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Barney S. Heath
Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 9, 2020

TO: Councilor Deborah Crossley, Chair, Zoning & Planning Committee
Members of the Zoning & Planning Committee

FROM: Barney Heath, Director, Department of Planning and Development
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director, Department of Planning and Development
Nevena Pilipović-Wengler, Community Engagement Manager
Zachery LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning
Cat Kemmett, Planning Associate

RE: **#88-20 Discussion and review relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance**
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING requesting review, discussion, and direction relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance.

MEETING: December 14, 2020

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

Overview of the Zoning Redesign 'Where We Are Now' Community Engagement Effort

Staff convened two community engagement events as part of the December 2020 community engagement effort called 'Zoning Redesign: Where We Are Now' on the night of December 2nd and the afternoon of December 3rd. Both events consisted of opening remarks by Mayor Fuller, remarks by the Planning Director Barney Heath, a staff presentation by Jennifer Caira, and break-out discussion rooms facilitated by staff and co-hosted by ZAP Councilors and Planning & Development Board members.

On December 8th, the recording of the opening remarks and presentation given on the night of December 2nd was posted to the Zoning Redesign website (www.newtonma.gov/zoningredesign), along with the attached survey for Newton community members to provide their questions regarding Zoning Redesign and their ideas for community engagement in 2021. This survey is open until the end of the day on Sunday, January 10th.

The two events on December 2nd and December 3rd combined had over 500 attendees. According to the facilitators and co-hosts of the break-out discussions, every participant who wanted to speak had the opportunity to do so at least once, and in some cases, were able to share their opinions and questions multiple times. Reports also shared that opinions and reactions varied amongst the break-out discussion

rooms. In one room that I personally had the chance to briefly ‘visit,’ a participant shared that they had no idea there was such a diversity of thought around Zoning Redesign.

The particular patterns of participants’ questions and opinions are currently being organized and synthesized from the audio/visual recordings of the two events’ 18 break-out discussion rooms, the comments left in these 18 rooms’ Chat boxes, the questions posted in attendees’ RSVP submissions (533 total), and emails sent to the Zoning Redesign email list and individual staff with questions and comments on Zoning Redesign and these community engagement events. Compilation and analysis of the survey responses will be conducted after the survey closes on January 10th.

This compilation will be laborious but productive in coalescing Newton community members’ questions, hopes and concerns for a future Zoning Redesign FAQ document as well as design of a comprehensive engagement strategy for 2021. Staff hopes for the compilation of material from the two events to be finished by the end of Friday, December 18th. In addition, staff are working on posting the break-out discussions’ material (video/audio recordings and Chat box comments) for public view and hope to post this as soon as possible.

In the meantime, overarching themes of questions and reactions included, but are certainly not limited to, the following:

- **Single-Family vs. Multi-Family Zoning:** What are the proposed changes to the current single-family zoning and for multi-family zoning? Is single-family zoning being abolished? Will the proposed changes to single-family zoning result in six-unit apartment complexes all over the city? How will the proposed changes affect the suburban feel of Newton?
- **Housing Affordability:** How will the proposed changes address affordability of housing or redress historical racial disparity in housing? How is ‘affordability’ being defined?
- **Environmental sustainability:** How will the new zoning ordinance further the City’s climate goals? How will the new zoning ordinance increase and protect greenery in Newton?
- **Process:** Why is the city carrying out the Zoning Redesign project during a pandemic? Should there be a referendum on the proposed Zoning Ordinance?
- **In addition:** How does Zoning Redesign affect transportation and education?

It is apparent from the discussions in the breakout rooms and the questions and comments submitted, that much more work needs to be done to present material clearly and as easily digestible. In addition to using the feedback from these events to create an FAQ and an engagement strategy for 2021, the Planning Department intends to revamp the Zoning Redesign website and create short videos and summaries for key topics.

It is also clear from the feedback that more analysis is needed, particularly around some of the big ideas such as expanding where two-family buildings are allowed by-right and the ability to convert large homes into multiple units.

Lastly, despite some technical difficulties, the Zoom facilitation of the break-out discussions proved effective for a large community meeting. This confirms Zoom as one successful platform to utilize for future Zoning Redesign engagement.

Looking Forward

It would be appreciated to hear ZAP Councilor's reactions to the following questions:

- How did the ZAP Councilors who acted as co-hosts during either of the two events experience their break-out discussions?
- Do you have ideas for community engagement in 2021 (especially ones that surfaced because of your break-out discussions)?
- The way we conduct community engagement for 2021 could heavily rely upon how ZAP chooses to work through the drafted Zoning Ordinance update. How does considering community engagement for 2021 influence your thoughts of ZAP's working calendar?