



Zoning & Planning Committee
Report
City of Newton
In City Council

Monday, July 29, 2019

Present: Councilors Albright (Chair), Danberg (Vice Chair), Krintzman, Downs, Leary, Brousal-Glaser, Kalis

Absent: Councilor Baker

Also Present: Laredo, Markiewicz, Norton, Kelly, Schwartz, Greenberg, Crossley

City Staff Present: Barney Heath (Director Planning Dept.), James Freas (Deputy Director Planning Dept.), Rachel Nadkarni (Long Range Planner Planning Department), Katy Holmes (Chief Preservation Planner), Donna Whitham (Committee Clerk)

#165-19 Adoption of Washington Street Vision Plan as part of the Comprehensive Plan
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING requesting approval and adoption of the Washington Street Vision Plan as an amendment to the 2007 Newton Comprehensive Plan.

Action: **Zoning & Planning Held 7-0**

Note: Mr. Heath opened to introduce a brief presentation implementing suggested comments from the last meeting. The objective is to include those comments in this revised edition incorporating additional illustrations for a better visual conception; further alterations can be made later with input from the community. He hopes to confirm a public hearing date. Ms. Nadkarni began her presentation (attached) and pointed out the new cover page, acknowledgements page and non-profit entities. Many titles, captions and graphics have been enhanced to accommodate previous feedback. Some language was changed to exclude the actual reference to the *Climate Action Plan* draft source and the word *create* to reflect only when the City of Newton is doing so. The word *restore, shape and guide* were mentioned to help describe the changes. Ms. Nadkarni commented on the definition of height principals of 6-plus was changed to 6-10. She underscored the map shown is for illustrative purposes only and is not to be considered a zoning map. After the next changes are implemented, the Planning Department will look forward to the Public Hearing draft.

Concerns were raised by Councilors regarding implications of the mega-blocks and that these could be misunderstood by the community. Ms. Nadkarni mentioned the reasoning against mega-blocks that instead of large non-walkable solid building an area could be navigable via an ally/pathway/walkway. However, this only applies to new developments where large plots of land are involved. There is no plan to take houses to break up any current blocks. This would not be possible without the acquisition of property. A committee member would like to be certain that sensitivity is used for adjacent neighbors and to use distinct clarity as to the changes.

Discussion lead to the building heights of 3-6 stories as indicated in blue on the illustrative map. A Some Councilors felt the description should be ranged at 3-5 stories, because building heights would feel like enclosed walls along the Mass. Pike. Ms. Nadkarni proposed the possibility of various wall concealers as a less imposing option.

The building height in West Newton raised concern as to the tightness near Webster Street. Some Councilors explained this would be overly tall in proximity to the low-lying neighboring homes. It was stated that the concept of specificity in varying heights would be helpful in this case, as opposed to the Needham Street project where fewer details were applied. Some Councilors stated that building heights should be decreased, especially the potential 10 story structures. Many suggested to revisit the low, medium, high description and confirm specific heights during zoning determinations. Some Councilors are aware that their constituents are not in favor and have voiced unfavorable opinion. Ms. Nadkarni was asked to reference the wording used on the Needham Street project; she mentioned there had been height distinctions to start and ultimately the map was removed using principle guidelines prior to zoning ordinances.

Mr. Heath again reiterated the usage of the current map is for illustrative general vision purposes; the word diagram was determined as a proper term. The detailed zoning map will be created at the appropriate time. A Committee member stated that a vision map prior to the zoning map is a helpful tool. Councilors debated if illustrative map should be left in the draft: a straw vote resulted with a passing 6-0-1 (Downs abstaining) to leave a diagram on the plan with heights described as low, medium and high with a footnote that high meant no taller than 10 stories.

Conversation ensued about building illustrations in the draft which seem to have straight roof lines and not varying heights as expected. Ms. Nadkarni suggested that she did not have the original drawings and could not make changes, but that she would look for additional images. A Councilor mentioned retrofitting of historic structures as opposed to building now; new additions do not necessarily have to look modern and could be constructed to mimic the original building.

Transportation and rail vision were addressed, with the need to create accessibility for persons with disabilities, more safe bus stops and adjustments to the T-stops; detailed options will be further be discussed and determined. Safety issues are essential, with priority for more crosswalks and sidewalks; helpful village parking sources is a preferred option rather than oversized parking structures at high costs to the City. There was a discussion regarding traffic patterns, redirections and increases of flow. Mitigating traffic and navigating calmly through neighborhood side streets is a must for future street design. Rerouting vehicles could cause a shift creating congestion to neighboring streets posing problematic situations.

Many Councilors suggested that there will be future deliberations on the usage of the Armory and the options for which it could be transformed/reused. Councilors would like to see more general language in Armory descriptions. Addressing housing, enhancing economic development and strengthening the business climate is vital and various Councilors stated this draft reflected that goal.

A Councilor suggested that using illustrations from other cities/states, is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the properties of Newton. Some Councilors felt the planning department could use stronger and more emphatic language in the plan to more clearly reflect desired outcomes; other Councilors described being less explicit and keeping with a more general feel. Ms. Nadkarni assured that the pieces will come together regarding the language. A Committee member stated that the duration of the project could span up to 30 years, which should be communicated to the community.

There will be a Public Hearing on September 9, 2019 at 8:15pm.

#166-19 **Amendment to include the Washington Street Zoning in the Zoning Ordinance**
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING approval and adoption of the Washington Street Zoning Ordinance as an amendment to Chapter 30 of the City of Newton Ordinances.

Action: **Zoning & Planning Held 7-0**

Note: See above. Discussed with 165-19.

#244-19 **Amend ordinances by creating a temporary suspension on landmark designation**
COUNCILORS ALBRIGHT, AUCHINCLOSS, CROSSLEY, DOWNS, KELLEY, LIPOF, GREENBERG, KRINTZMAN, COTE, NOEL, LEARY, AND DANBERG proposing an amendment to Chapter 22 of the Revised Ordinance of the City of Newton, 2017 to create a temporary suspension on the landmark designation of any land, buildings, and structures in the City of Newton in order to allow the City adequate time to review the landmark ordinance and consider what revisions are appropriate. The temporary suspension will prevent and suspend the nominating, processing, and approval of any future landmarks or any property currently under consideration for landmark designation.

Action: **Zoning & Planning Held 6-0-1 (Brousal-Glaser abstaining)**

Note: A proposal was made by Councilor Kelley that we hold this item in Committee. The Chair pointed out that the Planning Department has agreed to begin the work of reviewing the landmarking and demolition delay ordinance immediately thereby possibly reducing the need for a suspension of landmarking. After a discussion it was decided to hold the item in committee because if the Committee voted no action necessary, the docketers would have to ask permission to bring the item back.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan S. Albright, Chair



Washington Street Vision Plan

**Discussion of Draft
Comprehensive Plan Amendment**

07.29.19

Goal

**Review edits based on Council feedback from
July 15th**

Discuss any final comments to be incorporated into
the draft that will be used for the public hearing

Editing Summary

Washington Street Vision Plan

- **Introduction**
 - A Vision for Washington Street
 - Implementing the Vision Plan
 - Summary of Guiding Principles
- Added a cover and acknowledgements page
 - On page 8 – added reference to “private and non-profit developers”

Editing Summary

Washington Street Vision Plan

- Introduction
 - **A Vision for Washington Street**
 - Implementing the Vision Plan
 - Summary of Guiding Principles
- Added a number of new graphics
 - A number of small grammatical changes were made
 - Word choice changes were highlighted in red
 - Reviewed places where verb was “create” and found other words when the City was not actively creating
 - Removed reference to the draft climate action plan

Height Principles Map





Area-wide Planning Principles

Mapping the Height Principles

This diagram illustrates the height principles along Washington Street. The height ranges shown correspond to the area-wide planning principles:

- Maintaining the lower height neighborhood between West Newton and Newtonville
- Allowing historic iconic buildings to maintain their prominence in the village cores
- Creating moments of arrival and transition at the edges of the villages
- Ensure buildings respond to human scale throughout the area including upper story setbacks on taller buildings



-  Low Heights - Neighborhood Character (1 to 3 stories)
-  Low Heights - Village Character (1 to 4 stories)
-  Medium Heights - Village Character (3 to 6 stories)
-  Taller Heights - Village Character (4 to 10 stories, with anything above a height between 4 and 6 stories stepped back from the building edge)

Footnotes:

- **This is an illustration of principles only;** this is not a regulatory **or zoning** map.
- Further nuance must be developed in Washington Street Zoning including specifying the limits of each zoning district and the rules for each district and building type.
- The scale of some buildings, including taller height buildings, will require additional review and community input as can be achieved through the Special Permit Process.

Editing Summary

Washington Street Vision Plan

- Introduction
 - A Vision for Washington Street
 - **Implementing the Vision Plan**
 - Summary of Guiding Principles
- Incorporated a reference to non-profit developers
 - Early action regarding a finance strategy updated:
 - It had included a reference to a grant the City had applied for, but was not awarded

Editing Summary

Washington Street Vision Plan

- Introduction
 - A Vision for Washington Street
 - Implementing the Vision Plan
 - **Summary of Guiding Principles**
- Updated to include new heading text with verbs to replace “create” and other word changes

Next Steps

Fall 2019 – Public Hearing

Staff will prepare an updated version for the public hearing at the Committee's direction