved and under construction at the corner of Walnut and Washington Streets.	*		Need more understanding of exactly what zoning tools achieve this	Explain more how the zoning attempts to address this
<b>Building Shape</b>	I really like: Glass first floors and frequent doors to the street for retail, so you don't have street interface like the first floor of West Newton Square's CVS, and Trader Joe's.	*		This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process	Explain more how the zoning attempts to address this
<b>Building Shape</b>	Build quality & green	*		Need more details on how zoning will incentivize using high quality building materials and sustainable buildings	Prepare a deep-dive discussion of this topic for April 8
<b>Civic Spaces</b>	I really like: The building of a road that would expose Cheesecake Brook, and the addition of a linear park along it.	*		This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process	Work towards adoption of the vision plan and zoning that prescribe these elements for Washington Street
<b>Civic Spaces</b>	I strongly endorse the suggestions about street trees and other appropriate plantings, wider sidewalks, and improved civic spaces. Much of this work should be included in the redesign of the street itself. I also support the statements about discouraging mega-blocks, adding awnings, the location of dumpsters, and other aesthetic issues. The Hello Washington Street document does a great job of highlighting the importance of such measures. We can learn a lot from places like Post Office Square and the Greenway in Boston which are both excellent examples of well-use space.	*		This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process	Work towards adoption of the vision plan and zoning that prescribe these elements for Washington Street
<b>Civic Spaces</b>		*		Interesting comparison cases	Review these comparison sites and incorporate relevant elements

<b>Civic Spaces</b>	At one point Commissioner DeRubeis had his eye on Walker park for an off-leash area - i would love to have that idea remain in the mix.	*	pg. 121	Noted	Consider including this idea in the Vision Plan
<b>Civic Spaces</b>	Great idea: Tree canopies	*		This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process	Continue to explore how trees are incorporated in the redesign of Washington Street
<b>Economic Development</b>	I am supportive of efforts to create pop-up businesses and otherwise engage in creative uses along the Turnpike. This seems like a good use of land and an appropriate barrier to the Turnpike. However, I am not in favor of allowing shipping containers or other temporary structures without at least strong limits on their use, type, and duration. Great idea: Artist live/work space	*		Noted	Include this pavilion building type in the zoning ordinance and appropriate limitations on building materials/uses Work towards adoption of the vision plan and zoning that prescribe these elements for Washington Street
<b>Financing Tools</b>	Is TIF realistic on Washington St – doesn't seem like a distressed area?	*		TIF is not explored, DIF is explored	Continue to include DIF as a tool in Vision Plan
<b>Format</b>	What are Option 1 and Option 2 in the fiscal impact results?	*	pg. 178	Option 1 is the development program for all areas of the Washington Street zoning code except air rights parcels; Option 2 is development program inclusive of air rights parcels	Significantly expand the explanation of these options in the Vision Plan
<b>Format</b>	Please provide further information on how the financial impact results were developed, including from what sources. Also, what do "Option 1" and "Option 2" refer to?	*		Need more explanation of Fiscal Impact analysis including assumptions used and sources of data	Produce an appendix to this Vision Plan that shows details of how fiscal impact results were developed
<b>Format</b>	The renderings show lots of trees and pedestrians and few cars, all in good weather. Unfortunately, I do not think that will be the reality on some days, especially in our New England climate, when it can be cold, wet, and dark on a late afternoon in winter. We should have renderings that more accurately depict what Washington Street is likely to look like in all seasons, with different levels of traffic.	*		Noted	Incorporate when possible images from different seasons in New England context
<b>Format</b>	not crazy about the term "tactical urbanism" might there be an alternative name?	*	pg. 46	This term needs more explanation	Reference definition listed in the Vision Plan whenever term is used
<b>Format</b>	there is a map. C is supposed to be a street across the turnpike. Is it? it looks like it runs parallel to the pike.	*	pg. 93	Confusing which places on map are indicated	Shift letters c and d to better clarify
<b>Format</b>	we need to see this graphic. How do we make sure that we don't get rectangular block style buildings?	*	pg. 115	Consider which sketches are included	Consider removing the birds eye view sketches

<b>Format</b>	The comparisons that are used seem to be to fairly large cities but Newton is a suburb, with village centers more like what one would find in a medium-sized town. Where are the comparisons to those types of communities?	*	pg. 165; 167	Noted that in other parts of the country a city or county boundary include a wider range smaller neighborhoods comparable to Newton Not yet	Continue to look for comparable places and incorporate when possible  Run by Climate Action Plan team
<b>Process</b>	Have you run this plan by the people working on the climate action plan for comment?	*		Not yet	
<b>Process</b>	I think we talked about creating a master sheet of things that we should do - i.e. an arts plan, various economic development tasks, possible docket items - It feels like it would be great to make this an appendix so they don't get lost	*		Idea to compile a top ten priority actions list instead of a full in-depth implementation plan that can become out of date quickly	Draft priority list
<b>Process</b>	Great idea: Arts and culture master plan	*		This work is already ongoing with Community Design for Arts and Culture (CDAC) committee	Liaise with this committee
<b>Process</b>	Great idea: Test before Invest!	*		Analyze the potential to test roadway redesign ideas before major construction	If possible, incorporate testing into the scope of work for conceptual design for Washington Street roadway
<b>Transportation</b>	The vision of a tree-lined Washington Street where pedestrians walk freely, cyclists can ride unimpeded, and vehicles travel smoothly is great (and one that I expect would be supported by the vast majority of our residents). Our challenge is to make sure that the proposed changes in the Hello Washington Street plan enable us to meet that vision. I really like: Wide sidewalks	*		This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process	Further analyze the roadway vision in the conceptual design of the Washington Street
<b>Transportation</b>		*		This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process	Further analyze the roadway vision in the conceptual design of the Washington Street
<b>Transportation</b>	How do you anticipate incorporating a driverless future? We talk about sensors and possibly no curbing, but when?	*		One of the clearest aspects of the future of autonomous vehicles is the need for pick up/drop off zones	Include this in the "Smart Driving, Smart Parking" section of the Vision Plan
<b>Transportation</b>	West Newton area – would we create streets where there are none now, how is this done?	*		Depends on if this is public right of way or private right of way and the location	Further detail implementation for private ways in zoning; new public right of ways would require extensive public process
<b>Transportation</b>	I strongly support efforts to create a bike and pedestrian connection with the Charles River Greenway.	*		This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process	Adjust the image page 47 to better highlight all routes to Charles River

<b>Transportation</b>	<p>I agree with the observation that Washington Street in its current format does not work well. It is a difficult road to drive on, nearly impossible to bike along safely, and dangerous to cross in most places.</p>	*	<p>This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process</p>	<p>Further analyze the roadway vision in the conceptual design of the Washington Street</p>
<b>Transportation</b>	<p>If we hope to improve the corridor, the city will need to spend the money now (or in the near future) to properly reconfigure the roadway - it should not wait for developers to build along the corridor. Proper design, in turn, will encourage the type of development we are trying to promote.</p>	*	<p>The City is spending \$2M on a conceptual design for the Washington Street roadway</p>	<p>Further analyze the roadway vision in the conceptual design of the Washington Street</p>
<b>Transportation</b>	<p>Improving access for mobility challenges is appropriately listed as a high priority and we should do all we can to improve street crossings, curb cuts, and the ability to use sidewalks safely.</p>	*	<p>This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process</p>	<p>Further analyze the roadway vision in the conceptual design of the Washington Street</p>
<b>Transportation</b>	<p>In the chart showing the ADT counts of the comparative streets to Washington St - all the traffic counts went up. So - how well did these roads handle the traffic. Maybe we need someone to call a few of these places and get some first-hand reports on how it went. And why did all the traffic counts go up?</p>	*	<p>pg. 165 Some of the traffic counts go down, some stay the same, some go up</p>	<p>Include references to source material</p>
<b>Transportation</b>	<p>the concept of better, safer street design, the local storefronts, enjoyable storefronts is appealing. Yes—streets for people.</p>	*	<p>pg. 9 This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process</p>	<p>Further analyze the roadway vision in the conceptual design of the Washington Street</p>
<b>Transportation</b>	<p>I really like: Wide sidewalks</p>	*	<p>This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process</p>	<p>Further analyze the roadway vision in the conceptual design of the Washington Street</p>
<b>Transportation</b>	<p>Great idea: Wider sidewalks.</p>	*	<p>This comment is inline with what we heard in the community process</p>	<p>Further analyze the roadway vision in the conceptual design of the Washington Street</p>
<b>Transportation</b>	<p>Covered and comfortable bus stops—throughout</p>	*	<p>The City is investing in better bus stops already on Washington Street</p>	<p>Continue to look for opportunities to improve bus stops in the Washington Street roadway study</p>
<b>Transportation</b>	<p>I like the bike bridge, but am not sure how useful it would be. This would need a study.</p>	*	<p>Noted</p>	<p>This concept is not anticipated to be a high priority implementation step, rather it represents a future vision that would need to be studied and appropriate funding allocated</p>



<b>Transportation</b>	Reading everything I can on driverless vehicles. Outside of driverless trains, I don't buy the hype.	*	Noted	The impacts of autonomous vehicles will be studied in an ongoing fashion by the City
<b>Zoning</b>	looking forward to reading the zoning that impact Action item #A to support the arts	*	pg. 38 This is in process	Incorporate specifics on this in the zoning
<b>Zoning</b>	and all the future-oriented maps - and caveat: I haven't read the zoning document yet - do we zone for this kind of future or do we zone for the present?	*	pg. 155 For the future	Work towards adoption of the vision plan and zoning that prescribe these elements for Washington Street

## What is a Vision Plan?

**Planning for the future involves roughly the same steps whether one is planning for the future of a community, creating a business plan, or planning a trip. The questions one asks at each stage in thinking about the future are the same.**

- Step 1: Deciding on the how you will plan for the future**
- Step 2: Deciding on the destination**
- Step 3: Deciding how you will get to your destination**
- Step 4: Making it happen & correcting course along the way**

The vision for Washington Street in 20-30 years will become clearer over time. It may be that the vision itself shifts and needs to be changed. One can think of a vision plan more like a business plan than a blueprint for a house. A business plan is constantly evolving as the market for the product or service created and the availability of raw materials are constantly in flux. A business plan gives you a picture of the future to guide decisions about inventory and business growth. A blueprint on the other hand tells you that if you follow this exactly, you will get the product that was drawn. A vision plan is not a blueprint and can never tell you exactly what will happen and when. Like a business plan, a vision plan defines a goal, it does not prescribe the future.

The Washington Street Vision Plan sketches out the objectives for Washington Street 20 years and more from now. The Vision Plan is a policy document that outlines what Newton wants to see happen in this area both in terms of what is built by the private development and business sector and what public infrastructure investments the City of Newton would like to pursue, either through its own financing or in conjunction with public or private partners, in order to enhance the quality of life along Washington Street.

It is important to recognize that there are known unknowns in vision planning. There are many aspects of life in the 2020s and 2030s that simply cannot be foreseen today; for instance, will there be autonomous vehicles or how will climate change create new challenges. Course correcting and adjusting will always be a part of implementing this plan, just as it is for any other type of plan. Without a plan though, it is difficult to organize actions to accomplish the great things that are of interest to Newton.



A Vision Plan is based first and foremost in collecting community ideas and coalescing those ideas into objectives for the future. The Washington Street Vision Plan, like a business plan, will evolve with time. The Vision Plan for Washington Street is anticipated to have feedback loops throughout the process of evaluating individual public or private projects and in revising the vision plan over time.

## Why Plan Now?

**Is Washington Street the best version of itself? Is the view you see of Washington Street today emblematic of what Newton stands for? For years, the City has heard that Washington Street is not living up to the high standards that Newton sets for itself.**

The City Council adopted a goal in the Comprehensive Plan to do area vision planning like this for places like Washington Street and that plan laid out a general overview statement about what might be achieved through a vision planning process. The community process engaged in for this Vision Plan was meant to update and more deeply discuss the goals for Washington Street's future.

Here is the vision for Washington Street written into the Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2007:

*The time is near (but not yet here) to seriously consider additional air rights projects over the Turnpike. In addition to Newton Corner, it would be feasible and appropriate to study high rise air rights developments in Newtonville and possibly in West Newton. These developments could not only be physically connected to Washington Street but also be part of a larger development plan so that the connection of the new to the existing is relatively seamless, the uses are complementary, and a reuniting of north and south portions of those areas is achieved.*

Of course a lot has changed in Newton, the metropolitan region, and the world since 2007, and planning is never finished, but rather an ongoing effort to prepare, analyze, and respond to a changing world.

### WHY PLAN NOW?

**This is an opportunity to revise and add nuance to the Vision for Washington Street outlined in the City's Comprehensive Plan from 2007.**

**In shaping this vision, the City of Newton has an eye on:**

- **Renewed view of Washington Street as an Opportunity**
- **Housing Needs and Trends**
- **Transportation Needs and Trends**
- **Uniting Across the Turnpike**
- **Need for Community Spaces and Places**
- **Importance of Fiscal Strength and Economic Development**
- **Preparing for Contingencies**

