



Summary Report

Tapping the Creative Economy: Zoning, Arts, and Artisans

Arts, culture and the creative economy in Newton was the focus of the February Zoning Redesign event at the Newton Free Library. Over forty people, many of them artists, art patrons or leaders of arts organizations gathered to consider how Newton's new zoning ordinance could help establish a strong connection between creative uses and Newton's built environment. While zoning and the arts may not appear to be highly related topics, zoning can serve as a tool to facilitate expansion of arts related uses in Newton. After a guest performance by youth vocalist Julianna Walsh from the West Suburban YMCA, staff gave a presentation on proposals for arts and culture in Newton's new zoning ordinance, and then sought feedback on proposals from attendees via facilitated small group discussions.

In general participant feedback was positive to the zoning proposals. Proposals were outlined in three categories and are described in further detail below: 1) bringing arts and culture into zoning, 2) supporting more art in the built form, 3) tapping into the creative economy. Video of the presentation and slides can be viewed on the project website www.courbanize.com/newtonzoning

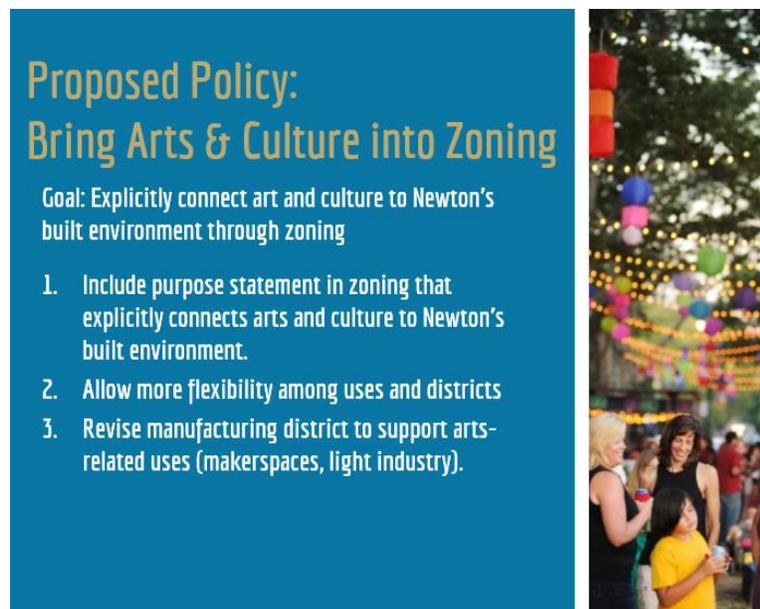
In Newton's current zoning ordinance there is no mention of arts and cultural uses beyond permitted uses such as theaters, halls, and galleries. The 2007 Newton Comprehensive Plan mentions arts and culture in one instance when it identifies developing more cultural facilities to activate Newton's village centers during different times of day. Despite this lack of reference to arts and culture in Newton's guiding documents for planning and development, the city has a strong cultural sector including dozens of arts organizations, schools, performance and practice spaces. Furthermore, there is a longstanding and strong partnership between the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs and the artists who live and work in Newton including the Newton Festival of the Arts.

Community Feedback: Bring Arts & Culture into Zoning

Zoning can more explicitly connect art and culture to Newton's built environment through zoning in three specific ways as listed in the slide below. Participant feedback to these ideas was overwhelmingly positive. Attendees of the event liked the idea of recognizing the arts, artists and the creative economy in the zoning ordinance. In part because many attendees work in this sector, participants attested to the benefits of a strong arts-based economy for community members directly involved as patrons or students or makers, but also to the positive ripple effect the arts has across an entire community. Attendees supported the idea of adopting a more flexible zoning ordinance that more easily allows uses to intermix – for example a theater use in an office-focused commercial district.

Revising the zoning for manufacturing uses in Newton was supported by attendees who highlighted how difficult it is to find available studios and makerspaces in Newton, which pushes artists to neighboring communities like Natick, Dedham or Somerville. Participants also expressed the need for studio space that is *affordable*. Group discussions identified new considerations when zoning and permitting these uses like fume hoods for welding equipment, and the need for rules for fabrication workshops which are a relatively new type of light industrial or manufacturing use. One group suggested that Newton has limited opportunities to convert existing older manufacturing buildings into artist spaces, and perhaps these uses would only be found in new construction.

Attendees highlighted the need for more large community arts spaces, such as exhibition spaces, performance and rehearsal spaces, and places for larger concerts and productions - this was a significant focus of many of the discussion groups. Participants were interested in finding ways for these spaces to be affordable and shared among different groups and organizations. Some creative ideas emerged including working with property owners to offer unused spaces to artists or allowing temporary or pop-up art exhibitions during construction and in empty storefronts. People wanted to find better ways to work with schools and universities and pointed to businesses like L’Aroma Café and West Newton Cinema that have rotating art exhibits.



Proposed Policy:
Bring Arts & Culture into Zoning

Goal: Explicitly connect art and culture to Newton’s built environment through zoning

1. Include purpose statement in zoning that explicitly connects arts and culture to Newton’s built environment.
2. Allow more flexibility among uses and districts
3. Revise manufacturing district to support arts-related uses (makerspaces, light industry).

Community Feedback: Art in the Built Form

The second area of policy proposed included ways to use zoning to encourage art in the public realm. There was overwhelming support for the first and second proposals in this category - to allow murals and to make the permitting of murals easy; and to define art in the ordinance with review by the appropriate departments and commissions. At least one group expressed surprise that there are currently no murals of note in Newton or other art in the public realm, except for the standing mosaic in Newton Centre and the temporary pianos in the park project. This demonstrates a significant opportunity area for connecting Newton’s artist community to the wider city and achieving the goal to further enliven village centers as

identified in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan. In addition to murals painted on buildings, attendees wanted to explore building wrappers that use alternates to paint for mural art. One group suggested ways to encourage art to be displayed in windows of commercial spaces.

Group discussions expressed significant support for encouraging art via a 1% for art from construction costs of some new development. There was concern that this percentage may need to be increased to 1.5% or 5% to make an impact. Some people questioned if a developer team selected the publicly accessible art or worked with an artist to design a piece, if the art would achieve the intended goals or if the funds might be misused for other expenditures. Staff indicated how this process would likely involve City staff and/or Council review and a process could be set up for ensuring accountability.

This discussion led to other ideas about partnerships with developers including specific sites such as Riverside and new development on Washington Street near Newton Corner. One group discussed the approved Washington Place project and both the Community Art Space and outdoor plaza that is planned there. Very few groups discussed the proposal to clarify allowances for private art on private property. One group expressed surprise that this would be part of zoning.



Proposed Policy:
Art in the Built Form

Goal: Encourage art in the public realm through zoning.

1. Allow murals and make permitting easy
2. Define public art in ordinance and review by Mayor's Office of Arts & Culture, Urban Design Commission.
3. Encourage creation of publicly accessible art through 1% for art in new development.
4. Clarify allowances for private art on private property.

The photograph on the right shows a red bird sculpture perched on a dark metal structure of a building facade, with a light-colored wall and some greenery visible in the background.

Community Feedback: Tap into the Creative Economy

The third category of proposals focused on using zoning to support the arts, artisans and the creative economy. Many participants expressed support for encouraging more live/work housing as a benefit to artists, and for allowing more of these types of units to be designed.

Supporting arts uses with improved connections to transit and walkable areas was identified as a benefit. Attendees widely supported updating the zoning ordinance to allow shared parking. People pointed out this shared parking is especially important for performances and events, which may require large parking demand, but only on an intermittent basis.

The idea of creating an arts district was the area of most mixed feedback at the event. Some groups thought every village in Newton should become an “arts district”. Others thought that creating any sort of arts district would unfairly disadvantage other parts of the city. A few groups really liked the idea of an arts district and identified Union St. in Newton Centre, Waban Village, Auburn St. in Auburndale, West Newton and the entire Washington Street Corridor as potential areas.

Of particular interest to one group was the idea of a cultural district along the Washington Street Corridor, especially as it is in the initial visioning and planning phase and provides a strong opportunity to partner with development. One group asked, what would Washington Street look like if we let artists take over?



**Proposed Policy:
Tap into the Creative Economy**

Goal: Support arts, artisans, and creative economy

1. Encourage housing that may benefit creative economy: live-work
2. Update rules for home businesses
3. Create more affordable and middle-income units
4. Eliminate parking minimums & increase transportation options
5. Consider an arts & culture district



Community Feedback: Ideas to Encourage More Opportunities

One group discussed the need for an overall vision, process, and plan for managing, supporting and implementing the arts in Newton. Another group, also encouraged by the discussion, didn’t want to wait for the City to adopt plans, but instead wanted to get pilot projects going now to keep the momentum moving forward. One group suggested allowing “artist in residence” programs and partnerships with the City. Attendees wanted to see more temporary public art projects, which would allow for artists to create public art on rotating basis. Participants were concerned about the length of time for City processes and decisions and suggested an expedited special permit process. Groups wanted to find ways to strengthen collaborative relationships. Finally, one group talked about arts organizations banding together to act as developer to build the types of arts performance and studio spaces that were identified at the event.