

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

ZONING & PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

SPECIAL MEETING

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2007

Present: Ald. Yates (Chairman), Ald. Baker, Lappin, Danberg, Sangiolo, Weisbuch, and Burg; absent: Ald. Johnson; also present: Ald. Hess-Mahan Linsky, Mansfield, Parker, and Albright

Committee advisors and staff: Phil Herr, Chair, Comprehensive Planning Advisory Committee (CPAC); Linda Finucane, Chief Committee Clerk; Marie Lawlor, Assistant City Solicitor; Candace Havens, Chief Planner

#351-06 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR submitting in accordance with Section 7-2 of the City Charter an updated Draft Newton Comprehensive Plan, dated October 2006.

ACTION: APPROVED AS AMENDED 6-0 (Alderman Weisbuch not voting)

NOTE: The sole item before the Committee was the draft Comprehensive Plan as submitted to the Board by His Honor the Mayor. In accordance with the Charter, the item was the subject of a Public Hearing before the Planning Board, which then submitted a letter submitting the adoption of most of it. The Board of Aldermen held a public hearing on September 10, 2007. The Committee reported it to the full Board with a 5 to 3 vote, but on November 5, it was recommitted in an attempt to get stronger support from the Committee. Alderman Baker subsequently met at length with Mr. Herr in an attempt to find language that partially assuaged the concerns of the Committee Minority (Baker, Yates, and Lappin) to avoid similar dissent on the Board. Mr. Herr worked with Alderman Baker to find language that would maintain the issues not be so problematic to the minority, (two of whom, Yates and Baker, had participated in the deliberations of the CPAC) as to lead them to vote no on the Plan. The Committee worked mainly from memoranda from Mr. Herr (attached to Mr. Kruse's memo dated 11-14-07) and Alderman Baker listing their agreed to changes, and from Alderman Baker's text pages with items of concern called out in gray, noting that Mr. Kruse had endorsed them in a separate memorandum. The Committee also reviewed and considered e-mails from Aldermen Johnson, Albright, and Danberg, along with one from Srdjan Nedeljkovic.

Alderman Baker no longer wished to pursue some of the sections that he had originally outlined and these sections will not be included in the report documents. Some of the sections questioned by Alderman Baker were negative descriptions of the city's current zoning. Mr. Herr and the Law Department agreed that these sections could be cited by petitioners seeking to overturn decisions of the Board of Alderman as the Special Permit

Granting Authority. Ms. Lawlor was unsure if the citations of these criticisms would necessarily prevail but felt after conversations with Dan Funk that it would be prudent to omit them. Alderman Yates described the extremely unpleasant feeling of having words and actions that he had suggested used against the city before the Supreme Judicial Court in the Super Stop and Shop on Needham Street case. Although the city ultimately prevailed, Alderman Yates felt strongly that it was foolish to give people opposing city decisions any such possible ammunition. The Committee agreed to the removal of such wording although the suggestions for possible changes remained intact.

The Committee discussed at some length the suggestion for the possible total rewriting of the zoning ordinance by an outside party. Alderman Yates said that this was all too reminiscent of the Village Study done more than twenty years ago which was put aside because its proposals were too foreign to the basic structure of the Ordinance. Mr. Herr explained that the substituted language would still allow for a comprehensive revision in one gargantuan initiative or in clusters of topics as suggested by Alderman Baker. Alderman Hess-Mahan argued strongly in favor of retaining the word "comprehensive" to reflect that the whole ordinance needed to be looked at. Aldermen Danberg and Burg agreed and the word was added to the proposed Herr-Baker language.

There was extensive discussion of the neo-traditional planning language cited in the plan. Alderman Baker wanted to revise it to accept the built realities in Newton. Others pointed out that it was cited as a partial source to consider, not policy to be adopted word-for-word. Eventually Mr. Herr offered a change in the introductory sentence to clarify that the language from the 1992 article was adapted for Newton and pointed out that the language left it as guidance, not definitive language to be followed zealously. The wording cited in the enclosed text was approved as a way to show the city's support for general neo-traditional planning principles without being wedded to them in every instance.

The language around parking in village centers and possible means of improvement also generated extensive discussion. Yates and Baker had concerns about some of the parking proposals, such as fees and maximum limits. Aldermen Danberg, Sangiolo, and Burg wanted this solution implemented and phantom tax credits eliminated. Alderman Yates explained that in the major zoning review that occurred in the 1980's, this issue was considered at length and scaled back credits were retained to protect new businesses in the village center business blocks that were built before cars were prevalent and thus would be grossly non-conforming if modern parking standards were imposed on them. Nevertheless, the Herr-Baker language allowing the new parking fees to be developed was adopted.

In several sections, qualifying language such as "wherever possible," "as appropriate," "Consider," etc. was proposed by Herr and Baker. Alderman Baker was concerned or uncertain about some of the language in the Plan. Mr. Herr felt that there was no significant difference in these cases. The new ideas advanced by the CPAC would still be mentioned for possible development. Alderman Parker objected to virtually all such wordings, feeling in some cases that they were "gutting the heart of the Plan." he

establishment of a transportation advisory committee was the final last major topic of discussion. Alderman Baker had softened his original opposition to language recurring coordination with the existing agencies handling transportation matters. The majority felt strongly that such a group would fill a need in the city's decision-making process for citizen input on matters major transportation policy. (It was agreed to keep the original language although capitals on the proposed committee's name were removed to allow for flexibility.)

Ultimately, by a vote of 6-0, the Committee passed a resolution to approve the Plan as previously amended with scrivener's corrections and updates and as also amended earlier during the meeting. (Alderman Weisbuch had attended despite his illness for three hours, but finally had to leave an hour before the vote.)

Aldermen have previously received a full printed copy of the Comprehensive Plan. A link to the full text is prominent on the city's web site. A copy of the pages of the text proposed for amendment (most pages were not) with the specific wording in question is enclosed. After review and adoption by the Board, the changes in the Plan will be incorporated into one document that will be made available on the city's web site and to all interested property owners and residents.

The Committee adjourned just before midnight with good wishes to the staff's ability to put out enough information to the full Board in the packet so that the item can be considered at the Board meeting next Monday.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Yates, Chair

Attachments: Amended pages from Draft Comprehensive Plan
Resolution
E-mails referenced above

IMPLEMENTING THE VISION

The following are among the potential actions for improving Newton’s ability to guide change towards greater excellence in place-making, and through that towards building a stronger sense of community in the City and in those places.

- **Clarify guidance appropriate for the various place types across Newton**, such as for neighborhoods, village centers, scenic road corridors, or uniformly single-family residential areas, to provide a City-wide framework for more local guidance to particularize for individual places. That guidance should be vividly communicated using photos, drawings, and diagrams in documents conveying to the public, to those proposing development, and to City agencies and officials what excellent building in Newton entails, using non-regulatory but concrete terms.
- **Support the place-centered planning efforts alluded to above and in a number of this Plan’s elements.** Newton Centre, given the planning studies already under way there, might well be the first to begin such efforts, but others need not await the conclusion of that process, but could parallel it, even if a few months behind. At the City level decisions need to be made about how best to organize and provide technical support to those area efforts, the basis for review and approval of their outcomes, and the relationship between those approved outcomes and City implementation activities within the areas covered.
- **Enhance Zoning’s special permit criteria.** Most developments larger than a single-family house (and some of those) require Aldermanic approval of one or more special permits under Section 30-24 of the Zoning Ordinance based on the criteria in that section. Well-crafted criteria, and easier access to information about previous projects as models or examples, could greatly help designers anticipate what the City is qualitatively seeking, and could produce more predictable decisions, more quickly.

Enhance Zoning’s site plan review criteria. The site plan review criteria (Section 30-23 of the Zoning Ordinance) deal not with whether a proposal is or is not allowed at a given location, but rather with how it must be designed. Its seven listed criteria are only a little more concrete than those for special permits (although the procedures and required submittals are spelled out in great detail).

- **Add Zoning performance standards.** Either as a part of the above options or independently of them explicit performance standards to be met by all large-scale development should be developed, making measurable and testable what is required regarding topics of concern. Such guidance now exists for some topics: lighting, noise, and tree removal. Even more powerful might be performance rules regarding such diverse topics as land use and traffic, as discussed in the *Transportation and Mobility* element, or landscaping and screening beyond the parking lot-related rules now included in zoning. Such rules can replace lengthy dialogue with a technical basis for determining if certain aspects of a proposal really are “excellent,” as defined by this City.

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KNOWING WHEN WE ARE SUCCEEDING

LAND USE – AN OVERVIEW

Newton, being a mature community, has a powerful commitment to its existing pattern, and our vision and goals for future land use reflect that. Our intention is to guide change so that it reinforces what we have, building on our assets.

- Land use is to be guided with the intention of enhancing village centers, supporting their vitality, with special emphasis on the role of those centers in:
 - providing services to nearby neighborhoods, restoring that function where it may have been eroded, while also
 - reflecting how those centers interrelate to each other in often complementary ways in serving the entire City, and
 - providing a housing alternative - that of living in a mixed-use environment - otherwise largely missing in the City, and
 - providing focal areas around which the sense of place and of community that we seek can be effectively shaped.
- Development is to be guided to reflect the character held or sought by existing residential neighborhoods, protecting the qualities of that which exists. That often but not always means minimizing changes: well-designed change can strengthen existing qualities. Sometimes residents feel that the opportunity to make change is a valuable part of the character of their part of the City², while in other areas even small departures from what exists are viewed with dismay. In all of the places in the City, the well-considered views of that place should be given great respect in land management policies and decisions.
- Intensive, well planned corridor development is anticipated and welcomed on Needham Street and Chestnut Hill, as long as it is integrated with and helps produce transportation and other enhancements to make the impact of that development a positive one.
- Consistent with those objectives, land use change is intended to accommodate sufficient housing development to meet our housing goals, and sufficient and appropriate development to meet our fiscal needs. The scale of development on which this *Plan* is based, if well-conceived and carried out, can both accommodate those objectives and protect the community values which make Newton such a special place.
- In the course of accomplishing the above development intentions, both natural and cultural resource objectives are to be served, as indicated in those *Plan* elements.
- To achieve our intentions, we need to have a land use management process that provides an important role for community planning at the village center, neighborhood, and corridor level, as well as enhancing the process at the City level, and we need a process that gives consideration to regional as well as to local considerations. The basic attitude of the City

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² Oak Hill Park residents some years ago made clear their preference to allow departures from a once homogenous neighborhood to continue occurring in that dynamically changing area.

Church of Christ, Scientist to cite a few), the total amount of institutional land is nearly as high as it ever has been.

The growth and decline of individual institutions is impossible to forecast with any precision. It also is impossible to forecast institutional land demands as is done for residential or commercial land use. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to attempt to set quantitative guidelines for institutional land use. Rather, the focus should be on the quality of institutional development that occurs, not on its quantity.

Institutional Strategic Plan and Approach

Given the important interdependencies of the City and the institutions within it, it is important that there be a strong climate of cooperation among them, in contrast with the sometimes bitter controversy that has too often marred the City’s more general context of cordiality. Accordingly, the institutional land use strategy should be built upon an expectation of cooperation, not confrontation. Central to the strategy is the building of means for promoting that spirit of cooperation.

At the same time, it is important that the City be able to enter those efforts from a position of having in place an adequate framework for such relationships.

The institutional use strategy, then, is to be one of both building an improved framework for City and institutional cooperation and seeking common ground so that the processes that accompany and should help facilitate and guide the inevitable pattern of a mix of institutional growth and decline can become more constructive.

Institutional Implementing Actions

- a) **Refine Newton’s zoning provisions concerning review of “exempt” institutions.** Working together with institutional parties, develop a set of provisions within the Newton Zoning Ordinance (Section 30-22) to provide an agreed-upon framework for review of those institutional developments that are given special standing by Section 3 of Chapter 40A MGL, the MA Zoning Act, often called “the Dover Amendment.” Such local “Section 3” provisions are increasingly common among Massachusetts communities, setting out as Newton has done what aspects of such development are to be reviewed, and what the considerations are to be used in making decisions. In some cases, “performance criteria” regarding traffic and other impacts are used as one key element in the system, applied equally to both exempt and non-exempt development. Such rules give predictability to all parties, and their preparation can provide a valuable opportunity for developing the spirit of cooperation that is being sought. In this effort, the City would be inviting institutions to join in framing an improved process that gives those institutions something they have not had to date, which is a good beginning for a spirit of cooperation.

- b) **Prepare and follow a detailed Municipal Facilities Plan.** Developing a plan for its own properties and community spaces as indicated in *The Framework for Newton’s*

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*Planning*³ would serve as an exemplar for what the City seeks from others. The “Open Space and Recreation” and “Community Facilities and Services” elements of this *Plan* are a valuable beginning, but a much more intensive process of inventory, analysis, and most importantly creative consideration of future activity and facility configurations is needed.

- c) **Seek agreement on institutional fiscal relationship and long-term plans.** Building upon a strengthened sense of cooperation from the first two steps, a cooperative effort might be convened to explore two other topics of concern. The first concern is how best for equity to be assured in the financial relationships over time between the hard-pressed City and the hard-pressed institutions, whether through negotiated Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreements or other means. The second is to develop a process through which the long-term intentions of private institutions can be planned and communicated with those affected by them, both the City at large and the local areas most impacted. For example, the preparation of comprehensive neighborhood or village area plans, as laid out elsewhere in this *Plan*, can become the medium for such exchange. Again, planning can be a means of building multi-dimensional community.
- d) **Structure a process for monitoring and alerts regarding state actions.** Attentiveness to change in the massive holdings of the state and federal governments within Newton is critically important. Too often such changes are a surprise to the City, and occur with too little City input. A recent example was the initiative of the Massachusetts Historical Commission to place Nonantum Road and the Hammond Pond Parkway on the National Register of Historic Places, quietly moving forward without noticeable public comment within Newton, but having profound consequence for the City. An agency of City government, probably the Planning Department, and a designated position within that agency, should be charged with developing systematic means of monitoring and providing alerts with regard to actions by higher levels of government that impinge on our City.

2. OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL LAND USE

The amount, qualities of, and location of land for recreation and conservation is intertwined with other issues within the Open Space and Recreation element of this Plan. Newton has approximately 985 acres of municipally owned open space, 268 acres owned by the Metropolitan District Commission, and 1035 acres of privately owned open space (of which about half is located in three golf courses).

Open Space Background

³ *Framework for Newton’s Planning*, pages 8, 9 and 15.

residents, 10% higher than in 2002 and as projected for 2030. The challenge is to develop a design for the residential land use in City that enables housing demand to be met while incorporating the principles stated herein. The structure that we have inherited can make that possible.

Residential Implementing Actions

a. Predominantly Single-Family Areas

- Maintain the dominance of single-family homes in such areas, including careful management of accessory uses such as home occupations and accessory dwellings.
- Development within those areas should be limited to that which is consistent with the existing fabric and is supportable by local infrastructure and the environment, achieved through creative management approaches, rather than bluntly over-regulating “to be safe.”
- The current capacity allows single-family areas to grow from about 17,500 housing units to not more than 18,300 housing units. That is consistent with *Plan* intentions, and should on balance be maintained, neither allowing substantial net increases through rezoning, “loosening” rules, 40B development, or other public actions, nor imposing substantial net decreases through rezoning, public land acquisition, or other public actions.

b. Mixed Single And Two-Family Areas

- Structural and social diversity should be maintained by assuring that a substantial share of single-family dwellings remain within such areas.
- Opportunities should be provided within these areas for serving small households through adaptation of and expansions onto existing structures, coupled with limited infill development.
- The present projected capacity of such areas to grow from about 10,900 housing units to not more than 12,700 housing units is consistent with *Plan* intentions, and should be maintained over time through the balancing of the impacts of public actions such as rezoning and land transactions.

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c. High Density Multi-Family Areas

- Additional areas of this kind are expected and, in appropriate cases, welcomed. They provide an important means through which creation of housing choice and affordability has been served in the past and can be served in the future. However, their number and scale must not be allowed to distort the character of the community.

Residential Strategic Plan and Approach

Central to implementing residential land use intentions is the process outlined elsewhere in the *Plan* for developing a series of individual area plans for the village centers, neighborhoods, and other special areas that make up the City, recognizing both the similarities and unique identities of each area of the City. Those area plans should be assessed for consistency with the “Build-out choice” illustrated above, or comparable measures later developed for providing policy guidance so that neighborhoods each take an appropriate share of the potential for growth that is to be accommodated City-wide.

We need to encourage retention of existing housing and development of new housing that supports village centers, that is focused on public transportation, that increases the City’s affordable housing stock, or that further enhances the existing character and diversity of housing types. The build-out has made vivid the reality that the displacement of housing by other uses is a concern commensurate with the production of new housing. The build-out has also made clear that our current land and zoning will not adequately accommodate the growth in households which regional forecasts have made.

A key strategy is to enable the citizens and public officials of Newton to set Newton’s residential land use agenda -- and not have it determined by state mandates and agency fiat. To that end, our intention is to encourage and manage (through “friendly” Chapter 40B projects and incentive-based zoning policies) the City’s stock of affordable housing units. Another key strategy, given our legacy and circumstances, is to work in conjunction with preservation interests to serve shared interests in using housing resources to advance preservation and preservation resources to advance housing.

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Consistent with the oft-repeated characterization of Newton as a “residential community,” housing development should be enabled to keep pace with any substantial increases in jobs located within the City. This element is consistent with guidance of “Guiding Land Use,” Chapter 2 from the 2001 “*A Framework for Newton’s Planning.*” Its intentions would be supported by adherence to that guidance, whose principles are not repeated here but are part of our intentions.

Residential Implementing Actions

- a. Institute changes in use, dimensional, and other requirements of the Zoning Ordinance consistent with the housing priorities noted herein.
- b. Where appropriate pursue refinement of accessory dwelling unit rules and procedures with the objective of enabling more use to be made of that form of accommodation in those circumstances where it would not be disruptive of the neighborhood fabric.
- c. In light of the importance of enabling scattered-site housing development, limit rezoning from Multi-family to Single-family district only to unusual cases where not only current land use but neighborhood context or limitations of infrastructure, topography, or unusually important historic considerations make that change appropriate.

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Business Vision and Goals

Newton has never been and does not seek to become a bedroom community. It has steadily had about the same number of jobs within the City as there are employed residents of the City, epitomizing jobs/housing balance. In planning for land use, it therefore is essential to maintain ample land and buildings for business use to meet the following goals:

- a. Maintain a significant commercial real estate tax base,
- b. Maintain a significant employment base,
- c. Encourage business (including retail) growth that furthers other goals in the Plan, provides essential services, and contributes to the vibrancy of the community,
- d. Maintain current land and building inventory zoned and utilized for commercial uses without major shifts to exclusively non-commercial uses,
- e. Discourage expansion of commercial uses in land and buildings currently zoned and utilized for non-commercial uses,
- f. Encourage retail uses providing essentially a mix of neighborhood and regional services appropriate for the specific area of the City, and
- g. Encourage mixed uses in business areas and village commercial centers, particularly where public transportation is available.

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Business Strategic Plan and Approach

Newton's success in maintaining a strong business environment is directly tied to zoning and land use. Because of the mature build out of the City, it is unlikely that much new land area will be available for business growth over the next twenty five years. The key for the City will be to maintain the current land area used for business use and to ensure that land needed for business use is not lost as land becomes redeveloped in the future. As mixed use development that often includes residential or institutional use alongside business use becomes more popular, it should be encouraged as a means of strengthening the viability of business uses over the long term.

This approach can be applied consistently across different areas of the city. For example, the Wells Avenue area provides a substantial contribution to the City's tax base. The area is dominated by office and business uses (with the notable exception of a private school). Zoning should continue to encourage office and business uses (perhaps more intensively) in this location and exclude other uses as a means of maintaining the City's employment and tax base.

On Needham Street which historically was an industrial area, the City has seen unplanned growth that has included office, retail, and residential uses join the existing industrial uses. While the residential use provided by the Avalon Bay project can provide a useful anchor for future mixed use development, the Needham Street area lacks a vision for the future. Many industrial properties (and the jobs that go with them) are currently in transition on Needham Street. The City has important decisions to make as to whether to let these properties go from industrial to retail or residential use. The character of a major area of the City as well as the loss of a significant portion of the City's business base is at stake.

LAND USE – ZONING, REGULATIONS AND PUBLIC PROCESS

Newton’s Zoning Ordinance is found by many City officials, citizens and others who use it to be complicated, difficult to use, and would benefit from enhanced clarity and revision in light of many of the objectives and ideas set out in this Plan.

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Deleted: , and not entirely consistent with the land use goals of the City of Newton. The Zoning Ordinance generally does not include planning or land use concepts used by many progressive municipalities, nor is it fully consistent with this Plan. The review system for new projects or redevelopment of existing buildings, although having undergone recent improvement, can still be cumbersome, confusing and often fails to serve the public interest.

For those reasons, these are important steps for the implementation of the intentions of this Plan:

- 1. Improve the development review and approval process to include clear rules, helpful interpretation, excellence in process, sensitivity to place, openness to creativity, structured opportunities for exchange, a clear regulatory map, early predictability, reasonable time frames, and a single point of focus.
2. Adopt explicit Site Plan Review standards and criteria, providing those preparing proposals with clarity regarding what is being sought, and assuring uniform implementation.
3. Continue the development of a hierarchical review process whereby projects exceeding certain thresholds are subject to a different process than those that could be administratively reviewed.
4. Create overlay districts or other innovative zoning techniques to implement village center, corridor and neighborhood master plans.
5. Undertake an effort to revise the City’s Zoning Ordinances which would benefit from further clarification, updating, and reflection of City policies, including ones contained in this Plan, for the Board’s subsequent review and adoption.

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LAND USE – SUMMARY

This element of the Comprehensive Plan respects the City’s rich history by aggressively planning for its future. Newton has a rich blend of village centers, residential neighborhoods, open spaces, institutional uses, commercial areas and regional corridors. As a mature city, Newton provides opportunities for preservation and challenges for new limited in-fill developments and redevelopment of existing properties.

The Plan attempts to:

- Facilitate understanding of current land use patterns in the city,
• Recognize the desirable balance among such uses,
• Promote excellence in land use,
• Incorporate community values into land use planning,
• Provide a set of tools to help the City plan for future development and evaluate proposed new developments, and
• Implement a process and structure that ensures timely and sound implementation of the plan over a period of years.

improved environment. Simple design elements can be implemented to allow more errands to be done on foot, by bicycle, or by using public transit. These elements include providing better pedestrian accommodations, having streets and developments that conveniently interconnect rather than being dead-ends and “stand-alones,” promoting street-level retail in the form of neighborhood stores, and supplying convenient and pleasant transit stops.

Our basic expectation and intention is that the need for future road-system alterations to increase capacity will be small. Increasing roadway capacity tends to encourage more people to drive, which could in turn create more traffic jams on existing roadways and choke points. A general strategy of “roadway widening avoidance” will not result in substantive changes in the amount of growth that Newton can accommodate, but it will have an impact on the form that future growth takes by directing development towards areas where it will have the best access to transit while having the least impact on traffic. The typical pattern of scattered development has had a cumulative impact of causing worsening congestion on our roadways, even though each individual project may have seemed to have little traffic impact on its own. Future development patterns will need to better respect the relationships among land use, design, and transportation planning.

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STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Over the past two decades the notions of “neo-traditional design” have attracted growing support, recently including Massachusetts’ policies as articulated by the Governor and the Office of Commonwealth Development. That set of design ideas is hardly radical, in fact they sound a lot like Newton as it has been. Newton Centre has sometimes been cited nationally as an exemplar of a neo-traditional neighborhood⁷. Here is how some of the key principles of neo-traditional design have been shaped for this plan, from an Institute of Transportation Engineers publication⁸.

- o There is a neighborhood commercial center within [roughly ¼ mile radius] for the majority of residents in the neighborhood;
- o The streets are laid out in well-connected patterns, at a pedestrian-friendly scale, so that there are alternate automobile and pedestrian routes to every location; wherever possible;
- o The streets are relatively narrow, and the streetscapes are well-defined by the buildings and trees along them;
- o Bicycles are considered an integral part of the transportation mode mix, and the design of the streets and sidewalks includes appropriate facilities for them.

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⁷ “UnSprawl Case Study: Newton Centre, Massachusetts,” *Terrain.org, A Journal of the Built and Natural*. Issue 2, December 1999.

⁸ Eva Lerner-Lam et al, “Neo-Traditional Neighborhood Design and Its Implications for Traffic Engineering,” *ITE Journal*, January, 1992.

Much of Newton reflects those principles, and continuing to do so is an important part of our strategy. Achieving that is made easier by the good framework from which we begin, and the relatively small amounts of development change that are anticipated. More importantly, there is clear evidence in our workshops and other observations of community support for keeping or even strengthening Newton as being that kind of place.

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The Background review indicates that the amount of continuing growth in trip-making demand originating in Newton or nearby communities is likely to be quite small. However, even that modest growth in traffic would not be mitigated by regional service improvements if recent patterns continue, with the likely result being increases in congestion and traffic impacts on Newton’s residential neighborhoods and village centers. However, successful pursuit of four basic strategies can, instead, lead to achieving the City’s transportation and mobility goals:

- Strengthening alternative forms of transportation with help from state and federal sources. The more we do to give people attractive alternatives to automobile use, the further we will go toward preserving Newton’s quality of life and character.

- Implementing transport-sensitive design guidelines for new development. This means assuring that there is a fit between the location, scale, intensity and design of development and is consistent with the transportation system that we want, rather than development dictating what the transportation system it must be.

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- Adopting context-sensitive design approaches for our roads and other transportation accommodations, so that they serve to enhance locations rather than damaging them.
- Building transportation planning and administration capacity, so that our transport-related decisions can be well-informed and well coordinated.

STRENGTHENING ALTERNATIVES TO DRIVE-ALONE AUTO TRANSPORT

We intend to increase the capacity of our transportation infrastructure to both mitigate current congestion concerns and to accommodate growth in demand. Given that the needed increase is relatively small, strengthening public transport, pedestrian access, bicycling accommodations, and other alternatives to drive-alone auto transport can offset a substantial share of it. Doing so can also improve the mobility of those in the City who don’t drive, including those too young or too old to do so, those having handicaps that preclude their doing so, and those whose budgets won’t allow doing so. It can reduce demands on energy resources and reduce harmful impacts on air quality, safety, and noise. In short, strengthened alternatives can improve the quality of life for Newton residents.

Over the past decade, public policy and programs at all levels of government have given increased emphasis to promoting modes of transportation that are an alternative to single-use automobile trips. Federal funding for transit and non-auto enhancements such as bike and pedestrian pathways has gained a larger share of the total, and aside from the Central Artery and Tunnel project, the same has been true for Massachusetts’ spending. As a result of a legislative mandate, Massachusetts Highway Department standards now require attention to bicycle access as a part of most roadway improvement projects. In this region as well as nationally there have

In addition to illustrating existing services, Map 4-3 includes possible concepts for improved transit services in Newton, including the following:

- An extension of Route 60 bus line
- The extension of trackless trolley services from Watertown into Newton Corner
- The restoration of bus service along Watertown Street and Washington Street
- A new Green Line branch, connecting the Town of Needham with Newton Highlands Station, located near Needham Street, which would provide two new Green Line stations in Newton
- A new Commuter Rail station at Newton Corner, and a new Commuter Rail branch with a new station located at Riverside.

Other possible improvements not mapped include improving commuter rail frequency and parking accommodations, improving bus routing and scheduling, and restoring an intra-Newton bus system.

The following list summarizes the recommendations for how to strengthen alternatives to drive-alone transportation within and through Newton:

A. Advocate for Newton’s transportation and mobility interests at state and regional levels. Transportation infrastructure resources and authority are dominantly at state and federal levels, often administered with substantial regional guidance. For that reason, working with State and regional agencies a priority in order to effectively advocate for and assist in implementation of State and regional transportation efforts that serve Newton’s goals. Examples of what could potentially be gained include the following

- (1) Newton would be well served by the capacity of the major highway and transit elements of the sub-regional transportation system being kept consistent with demand in order to avoid through traffic increasingly clogging our neighborhood streets as an alternative to congested highways. Similarly, it is crucial for the City to press for public transportation enhancements to stimulate increased use of systems, including regional public transportation, which will deflect pass-through traffic from Newton’s streets.
- (2) Improvement of off-street parking options at selected rail stations and express bus stops is important both in order to improve transit patronage and to protect Newton’s residential neighborhood streets from becoming virtual commuter parking lots.
- (3) Commuter rail could be enhanced by improving service frequency, improving access to stations, and possibly adding stations at Newton Corner and Riverside.
- (4) An existing but unused rail right-of-way paralleling Needham Street could possibly be utilized to extend light rail from Newton Highlands to Needham Heights, cost-effectively making possible innovative transit-oriented development near new stations. Implementation of this possibility would provide an opportunity that is rare to integrate the design of the public transportation facility and the design of land development that

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G. New roadway improvements should avoid degrading existing pedestrian or bicyclist accommodations, but rather should wherever possible give them comparable priority to vehicular accommocations.

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H. Adopt and implement a bicycle plan that reflects Newton’s special circumstances. Although it is recognized that bicycle travel will only constitute a small number of trips in Newton, the use of bicycles constitutes a valuable functional alternative for those too young to drive, for some who use transit but don’t live near a stop, and for many others. The State mandates that street improvements involving State funds must accommodate bicycle travel unless there is such accommodation available over an alternative route. With fixed rights-of way finding the space to accommodate bicycling as well as pedestrians, parked cars, and moving cars is challenging, giving added importance of having a plan in place to guide satisfying that rule.

The City’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force, together with City staff, has been building on earlier consultant studies to produce such a plan, and is close to having one. It has categorized existing streets as to what would be involved in adequately accommodating bicycling both north-south and east-west, and accessing major bicycle destinations. The Task Force is now developing an implementation plan chiefly involving simple striping and signage within existing street traveled ways, coupled with more substantial structural change or off-street routes in a limited number of cases. Consistent with other aspects of this *Comprehensive Plan*, that work gives promise of reflecting and respecting the special circumstances of village centers, where space for all travel functions is especially constrained.

I. Re-examine implementation of a locally-supported public transportation system, complementing hopefully enhanced service by the T (as advocated at item A (1) above. Subsequent to the Nexus experience, a number of communities facing hurdles to success as daunting as Newton’s have been succeeding with local bus systems.

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J. Reduce school area congestion through improved options for walking or bicycling to school and using public transportation or ride-sharing as alternatives to car use. School area congestion and threats to safety have become one of the City’s largest transportation concerns.

K. Facilitate promising innovations, such as Zip-cars, employer and business shuttle programs, and vans servicing shopping centers and senior citizen complexes.

ESTABLISH TRANSPORT-SENSITIVE DESIGN GUIDANCE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Given the City’s modest growth expectations, there is no traffic-based need to broadly impose more restrictive limits on development in Newton than those presently applied, but much remains to be done to improve how well land use decisions relate to the transportation networks which service it.

We want to assure that the design of new development is well-related to the transportation system that the City intends, rather than development dictating what that system must be, just as fully as we want the design of the transportation system to be well-related to the development

that the City intends, rather than serving only the City as it exists or as predicted rather than as intended.

Too often, development planning and control decisions take the transportation context as a “given,” and simply do some combination of shaping development for that given context or presuming that the context will change to accommodate what is being proposed. We intend to move beyond that, integrating land use and transportation considerations so that there is a creative process for more comprehensive considerations as a part of design. While much of that depends upon development project sponsors, the City can do much to foster that more comprehensive perspective, to the benefit of both land development and transportation and mobility concerns. This strategy looks at that from the perspective of land development. The next looks at it from the perspective of transportation system development.

- A. ~~Make ease of access and proximity to major employers, public transport, and schools and other services an explicit consideration in acting on proposals for new development. A clear intention of this Plan is to strengthen the nodal character of our mixed-use village centers, while aiming to limit further dispersion of growth. Directing compact development towards village centers and other mixed-use areas would support a mix of uses and promote a lively pedestrian environment that is conducive to transit use.~~

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At the same time, make maintaining the existing broad patterns of residential land use in our neighborhoods an explicit criterion for shaping development, whether those neighborhoods are richly diverse in housing types and densities or essentially homogenous in such respects. The net result of those two locational priorities would be a strengthened nodal pattern for Newton, marked by lively mixed-use pedestrian and transit-friendly centers, supporting economic growth while creating significant benefit for residents, businesses, property owners, employers, and employees.

To help in implementing those intentions, clear graphic documentation is to be provided to both public and private decision-makers to indicate objectively how well any location is served regarding proximity to transit, schools, major employers, and village center services¹⁰.

- B. Adopt land use regulations facilitating and encouraging well-integrated mixing of land use in new development and in re-use of existing centers (i.e. apartments over stores) as a method of auto-trip reduction, as further discussed in the Land Use element..
- C. Systematic limits on traffic impacts onto nearby streets need to be made as much a part of the usual rules of development as lot area and floor area controls are now. Accordingly, ~~pursue~~ land use controls assuring that development intensity will be consistent with the capacity and characteristics of the transportation infrastructure as it is planned to be. For example:

- (1) ~~Consider making~~ rezoning or permit approval subject to meeting explicit transportation performance standards based upon, among other things, roadway capacity and public transportation service as proposed in this Plan¹¹.

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¹⁰ See CPAC memo “Mapping Land Use Proximities,” November 3, 2004.

(2) Above some trip-generation threshold, consider requiring that project approvals are to be based on an approved Transportation Access Plan, supported by thorough technical analysis. Approval of such plans would require some level of achievement in reducing peak hour trip generation through employer-managed efforts such as reduced-charge MBTA passes, preferential parking for multi-occupant vehicles, and other well-documented methods.

(3) Consider allowing new development to contribute payments to help fund the City's transportation and related planning efforts as mitigation when certain agreed development related traffic impact thresholds are not met.

D. Modernize zoning's parking rules. For example:

1. In village commercial centers, consider revising policy to allow parking to be a shared resource, including considering the potential for an appropriate access fee, where legal, to help offset or shape parking demand, as well as clarifying when the "phantom" parking shortfalls on older properties can be used by new development which may have different needs.

(2) Consider complementing minimum standards for parking with carefully designed limits on allowable parking spaces at limited and appropriate locations where a viable split in transportation modes enables such limits to provide helpful incentives to alternatives to automobile travel, as other cities have done.

(3) Require shared parking between developments where feasible.

(4) Keep parking from worsening pedestrian access by being placed between sidewalks and residential buildings.

(5) Require that in the usual case the ground-level use of any parking structure at the street frontage is to be an active one such as retail or office, in order to maintain activity continuity.

E. Site design guidance needs to assure that vehicular access between abutting land uses and major arterials is better managed than at the present. As one part of that, curb cuts in commercial zones should be reduced by requiring shared access between adjacent premises.

F. Encourage mixed-use development, compact building design, a range of housing choices, and provision of trees, benches, and other amenities in high pedestrian zones.

G. Encourage excellent pedestrian access to transit and to other nearby destinations.

H. Encourage opportunities for innovative transit-oriented development.

¹¹ See CPAC memo "Performance Zoning for Trip Generation Limits," June 30, 2004.

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- I. Recent years have seen mobility gains for those having disabilities, including improvements in sidewalks and crosswalks. To assure continuing accessibility improvements, make arrangements to have centralized staff responsibility for oversight of accessibility provisions, and a single point of contact for those having accessibility concerns, rather than dispersal of that responsibility among agencies as at present.

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ESTABLISH CONTEXT-SENSITIVE DESIGN APPROACHES FOR TRANSPORTATION

Just as the above listed items are designed to gain greater transportation sensitivity in land use and development decision-making, those that immediately follow are designed to gain greater sensitivity to community context, including land use and development, in transportation and mobility decision-making.

- A. Assure that the design of arterial roadway capacity improvements avoid to the extent feasible the inducement of more auto traffic passing over Newton’s local streets. That is easy to articulate as an intention, but requires sensitivity to local nuances of habits and contexts that goes beyond that of the usual traffic engineering trip allocation models. That is one important reason for seeking the creation of a transportation advisory group within Newton which can provide such nuanced understanding to design considerations at regional and state level, as suggested below.

- B. Avoid increases in congestion on major roads so as to avoid displacement of through traffic onto minor residential streets. Chiefly, that means fine-tuning of intersection configurations, signage, signalization, parking controls, and other traffic engineering elements to enhance overall capacity. Road widening should be considered only as a last resort.

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- C. To the extent feasible consistent with A and B above, minimize widening of existing roads and addition of traffic signals in order to maintain an infrastructure consistent with the existing character of Newton’s village centers and neighborhoods.

- D. Where despite A, B and C above cut-through traffic still seriously impacts residential streets, make wider usage of traffic calming devices as a means of slowing traffic and/or diverting its path. Such practices as speed humps, traffic circles, center island narrowing, median barriers, half-street closures, and forced turn islands are already in use in Newton. Many other newer devices, such as raised crosswalks, are in use in nearby communities, but in this City the use of calming techniques has been sparing. Requests for traffic calming efforts are a common item docketed for action by the Aldermen. Support for traffic calming appears to be strong among both residents and their officials. What is needed is a focused effort (which has begun) to clarify City policy, update ordinances as necessary, and to then move forward on specific actions in a newly comprehensive way¹².

¹² See [successor to] CPAC memo “Traffic Calming Measures,” December 13, 2004.

E. Design Newton roadways for relatively low vehicle speeds. Higher design speeds require more displacement of bordering vegetation, greater impediments to pedestrian movement and safety, and higher construction costs for only minimal travel time gains.

F. Where appropriate, avoid dead ends and encourage interconnections between streets.

G. A key change would be to make village commercial parking a potentially shared resource, as discussed earlier in Plan. Address the concerns over inadequate parking for access to rail, light rail (trolley), and express bus transit. That inadequacy has damaging impacts on residential neighborhoods, on transit patronage, and on some village centers. Addressing that will require undertaking a major City-wide study of parking needs and actions. A discussion of such a study has been prepared as part of this CPAC effort¹³. Such a parking study would:

a. Explore means of reducing parking demand through creative efforts towards improving alternatives to drive-alone access to either destinations or transit-serving parking areas.

b. Identify opportunities, policies, and actions regarding village center parking needs. Business and commuter parking must be better woven into the existing village patterns so that it is more adequate and less disruptive for the businesses and neighborhoods. A key change would be to make village parking a potentially shared resource, as discussed earlier in the plan.

c. Identify how to achieve adequate parking for transit commuters without destructive parking on residential streets.

d. Give recognition to the value of on-street parking as a buffer between pedestrians on sidewalks and moving traffic, as well as a valuable asset for adding to convenience parking, while also recognizing the trade-offs involving auto capacity and bike safety.

e. Give consideration to expanded use of resident permit parking restrictions as one component of an integrated approach to managing access.

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BUILD TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

Transportation is thought about and acted upon in a variety ways at a variety of locations across Newton's city government. The Planning Department has a Transportation Planning Coordinator; the Public Works Department has a City Traffic Engineer; the Public Safety and Transportation committee of the Board of Aldermen handles transportation-related matters. Traffic and parking regulations are handled through the Traffic Council, whose members comprise the Transportation Planning Coordinator, the City Traffic Engineer, a Police

¹³ See [the successor to Candace Haven's "Parking Overview," November 17, 2004].

Department member, the Chair of the Public Safety and Transportation Committee, and a Chair appointed by the Mayor.

A. ~~Create a transportation advisory committee (analogous to the Housing Partnership) possibly to help complement the work of the Traffic Council, informal bodies like the Pedestrian Bicycle Task Force, and regular Aldermanic or Executive Department agencies in overall transportation and mobility planning.~~ Transportation is one of the City functions which are most widely a topic of concern among residents, rivaled only by schools. Unlike most other functions, transportation has no structured organizational vehicle for citizen input other than for those special cases where task forces are created, such as on Needham Street design, or where public hearings are involved, or more problematically in reaction after choices have been made. Schools, housing, conservation, recreation, and myriad other concerns have a City-created mechanism for providing proactive community input, in some but not all cases speaking with some authority. Transportation has no such mechanism, but would benefit from having one.

~~Where appropriate the advisory group would be charged with providing advice to the Mayor, to the Aldermen, and to various involved staff agencies regarding capital investment proposals for street reconstruction, traffic calming, making advocacy efforts before regional and state agencies, and designing creative initiatives towards enhancing alternatives to sole driver auto transport. To accomplish that, the group would draw on citizens able to bring professional skills into service, as well as others who bring familiarity with Newton's users of transportation and the needs of various groups importantly affected by transportation decisions, including persons with disabilities and retail businesses. The group might well organize itself into sub-groups focused on topics such as parking, bicycle accommodation, regional transit advocacy, or traffic calming.~~

The Traffic Council in name is appropriate for the role described, but its scope as defined by the Ordinance that created it¹⁴ would have to be expanded to play that role, as would its membership. Asking its members to both deal with the huge load of detailed consideration of parking and traffic regulation and these further tasks might overtax their time. What may be called for is a complementary organization, perhaps created simply by Mayoral action rather than an ordinance, as was the case with the Newton Housing Partnership, which bears some functional similarities to what a Transportation Advisory Committee might be.

B. Seek funding for investment in professional preparation of an integrated set of tools with which various City agencies can ably manage a range of transportation-related concerns including support for traffic engineering decisions. For example, developing and calibrating tools for the evaluation of impacts of development proposals could enable the City to use ~~where authorized~~ impact fees to systematically assure that new development supports the costs it imposes on the transportation system not just where the driveway meets the road but more diffusely across the City. The Land Use element speaks of managing development to assure that impacts are consistent with network capacities. Tools exist which, when calibrated for Newton, can enable that to be done with accuracy and equity at modest cost, once the baseline studies and software are in place. The technology of transportation

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¹⁴ Chapter 19, Article 2, Sections 19-25 through 19-31.

HOUSING

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We are committed to providing housing which matches the economic and social diversity of our City and responds to under-served citizens. [Framework Plan, August 2000](#)

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HOUSING BACKGROUND

Newton has long played a leading role in the Boston region’s housing efforts. Facilitated by the advent of railroads, Newton was the region’s first residential suburb. The acquisition and development of Oak Hill Park to provide affordable housing for returning World War II veteran’s was an exemplar for its era. Newton’s inclusionary zoning which mandates housing affordability in much development was the first of its kind in the Commonwealth. Today the City needs to undertake efforts in all of those ways, taking advantage of infrastructure, acting proactively in the real estate market, and skillfully using regulatory authority if it is to address the profound but unwanted change which the current regional housing circumstance threatens to bring to the City. The following provides background and then an outlining of intended strategies and actions for again acting in a precedent-setting way.

PLANNING CONTEXT

There is a large and important body of housing planning efforts and guidance that have been or are being created, both locally and at the State level. This plan is being prepared with careful consideration of them.

- Local planning efforts
 - The “Newton Consolidated Strategy and Plan” is a five-year plan most recently submitted to HUD² in 2005³, as one part of the submittal by a multi-community consortium for which Newton is the lead entity⁴. Consolidated Plans have a HUD-mandated scope similar to that of this element, but unlike this one, focus heavily on use of federal assistance, and are not formally acted upon by the Board of Aldermen.
 - Newton’s annual EO-418 Housing Certification submittals to DHCD qualify or gain advantage for the City in competing for state housing and other discretionary grants. These submittals outline both planned efforts and recent achievements.

² “HUD,” the acronym for the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, is one of myriad acronyms used in relation to housing. A listing of those and other possibly obscure references is found in “Glossary” at the end of the *Comprehensive Plan*.

³ City of Newton, *Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2010*.

⁴ The Consortium comprises Newton, Bedford, Belmont, Brookline, Needham, Waltham and Watertown,

NEWTON’S CURRENT HOUSING

Newton’s existing housing stock has many enviable qualities. Investments that owners have made on housing within the City are being rewarded with the high and rapidly escalating values which such housing now commands. The physical condition of Newton’s housing stock is, with relatively few exceptions, sound, so substandard housing is not a priority concern⁵. Growth expectations are comfortably low, as shown in the table above. The City has been adding housing units at a rate of about ½% per year (Table 5-1). Even in the long run, new housing is likely to add no more than about 11% to the number of units existing in 2005, based on a detailed parcel-by-parcel “build-out” analysis of the number of housing units that could be accommodated given Newton’s land and zoning constraints.

Newton’s housing is richly diverse in vintage, size, design, and type. About half of Newton’s housing units are detached single-family homes. Almost half of the rest are in two-family homes, with the remainder in multi-family buildings of three or more units. The multi-family housing is contained in developments ranging from several hundred units to only a handful. Location of new housing ranges from village centers to outlying park-like settings. A substantial number of housing units have been created by adaptive reuse of schools and other non-residential buildings.

More than half of the housing in the City is owner-occupied, with nearly 40% of the units being rental, close to the national average. About 2,400 of the nearly 33,000 housing units in the City (per US Census count) in 2005 are “counted” in the state’s Low-Moderate Income inventory of units credited towards the Chapter 40B 10% threshold for applicability of that law for overriding local zoning, involving about 900 units “counted” but not really affordable. Newton housing serves a rich array of households ranging from young starter couples to traditional families to seniors living alone, as well as individuals living in group, congregate, or institutional accommodations.

Less apparent than the enviable qualities of Newton’s housing are the serious concerns about the loss of affordability and the impact of that on community diversity. While over the years, housing values have risen faster than housing property taxes, those taxes together with other cost escalations are still a burden for many Newton householders, especially those with fixed incomes. Across the country the great majority of households spend less than 30% of their income on housing and spending more is widely viewed as being burdensome. On that basis, in 2000 about one out of every three renter households in the City was burdened by excessive housing costs, as was one out of five owner households⁷. Such costs have hidden consequences. For example, many of those who would otherwise live independently “double-up” with relatives or others to split housing costs. In too many cases, housing costs result in residents selling their Newton homes and moving elsewhere.

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⁵ See “FY 2005 EO418 Application for Housing Certification & Summary of the City of Newton’s Housing Strategy,” January 6, 2005 page 5 for housing conditions data.

⁷ US Census of Housing, 2000.

Newton residents are highly protective of the status quo in their neighborhoods. The City’s regulatory system serves that intention well, given that the majority of all housing developments require favorable action on permits acted upon by a Board of Aldermen which is structured so as to be responsive to neighborhood concerns. The tension between serving City-wide housing needs and serving neighborhood concerns over development is challenging for all of us. Finding means for resolution is a key part of the housing strategy and actions which follow.

HOUSING GOALS

PROTECTING THE CITY’S DIVERSITY.

Supporting Newton’s cherished diversity is a fundamental goal. To accomplish that, we need to undertake a program of positive actions that will assure fair and equal housing opportunities for a population that is at least as diverse as at present in age, race, household type, life-style, cultural heritage and economic status. That diversity should not only be welcomed but should also be actively sought. For that seeking to be effective, that diverse population must be able to find and maintain suitable housing at affordable costs.

- We want our own children and persons like them to be able to live here, and for all those who now live here to be able to choose to continue to do so as they age.
- We want our stock of housing to match the social and economic diversity of our population. That requires increasing both rental and home ownership opportunities for the entire range of low, moderate, and middle income families, for starter households as well as for senior citizens.
- We intend that the share of Newton’s housing that is affordable by regional norms will grow no less than it does statewide. ~~At minimum, we intend to make efforts towards reaching the 10% affordable level as set by and counted by the State as a “norm” for municipalities.~~

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BROADLY DEFINING DIVERSITY

- We seek diversity both between and within the City’s neighborhoods so that among them they afford real choices in living environment. Some neighborhoods are highly diverse with a mix of housing types and densities, some almost purely homogenous; some are compact, some are more open. It is important to maintain all of those dimensions of choice and diversity.
- While addressing broad affordability needs, we seek to also address the needs of special populations, including our large and growing elderly population, those with disabilities, and those who need supportive services as well as housing. That means such things as increasing the permanent availability of housing for local families now housed in emergency and transitional shelters, and access to services for frail elderly and other persons having special needs.

circumstances. Facilitating provision of housing together with retailing can promote a more active environment.

- Further zoning actions are suggested in the Land Use element, fully consistent with and supportive of housing goals.

COPING WITH A DYNAMIC MARKET

To achieve housing objectives in a market requiring quick response for effectiveness, the City’s housing-related procedures need to be as refined as possible.

- Permitting processes for new housing proposals need to be expedited wherever possible, not by compromising City review responsibilities, but by continuing to pursue streamlining procedures.
- Except in unusual circumstances, the disposition of publicly owned property should always be preceded by a process of public review and evaluated for, among other uses, affordable housing before being committed for any specific purpose.
- Individual project review by the Housing Partnership and the Planning and Development Board should be expedited or eliminated for small low-impact projects meeting pre-approved criteria, such as limits on subsidy per unit and consistency with programmatic objectives. Current examples include the City’s Purchase/Rehab Program, First Time Homebuyer Program, and the Newton Connection program.
- We need means for acting in the market more rapidly than now in light of that market’s volatility. We intend to continue to pursue gaining legislation to allow the Newton Community Development Authority to acquire interests in property without prior Aldermanic approval, subject to appropriate procedural oversight. We also intend to pursue creation of a municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund under newly adopted Section 55C of Chapter 44, MGL. Trusts created under that legislation have the ability to acquire, hold, and dispose of property.
- Efforts to improve the capacity of the City’s network of small non-profit housing providers should be continued. Those organizations have a demonstrated capacity to quickly respond to opportunities that open.

- Explore ways that construction related permit fees for small qualified non-profit organizations producing affordable housing might be reduced where the revenue lost is modest in terms of the affordable housing gain provided.

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F. Where appropriate, reconsider the regulations on accessory dwelling units. Among the changes worth considering are a system that might be more transparent and more highly differentiated among sub-areas of the City than the present provisions, perhaps resulting in more such units being built in most neighborhoods, without increases in others, and with fewer resorting to extra-legal creation of such units.

G. Increase the proportion of residential development applications that can be approved by right rather than through special permit, variance, or comprehensive permit, utilizing clear objective standards and administrative review processes that can obviate the necessity of case-by-case review by the Aldermen.

2. We need to have reasonable dimensional and parking standards for residential development.

- A. Reflect proximity to commercial centers, schools, and services as a major consideration in establishing or altering density controls.
- B. Use performance-based density rules (e.g. traffic) to control impacts rather than using any further proliferation of districts having varying density specifications.
- C. Explore to see if there are opportunities to zone select locations for small-lot small-house development.
- D. Reconsider density requirements for multi-family uses in light of current circumstances, most importantly in the Mixed Use districts.
- E. Assure that lot area per unit, FAR, yards, maximum height, and building coverage rules work together reasonably, which again is clearly not the case in the Mixed Use districts.
- F. Clarify and ease by-right parking requirements to reflect special residential uses and access circumstances, for example location in transit-served village centers.

G. Move towards parking as a shared resource in village centers, allowing fees in lieu of on-site parking.

3. Street and utility requirements need refinement.

- A. Limit street width requirements, construction standards, and stormwater management rules in order to reflect contemporary Low Impact Development approaches.
- B. Work with the Fire Department to assure that public safety needs are met without inhibiting residential potentials.

FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

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Potential actions include all of the following.

- A. Assure that the City’s approval of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) at minimum stays intact. That Act has proven to be the largest local source of financial help for housing, including some efforts for which no other public funds are generally available, such as for units affordable at 80-100% of the area median income.
- B. Provide loans and grants for mixed use and commercial-to-residential conversions in village centers, using federal CDAG funds, CPA support, or other available funds.
- C. Create a program for home-donation to NHA or non-profit organizations, offering life tenancy, tax write-off, NHRF rehab support, and maintenance support over the donor’s lifetime.
- D. Provide assistance to Newton-connected renters: first/last months rent, some partial rent subsidy, training, refund of tax-related portion of rent, eviction-prevention fund.
- E. Create an emergency housing assistance fund to enable service and housing providers to assist renters threatened with eviction for financial reasons.
- F. Continue existing programs: Newton Connection homeowner assistance program, first time homebuyer program, NHRF programs.
- G. Create a Reverse Mortgage Technical Assistance Program to assist homeowners to stay in Newton.
- H. Take advantage of infrastructure support made possible under District Improvements Financing (DIF) or Tax Increment Financing (TIF) if they prove suitable in comprehensive revitalization efforts, for example, in village centers.
- I. Explore means of providing support enabling seniors to remain in their homes, such as a City-funded reverse-mortgage program, or a City-funded Real Estate Tax Credit program to provide a tax increase “circuit-breaker.”
- J. **Explore** Chapters 40R and 40S of the Massachusetts General Laws links finance and development by offering financial rewards to municipalities that adopt “smart growth” regulations allowing relatively high density housing at well-located sites. We should explore meeting the requirements of that legislation, especially if, as anticipated, the “rewards” are made more attractive in the future than they are at present.
- K. Systematically review the inventory of real estate owned by the City or other public bodies to identify possible opportunities to provide opportunities for housing development or adaptive reuse. The sale of public-owned real estate with provisions assuring housing affordability has been a powerful tool in the past, certainly more limited in opportunities now, but perhaps possibilities still exist.

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OTHER ONGOING **POTENTIAL ACTIONS** FACILITATION EFFORTS

A. Have hierarchical review processes, with more demanding processes reserved for larger and more complex projects, expedited processes for smaller or simpler ones, especially if involving affordable units, continuing recently adopted changes.

B. Where feasible provide waiver of review fees in proportion to the share of units made affordable.

C. Assure that review and decision processes are as clear and transparent as possible.

D. Where feasible provide an all-inclusive one-stop permit for certain by-right and/or affordable housing developments.

E. Where feasible formalize the single-contact in each department (including the Law Department) to handle project permitting.

F. Establish a pre-review permitting group to facilitate coordinated project handling.

G. Create an Affordable Housing Clearinghouse and a City-wide housing/services information clearinghouse.

H. Open discussion with large employers (e.g. Boston College, Newton-Wellesley Hospital) re their role and stake in housing.

I. Explore creating home-sharing services for elders and for single mothers.

J. Make and support ongoing efforts at “putting a face on the housing issue” and in other ways give visibility to housing as a vital concern in this City, coordinating the City’s efforts with those of private non-profits.

K. Strengthen the City’s capacities for promoting fair housing, including a variety of education and outreach efforts, an improved complaint receiving and response system, and periodic monitoring of the equality of access to housing actually being achieved, as being developed through the Newton Fair Housing Task Force.

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IV. WHAT TO DO ABOUT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: AN ACTION PROGRAM

A “Flexible Moderate Growth” economic development program for Newton involves preservation of Newton’s residential amenities, strengthening of business in Newton’s village centers, and promotion of commercial development along Newton’s commercial corridors. The classification and identity of these areas is discussed in the “Land Use” element.

IV.1. Village Center Development

- Plan the renewal of village centers, aiming to provide vibrant attractive village centers serving the adjacent residential communities.
- Improve parking in the village centers. **Explore conducting focused or comprehensive parking studies to assess the need for parking spaces in particular locations as may be appropriate.**
- Consider the designation of overlay districts to regulate land use in village centers.
- Encourage mixed use in the village centers by promoting housing above retail. Increasing density allowing mixed-use development in the village centers would increase the population within walking distance and as a result would likely expand the available range of goods and services offered there. It would also increase the stock of affordable housing located close to employment centers and public transportation.
- Attract people into the village centers at off hours by developing cultural facilities focused on the local community—small theaters, art galleries, etc.—and maintaining local parks with improved facilities such as public gardens, outdoor cafes, band stands, tennis courts etc.
- Partner between commercial property owners and the City’s various departments to promote a mix of businesses responsive to the needs of the residents.
- Work closely with the Chamber of Commerce and encourage the establishment of neighborhood business associations to address broader business concerns and to organize and promote local events and festivals.

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IV.2. Commercial Corridor **and Business Node** Development

- Encourage appropriate development of presently underdeveloped areas such as Riverside and the Massachusetts Turnpike air rights, when such development appears to be feasible.
- Provide incentives for development of office centers and low impact research, publishing, financial, and management operations along commercial corridors and nodes.
- Review zoning regulations to encourage appropriate mixed, residential and commercial uses in the commercial corridors. Mid-density residential construction—including for seniors or assisted living facilities—may offer economic and social advantages so long as its siting can

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- Encourage the expansion of facilities suited to meet the needs of Newton’s changing population.

IV.5. General Planning

- With the advice and assistance of the Economic Development Commission, consider appointing a supplementary committee on economic priorities and performance to help make proposals for change as may be appropriate.
- Engage in an ongoing planning process, considering the layout of Newton as a whole and visualizing broad plans for the optimal urban structure of its centers and commercial corridors, as outlined in the “Excellence in Place-Making” element of this *Plan*.
- Make a citywide effort to explore and raise funds from outside sources (federal, state, and private) for redevelopment planning and construction.
- In addition to enhanced funding from regular sources explore means through which more adequate funding for the city’s Planning Department can be obtained through fees, grants, or other supplements to the tax levy.
- Further streamline the process of applying for and receiving building permits and other city approvals for construction, going beyond the start which has been made, as outlined in the “Excellence in Place-Making” element of this *Plan*.
- Examine the possibility of having materials and computer modeling prepared that would facilitate efforts of the City staff to provide estimates of the fiscal and economic impacts of development decisions.

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V. CONCLUSION

Newton’s planners and decision makers must put heavy emphasis on Newton’s residential character but most not lose sight of the important role of business in serving the community and in providing helpful job opportunities and tax revenues. Smaller scale commercial and residential development at moderate densities should be encouraged in the village centers to provide a focus for the local communities. Promotion of economic development should also focus on large-scale operations that can contribute to jobs, services, and the tax base, so long as they do not impinge on the high quality residential character of the community.

and facilities of conservation and recreation interest see the *2003 Recreation and Open Space Plan*.

FOR THE PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION OF NATURAL AND SCENIC RESOURCES:

1. Protect selected remaining unprotected, environmentally sensitive areas of both local and regional significance.
2. Identify and protect land of special conservation and/or educational interest, such as a distinctive bedrock outcrop or an area of unique vegetation.
3. Integrate conservation and passive recreation uses of open land where possible.
4. Balance conservation and development needs through procedures linking development with open space considerations as part of the permitting process. Consider allowing, for example, increased density (whether dwelling units per acre or commercial floor area ratio) in exchange for open space provided in excess of required minimums.
5. Continue to support and seek to enhance regional, state, and adjacent-community efforts for water conservation and pollution abatement (see also the Natural Resources and Environment Element).
6. Strictly administer Newton’s Floodplain/Watershed Ordinance (Art. II, Sec.22-22) to continue our participation on the National Flood Insurance Program.
7. In the planning and permitting process encourage the use of natural and permeable ground cover to minimize runoff in developed areas, rather than structural solutions.
8. Develop regulations, procedures, and guidelines for administering the City’s designated scenic roads (which are portions of the streets listed below), and explore the further extension of the set of designated roads.

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| Brookside Ave | Hammond Street | Sumner Street |
| Chestnut Street | Hancock Street | Valentine Street |
| Concord Street | Highland Street | Waban Avenue |
| Dudley Road | Hobart Road | Woodcliff Road |
| Fuller Street | Lake Avenue | Woodland Road |
| Grove Street | Mill Street | |

9. Develop design criteria and review procedures for the following identified visual corridors, and explore the extension of the set of locations that are included.

- Commonwealth Avenue
- Nahanton Street/Country Club Brook Valley
- Watertown Street
- Washington Street/Massachusetts Turnpike Corridor,

Beacon Street
Boylston Street.

FOR THE LOCATION, LINKAGE AND SUPPLY OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL SITES:

10. Acquire parcels and easements to connect areas for conservation, passive use and wildlife corridors.
11. Restrict use of municipally owned open space for building or parking except as accessory to conservation or recreation use or if such use is essential, provide compensatory open space.
12. Critically review Newton's guidelines for Cluster Zoning in addition to its guidelines for traditional subdivisions to better conform them to these intentions.
13. Develop aqueduct trails, loop pathways and new paths and nature trails to connect to the Charles River Pathway.
14. Where feasible, require that open space for active or passive recreation be created in new developments, especially in the underserved portions of the City.
15. Identify and acquire suitable vacant parcels as they become available for use as vest pocket parks in densely populated neighborhoods.
16. Explore an array of techniques for the protection of large parcels and the acquisition of small parcels, including:
 - Use of betterment assessments.
 - Use of conservation restrictions, deed restrictions, and scenic easements.
 - Use of zoning mechanisms.
 - Use of tax incentives.
 - Use of cooperative agreements with property owners and non-profit conservation entities.
 - Use of procedures linking land development with open space plan considerations as a part of the permitting process.
 - Other mechanisms successfully used in other jurisdictions to help protect large parcels.

FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION SITES:

17. Improve effective access to existing and future sites through improved entry signage and adequate accommodation for parking where appropriate, except where resource fragility mandates otherwise.

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the City, rather than private contractors, to be the sole beneficiary of future savings from such projects. Careful analysis indicates that an investment of about three million dollars will yield continuous operating savings of approximately \$600,000 per year. An additional investment of \$900,000 into street lamp replacement will yield additional savings of about \$400,000 per year.

3. Expand the Role of the Energy Commission. Participation in an advisory capacity in the site plan approval process will enable the Commission to take a pro-active role in guiding new development in Newton toward high performance building standards. To this end, the present ordinance which established the commission is proposed to be revised to provide for expanding its relationship with the Executive Department, the Board of Aldermen and the Planning and Development Board.

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All of the following strategies and most of the actions are taken from the Energy Action Plan. *The actions in italics go beyond those to include additional or more explicit actions reflecting the directions of the Comprehensive Plan or other more recent sources, including the Energy Commission's more recent considerations.*

- Increase energy efficiency and sustainable practices in buildings and infrastructure** (48% of the overall reduction). In the short term, this would involve encouraging owners to retrofit existing buildings to upgrade their energy using elements and systems. In the longer run, use of high performance building standards for renovations and new construction is necessary, which can be encouraged by means of various incentives and as a condition of obtaining special permits and variances. The figures for the municipality are based upon a 20% reduction in emissions from both buildings and street lighting.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

- As noted above, create an "Energy Investment Fund" to support energy efficiency and cleaner energy projects for all of the City's buildings, possibly providing it with \$3 million in funding availability, which is projected to earn a 20% annual return on investment through the savings achieved.
- Consider amending the Energy Commission or related ordinances to provide it with an appropriate advisory role in the site plan approval process for new city or private buildings where such advice may be of aid to the Board of Aldermen or the Design Review Committee in clarifying or elaborating some of the conservation of energy and natural resources requirements recently added to Newton's zoning special permit and public building site plan review criteria.
- Create a "Change-A-Light" campaign to encourage households and businesses to replace conventional lighting with more efficient bulbs.
- Continue to upgrade the City's street lights for increased energy efficiency as the technology advances.

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- Include life-cycle costing in in construction all municipal construction.
- Use outreach and education to promote efficiency and sustainability, such as through a “Green Homes” program, and a “neighborhood solar challenge.”
- It is noteworthy that one of the first actions stemming from the preparation of this plan was adoption by the Board of Aldermen of two amendments to City ordinances making energy efficiency and sustainability considerations for certain special permits, site plan reviews, and new public building reviews.
 - When possible, explore ways to make energy efficiency and sustainable practices considerations in the criteria for funding specific City grants such as the Community Preservation Act or Community Development Block Grant programs, so long as such additional criteria are consistent with the applicable law relating to such programs.
- Employ creative financing mechanisms for energy efficiency investments, such as mechanisms currently being proposed by the Energy Commission to implement municipal facilities improvements. These include “performance contracting,” through which private entities make the investment and in return get a major share but not all of the savings from energy-related improvements. With another model the city buys back ownership of the facilities it has invested in, using the savings generated over a long term lease
- **Increase use of fuel efficient vehicles and increase in alternative modes of transportation** (25% of the overall reduction). The Energy Action Plan projects that this emissions reduction will be achieved simply by turn-over in vehicles resulting in a more efficient fleet. In the longer term, greater use of alternative modes of transportation and trip reduction through transportation and land use planning is projected to play a larger role. The steps to achieve such transportation and land use-related reductions are much the same as those contained in the Land Use and Transportation and Mobility Elements of this *Comprehensive Plan*.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

- Work with the School Department to develop and implement “Walk to School Programs.”
- Expand the purchase fuel-efficient vehicles for City use.
- As proposed throughout this *Comprehensive Plan*, revise development controls to encourage development to locate in mixed-use contexts at commercial corridors or transportation nodes. *In particular, this may involve making dimensional controls to facilitate mixed use, revising off-street parking regulations to make parking a shared rather than parcel-by-parcel requirement, and reflecting transit proximity in parking requirements, allowed floor area, and overall balancing of benefits and costs.*

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- Expand current efforts to promote waste reduction at its sources and to increase the share of wastes that are set aside for recycling.
- Adopt programs and possible regulatory provisions encouraging the reuse of existing structures in preference to their being demolished, thus not only reducing waste but also protecting community character and promoting relatively affordable housing.

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WATER RESOURCES

For most of us in this region, water resources are not a topic of routine concern. In the late 19th century a regional approach was initiated to provide public water and sewerage services for metropolitan Boston. As a result, ample drinking water has been supplied without interruption from sources which are “away,” and wastewater is transported, treated, and discharged by the same regional body, now the MWRA, which provides us with drinking water. The well-managed Charles River provides us with recreation and amenity as it circles the City, constituting more than half of the municipal boundary. The river accepts almost all of our storm water, whether in streams, piped, or running over land, along with all of the things which are carried with that water. The smaller surface waters within our City all eventually connect to the Charles, sometimes via another municipality, but almost no storm water from any other municipality runs through Newton to reach the Charles; our streams are our own from start to finish. When contaminants are detected within our reach of the Charles, as they do from time to time, it is clear where the source lies.

The amenity, safety, and health of our City depends in significant part upon the Charles and the water it carries, and our development and day-to-day practices impact that vital waterway just as significantly as do the practices further upstream where that connection to the Charles is commonly much more visible. Our management of smaller waterbodies and of the groundwater resources related to all of them are similarly important, but not a prominent element of the public agenda of concerns. However, it should be.

The hydrology of those water systems is impacted by our actions, exacerbating the fluctuations in stream flows from trickles to torrents, which can be damaging to both natural and built resources at both ends of that fluctuation, whether flood or drought. The water quality of those systems is also impacted by our actions, reducing their amenity value and their ability to sustain habitats. Through impacts on hydrology and water quality we impact habitat sustainability, and we more directly impact habitats by our construction activities which displace or damage them. For all of those reasons, we owe it to ourselves, our region, and those who will later follow us to be mindful of those impacts, avoid or mitigate them, and restore damage done in the past to the degree which is possible.

As noted above under Background, Newton has a wide array of institutions working towards those ends. Additionally, there is a broad array of federal and state requirements mandating that our practices be improved over those of the past. To our credit, in some cases this City is going beyond those mandates in an effort to be caring about our cultural footprint on our natural water

- Would categorically thwart it (hopefully rare in any event).

The same considerations would apply for many other of the City’s planning intentions, whether encouraging non-auto mobility or mitigating housing stratification or saving some but not all kinds of open space or achieving some measure of sustainability.

Building that link between the plans the City makes and the actions in which it invests would involve at least three steps.

1. The first step would be to assure that in fact making that linkage in some way is supported among those who would be most affected by it, starting with the Mayor’s office but going beyond that to the officials in those agencies for whom the prioritization of capital requests is of vital importance to their ability to carry out their missions. A group of those officials should therefore be involved in the development of the approach. They could provide a means of communication among the departments most affected by this step. Informing their discussion would be helped by substantial prior review of historical capital planning experience in Newton, experience in other communities, and further clarity regarding what is proposed.
2. Given support for moving towards building the plan/project linkage, the currently stated guidance regarding project eligibility for funding would be supplemented with a statement regarding the value of proposed capital outlays being consistent with formally approved plans and policies. Carefully crafted, that simple statement could become a powerful incentive for those generating capital outlay proposals to assure that those proposals really are supportive of the directions that the City is seeking to follow, and in turn, would make the preparation and approval of plans a more important process than at present, enhancing their likely quality.
3. With such a statement in place, the third step would be to construct a procedure which would assure City departments that observing it really would result in enhanced priority in the funding of their requests. It might be as simple as circulating a well-designed outline to be completed by applicant agencies in seeking capital funding, which would walk applicants through identifying the ways in which that which is proposed is related (or not) to an existing set of adopted plans. On the other hand, the process might be more extensive, involving some level of interagency exchange and public involvement in the process. The process probably should not involve point-scoring, and would certainly not foreclose the ability of decision-makers to recognize possibly preemptive priorities not previously made a part of the system. The priority choices would still be the Mayor’s to propose, and the Aldermen’s to decide. This step would simply give them an additional consideration upon which to base decisions.

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An important benefit of closely linking capital spending to adopted plans is that doing so makes those plans more consequential, and making plans more consequential consistently means that those plans receive more critical scrutiny from more parties, which in turn results in better plans.

substantial ongoing efforts to initiate work on specific actions and to carry them to the level of development where they can be implemented. Much of the potential value of this planning effort will be lost unless the necessary resources for keeping the *Plan* current and for implementing it are made available. FINDING RESOURCES FOR LONG RANGE AND COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING IS AN UNAVOIDABLE REQUISITE FOR COMPREHNSIVE PLANNING EFFORTS TO PROVE EFFECTIVE OVER TIME.

- **A partnership for planning.** No lesson from the Early Actions is clearer than that the likelihood of success in gaining positive movement on actions is greatly improved through early partnering among even a few individuals from City staff, Aldermen, and relevant citizen officials. While that lesson is simple, carrying it out is often difficult and time-consuming. An important element in the City’s planning system should be a structure which would facilitate that kind of collaboration, making it almost routine.

How best to do that is challenging in Newton, as it always is. There is a broad range of agencies, organizations, and interests who are and will be doing planning which is relevant to any comprehensive effort, and whose views need to be part of ongoing planning. The nine topical elements of the *Plan* will importantly involve at least twelve different appointed City boards and commissions in their implementation, which underscores both the *Plan’s* comprehensiveness and the richness of citizen involvement in the City’s operations. Nine of the ten Aldermanic standing committees are likely to be similarly involved. Staffing for almost all of the initiatives, however, comes from a single department, Planning and Development, either alone or acting together with Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Public Facilities, or the Newton History Museum. Accordingly, it is reasonable to anticipate that the Planning and Development Department will play a central role in *Plan* implementation, just as it was central in providing support for the *Plan’s* preparation.

The more difficult question is how to create an organizational structure and process which can effectively achieve the integration of planning and acting which is being called for. These are some initial thoughts.

– There **could** be an identified group which would provide planning guidance on an ongoing basis. Included in that group **could** be representation from the City’s administrative staff, Board of Aldermen, appointed officials, and other citizens. To be effective that group should either have many fewer members than CPAC had, or be organized with an hierarchical structure which allows a smaller number of members to carry out the guidance function except under special circumstances.

Provided however, the relationship of such a group with the existing Planning Department and Planning Board is also clarified and carefully worked out.

– That group should have identified staff resources sufficient to make it operationally effective.

– At least initially, and perhaps permanently, the group’s effectiveness should rely upon the value it adds to the process, rather than upon mandates upon others to work with

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