



Summary Report

What's the Process? How Stuff Gets Built in Newton

This summary report is for the Zoning Redesign event on Thursday April 12, 2018 and the presentation slides and video of the presentation are available online (www.courbanize.com/newtonzoning). An informational sheet was published ahead of the event and is appended to this report.

Community Feedback: Tailor Process to Type of Request (A) + (B)

Proposed Policy: Tailor Process to Type of Request

Goal: Create, clear, predictable review process for projects of all sizes and scales

1. Allow small projects by-right with incorporation of form-based code requirements.
2. Incorporate Site Plan Review in by-right permits for large houses, for-profit schools, commercial ground floor uses, and comprehensive sign packages.

Proposed Policy: Tailor Process to Type of Request

Goal: Create, clear, predictable review process for projects of all sizes and scales

1. Planning Board to act as Special Permit Granting Authority for mid-range projects.
2. Continue City Council as decision maker on larger projects but formalize design review.
3. Provide guidance for community meetings

Staff facilitated small table discussions with attendees after the presentation. There were a range of opinions about the proposed policies to create clear, predictable review process for projects of all sizes and scales. Some attendees did not support any of the proposals, while others liked some of the proposed changes. Groups discussed different options for approval processes when zoning is made to better fit the existing built context. There were questions about where it is useful to have a more discretionary process, and where it is useful to have a less discretionary process.

Attendees pointed out trade-offs with different process options. Several people liked that by allowing small projects by-right (with incorporation of form-based code requirements), this process would mean a faster review for things like homeowners adding mudrooms. Others were skeptical that this process may

mean unelected City employees have more authority. Some attendees asked that decisions be made by people who are accountable to residents by holding elected office.

Many people were interested in how notification of abutters would differ among the process options and asked for this to remain part of the process for even small-scale projects like residential additions. Some asked about the roles of Area Councils in planning, local and citywide regulations. Others suggested that the process for notifying abutters also be tailored based on the size of the project.

Changing the Special Permit granting authority for mid-range projects to the Planning Board was one of the most discussed topics. Many people acknowledged that this is a significant change from the current process and expressed concern that an appointed body, not an elected body, would have this role. There were also some attendees who liked the idea and applauded the effort to separate decisions into categories, as long as there are clear standards defined up front. A few people suggested that it may not be a disadvantage to transfer small-scaled projects to the Planning Department, because is already giving a recommendation to City Council. Furthermore, the new context-based zoning requirements would create thresholds so small changes are within the existing context.

Many of the discussions pointed out the significance of where the thresholds for the small and medium-sized projects would lie. One group said that approval of 10-20 unit project by the Planning Board is a big project. Others asked about whether the process options are similar to other towns.

Community Feedback: Adopt Institutional Master Plans



Proposed Policy: Adopt Institutional Master Plans

Goal: Streamline process and provide holistic review of future development while providing long-term predictability for neighborhoods.

1. Require Planning Board approval for long-range master plans for large educational institutions.
2. Issue building permits for future projects consistent with the approved master plan.

There was less discussion about the proposed policy for adopting institutional master plans. The tables that did discuss mentioned that the public should have input into the Master Plan before it is approved. The same table also recommended the City change the college/institutional/golf course zoning from

residential to a category that is not developable, in part because of effects this has on assessing, City revenue, and 40B safe harbor status.

Community Feedback: Update Criteria for Approvals

Proposed Policy: Update Criteria for Approvals

Goal: Create clear process and criteria for Special Permit approvals, consistency rulings, and amendments.

1. Tailor criteria for approval to nature of request
2. Create thresholds for consistency rulings
3. Formalize process for consistency rulings
4. Include new criteria for Special Permit Amendments

Groups that discussed the proposed policy for updating criteria for approvals focused on the importance of defining the thresholds for consistency rulings. Attendees requested a formalized process for consistency rulings and that rulings be made easily accessible to the public. Staff provided clarification that the proposal would mean consistency rulings stay with Inspectional Services Department, but that the clarification would seek to give ISD more guidance. Examples consistency rulings were discussed: Wells Avenue bike rack wasn't in the original Special Permit and so was moved to a different location that was deemed consistent; River/Elm example of a request to amend a Special Permit that should come back to City Council; and examples of heat pumps and compressors allowed by consistency ruling in the set back.

Community Feedback: General Comments

As at previous meetings, there were discussions about 'McMansions' and tear downs. Many are bothered by tear downs and think this is wasteful; others commented it is disconcerting to have mish mash 'McMansions' rebuilt next to small houses. Others asked, if the market wants 'McMansions', shouldn't we have them? Staff suggested that zoning shouldn't seek to prohibit the expansion of homes in the case a family's needs change, but there is a flip side, that existing structures are getting replaced with very large scale homes with very little review under the current zoning.

Still others made the case for transit oriented smart growth so new buildings don't go where we already have open space. One attendee mentioned Bethesda, MD town center as a good example of single family homes close to three-story garden apartments and nearby five-story buildings. Discussion groups were

concerned that these questions really depend on where someone lives; for example, for residents near a village center in single family homes, a 12-unit building may not feel appropriate. Some people said they are worried that high density development will destroy village centers.

Some attendees had questions about the integration or difference between Zoning Redesign and the Washington Street vision planning process.

Some attendees asked about school impacts of development and who is responsible for estimates and analyses.

Attendees noted that more understanding is needed before giving feedback. The concepts and terms were hard to understand. People asked for less jargon in subsequent presentations. In addition, some attendees asked about the zoning map, which it was noted is forthcoming at the May 10, 2018 event.

What's Next?

The final event in the series will take place on May 10, 2018, "A New (Draft) Zoning Map for Newton".

What's the Process?

How Stuff gets Built in Newton

April 12th, 2018 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. at Newton Free Library, 330 Homer Street
www.courbanize.com/newtonzoning

Zoning identifies the process by which a new building, addition, or change of use is reviewed and a decision made.

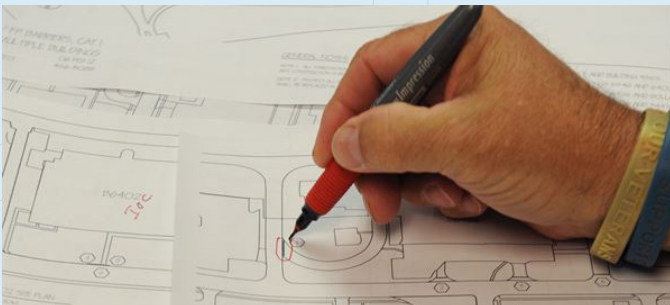
Residents and businesses want land use and development review processes that clearly identify the City's expectations, that lay out the steps to be followed and guide an applicant towards the desired outcome in the shortest amount of time possible. Property owners often say a quick no can be better than a long yes.

In many respects, the community at large wants the same thing. Neighbors want to understand what can or cannot be done on the property near them; in addition, neighbors want a meaningful opportunity to share their ideas and concerns.



Creating review processes that can address these interests is a challenge and requires that we think through a range of approaches more tailored to the different types of decisions the City must make.

Zoning Redesign offers an opportunity to provide clear regulations and procedures that result in predictable, efficient, and coordinated review processes.



Join us on April 12th as we discuss ways to tailor the process such as:

- Creating a **hierarchy of review and decision-making bodies** tailored to the nature of the request
- Incorporating **design review**
- Creating a **master plan process** for educational campuses
- Establishing a **clear process** and criteria for Special Permit amendments and consistency rulings