



Summary Report

Think Globally, Act Locally: Zoning for a Sustainable Newton

On September 27, 2017 the City of Newton kicked off a series of events for Zoning Redesign, the City's project to rewrite the Zoning Ordinance. Over 65 people attended "Think Globally, Act Locally: Zoning for a Sustainable Newton" at the Newton Free Library. In order to receive feedback and generate discussion about the proposals, the event format was a presentation from staff followed by facilitated group discussions involving everyone in attendance. Attendees were asked to give feedback on the zoning proposals and bring forward any new ideas that were not presented.

Zoning proposals on three aspects of environmental sustainability

Staff presented on three aspects of environmental sustainability that zoning could assist with achieving a healthier, more resilient environment: 1) stormwater management, 2) green design incentives, and 3) alternative energy. The full presentation is available to the public via slides and a video recording posted online (www.courbanize.com/newtonzoning). An informational sheet was published ahead of the event is also available online and is appended to this report.

Community Feedback: Stormwater

The image shows a blue informational sheet titled "Proposed Stormwater Policy". The text on the sheet includes a goal and four numbered points. To the right of the text are three photographs: a stormwater management structure with trees, a residential street with a tree, and a tree in a planter box with a metal grate cover.

Proposed Stormwater Policy

Goal: Direct applicants to appropriate stormwater management options to address the potential for flooding and water quality.

1. Triggered by an increase in impervious area.
2. Small projects directed to list of home-scaled best practices.
3. Large projects required to demonstrate no net increase in stormwater run-off and a percentage reduction in nutrients.
4. Maintenance of stormwater structures for future property owners.

Increasing the amount of **permeable surfaces** was one of the leading topics of discussion in the table sessions. Attendees were supportive of zoning that continued to regulate the amount of impervious surfaces allowable on lots. People were interested in finding ways through zoning to reduce the amount of paving and increase the permeability of sites. Community members suggested creative solutions such as requiring permeable materials to be used for new driveways or incentives for 'de-paving'.

Table discussions also discussed zoning that could **incentivize stormwater tools** such as underground cisterns for reusing stormwater onsite. Rainwater harvesting, recycling gray water, ground water recharge, and daylighting streams were among the more cutting edge stormwater tools proposed.

Ideas for **regulation** included rules to limit construction in wetland areas, zoning or building permit processes that trigger stormwater compliance and upgrade, regulation of retaining walls and **topographic** changes, sediment and erosion controls, and the ability for the City to impose stronger enforcement. Understanding how to best regulate stormwater runoff impacts between abutting properties was a concern. Staff received positive feedback about the fourth proposal - requiring future property owners to maintain existing stormwater management systems and enforcing this via a check at the time of sale.

Finally, although zoning does not typically address public land uses, table discussions generated several new proposals for **stormwater management on public land**. Attendees asked that the City set an example by creating standards for City property, implementing stormwater management when rebuilding streets, using permeable paving, and creating pervious surface parking lots and visible rain gardens at schools. City roles could include education programs about appropriate lawn watering and fertilizing, and improving coordination within City departments and permitting.

Community Feedback: Green Building



Proposed Green Bldg. Policy

Goal is to clarify environmental design goals and incentivize larger projects to do better.

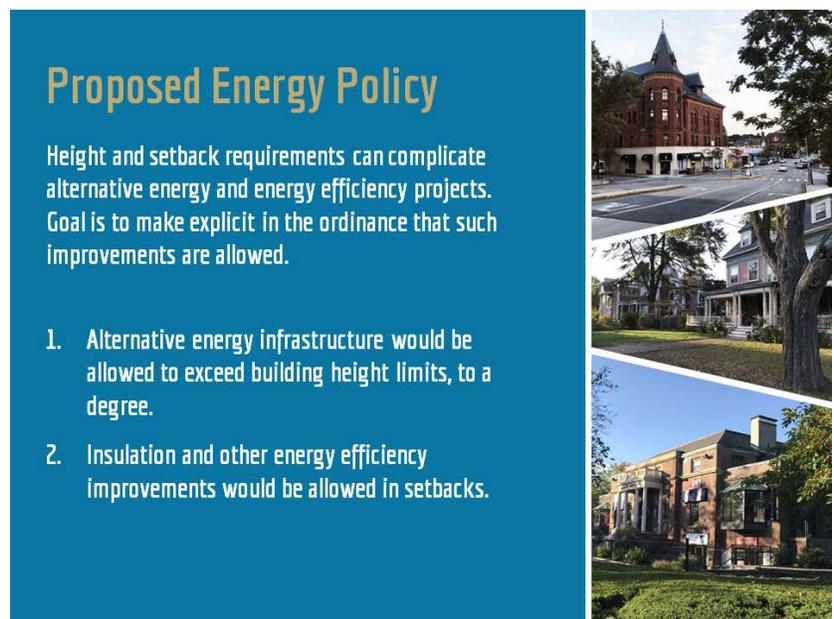
1. Large projects would be required to meet a standard of LEED certifiable or similar.
2. Specific point totals would be required for energy, ensuring a focus on this issue.
3. A density bonus would be provided to projects achieving a higher rating.

The proposals to incentivize ‘green’ building generated many supportive comments, especially requiring large projects to meet a standard of LEED certifiable or similar. One table proposed the minimum threshold for **LEED requirement be 20,000 square feet** with higher standards required for larger projects seeking zoning variances. Another table suggested extending LEED requirements to major renovations, change of use, and criteria for siting new construction. Participants noted how landscaping can provide sustainability benefits and suggested tree planting have canopy coverage requirements.

There was general support for the second policy proposal to require an energy focus within green building incentives. Attendees expressed interest in zoning incentives to **encourage net zero** or net positive buildings. There was support for mandating demolished buildings meet certain recycling requirements and incentives for salvaging building materials. One group came up with an idea for a Newton green building resource center.

There were differing opinions about the third proposal for **density bonus incentives**. Some pointed out that the greenest building is an existing building. People had remaining questions about the environmental tradeoffs for density bonuses including decreasing congestion with transit oriented development, infill development instead of green field development, and whether or not to incentivize environmentally-friendly buildings with density at all.

Community Feedback: Alternative Energy and Energy Efficiency



Proposed Energy Policy

Height and setback requirements can complicate alternative energy and energy efficiency projects. Goal is to make explicit in the ordinance that such improvements are allowed.

1. Alternative energy infrastructure would be allowed to exceed building height limits, to a degree.
2. Insulation and other energy efficiency improvements would be allowed in setbacks.

Attendees generally supported the proposals for alternative energy such as allowing **solar panels** and **exterior insulation within the setback** up to certain dimensional limits. Other ideas from the community included community solar, solar panels on carports and storage facilities, orientation of the building to maximize solar exposure, geothermal energy, energy retrofits of older homes, and questions about how to regulate solar rights and ensuring solar panels do not limit abutting properties ability to also do solar. A participant suggested Sterling, MA as an innovative example where the town has

invested in energy storage batteries to control rising power costs during peak demand hours¹. Finally, the community asked questions about regulation of parking requirements which will be discussed a full conversation about parking and zoning at the event on January 18.

Community Feedback: General

At the event, table discussions generated some general comments about open space, increasing and maintaining bike paths and rail trails, encouraging smaller houses and multifamily “cluster housing” with internal courtyards, the opportunity for environmental sustainability with proposed new developments at Northland on Needham St., and discussions around whether FAR is the best method for regulating density and massing.

The next event is **October 19, 2017, Newton’s Advantage: Zoning and Economic Development** and topics will include commercial uses, innovation manufacturing, makerspaces, and home businesses, co-working, and sign regulations.

¹ <https://www.cleangroup.org/sterling-massachusetts-changes-business-electricity-new-england-forever/>