



Summary Report

A Parking Lot for Goldilocks: Zoning for Just the Right Size

Transportation, parking and zoning were the topics of the fifth event in the Zoning Redesign event series held on Thursday January 18, 2018. Similar to past events in the series, staff presented background information on Newton current zoning ordinance. The presentation highlighted how the current zoning ordinance affects transportation planning via development review and parking requirements. Consequences of the current ordinance include less than optimal transportation planning, unwanted traffic and congestion, and high parking requirements. Staff presented four opportunity areas for improvement in the following proposals.

Community Feedback: Transportation Demand Management

A graphic with a blue background on the left and three photographs on the right. The text on the blue background reads: "Proposed Transportation Demand Management Policy", "Goal: Require new developments to reduce drive alone trips at peak times.", "1. Set a mode-split goal", and "2. Require developments to implement T.D.M. until they reach their mode-split goal". The photographs show a parking lot with cars, a yellow and blue transit vehicle, and a multi-story residential building.

Proposed Transportation Demand Management Policy
Goal: Require new developments to reduce drive alone trips at peak times.

1. Set a mode-split goal
2. Require developments to implement T.D.M. until they reach their mode-split goal

Group discussions demonstrated interest in using zoning to seek greater transportation benefits from developers, both at the time of construction and throughout the course of the building's operation over time. Working with larger employers and larger buildings were identified as good starting points for new zoning. Several tables discussed how transportation behaviors are changing meanwhile technology advances are allowing greater capabilities for transportation to be user friendly, responsive, and more sustainable. Among attendees there was a **range of opinions in how much non-driving options should be prioritized versus planning for driving among commercial and residential users.**

Newton's existing **connection to MBTA** transportation networks, while very advantageous, was mentioned as a necessary area for increasing service and reliability in order to make some of the

features of TDM work. At least one table talked about the “chicken or egg” conundrum of increasing transit ridership in order to increase transit service. Attendees want the City to continue to advocate to the state to invest more in transit and prioritize Newton routes. Increasing the gas tax was one state level policy. One person brought a map to the meeting indicating potential connection between the Commuter Rail and the Green Line, although it was noted this has already been studied and has many barriers to feasibility.

Shuttles were discussed among numerous tables. Connecting Newton locations better to MBTA rail stations and bus stops was a priority among attendees at the event. Groups expressed interest in joining forces with neighboring communities like Watertown and large employers in the region, like Trip Advisor who already has a shuttle service for employees. The shuttle service at Woodland Station that services Newton Wellesley Hospital was an example the one group said currently works great.

One table asked whether zoning for TDM would scare away potential employers to Newton. It was suggested that the **benefits to employers** be quantified and included in the conversation – increased employee health, productivity, happiness, as well as the reduced construction costs when less parking is required. When setting TDM goals, zoning should identify different goals in different areas of Newton. Zones should have **different requirements of parking based on proximity to transit**. One person noted that people can make choices as to where they live and work based on whether or not parking is included. One group wanted to see more future-oriented TDM proposals, such as autonomous shuttles and Newton might be a good location for that.

Community Feedback: Right Sized Parking Requirements

Right Sized Parking Requirements

Now: minimum parking requirement
Based on estimated maximum need
Results in large lots, inefficient 364 days of the year

Proposed: goldilocks parking with a maximum
Based in transportation goals, design goals, modern market needs
We're not worried about minimum parking - market still wants parking, developers are going to provide it

Attendees discussed the parking requirements in zoning and many were in favor of proposals to more accurately predict the amount of parking needs and reduce the likelihood that excess parking is built. Other people in attendance expressed concern about reducing the convenience of parking and questioned to what degree excess parking is truly detrimental. There was enthusiasm over what could be **gained from the space freed up from parking**. Those who were supportive of reducing or eliminating the parking minimum wanted to allow for more valuable community assets – commercial space,

housing, greenspace. Most participants agreed that it's okay to let the market play a larger role in determining parking needs.

Those who were skeptical of removing the parking minimum stated concerns about people circling looking for limited parking, and concerns about neighborhood streets being used for parking by people who are visiting or working at nearby businesses. **Convenience** in parking is a priority among many people. Several tables identified **flexibility is critical and neighborhood context should be considered when determining parking requirements**. At least one group was unclear as to the **benefits of maximum parking requirements** and where that would be relevant. Other had questions about the role of parking waivers. If parking requirements are reduced, one group wondered how to ensure that parkers are not parking in public lots and overwhelming them.

Other questions included making sure low income tenants were not negatively impacted by shared parking. They also had concerns over the impact on families, older adults, and other groups that likely need a car and wanted to make sure this didn't become a tax on them.

One table talked about **accessible spaces** and wanted to make sure the zoning and development review process includes a process to ensure siting in the proper locations especially when there are multiple tenants in the same building. The table also requested a similar review process for commercial loading to reduce double parking and to ensure loading spaces do not replace too many regular parking spaces.

Community Feedback: Optimize Parking Requirements

How do we make private parking lots available for more public or shared use? A majority of attendees were interested in finding new ways to answer this question. Even some attendees that were skeptical about other proposals from the evening saw the need to make better use of excess parking that sits empty and reduce the likelihood that more unused parking spaces be built in the future. Tables pointed out how optimizing the use of spaces that are already built would allow for space owners to gain revenue, people to park easier, and allow Newton to respond to changing retail behavior. People encouraged the City to be creative and make it easy to allow shared parking.



Proposed Parking Policy

Goal is to ensure convenient parking without excessive parking

1. Set parking maximums
2. Recalculate/remove parking minimums
3. Allow shared parking
4. Encourage zoning to reflect true costs

The graphic includes three images: a parking lot with several cars, a yellow van parked in a shared parking space, and a multi-story residential building.

One table wanted the **City to take the lead in developing parking scheme for village centers** – then develop zoning to accommodate the allowable space – anything beyond the zoning would need a special exception. In this plan, satellite parking lots should be encouraged and allowed to provide parking for both commuters and employees. District parking plans which allow employees to park on residential streets with permit should be experimented with.

Some people in favor of shared parking questioned how it would be **enforced**. If a church uses an app to allow others to park there, who will enforce someone else parking there without using the app or without paying? Another group asked if there would be available tax abatement if private owners allow public parking. Groups raised the question of **liability** over public parking on private lots – and staff explained that working with an app mediates this with a **group insurance policy**. One group supported a **hierarchy of parking** – some buildings will charge for covered parking but allow free surface parking.

Many attendees were supportive of **separating the residential rent from parking costs** saying this was very important for reflecting the true cost of building and maintaining parking.

The presentation sparked discussion about **public parking management**, although this falls outside the area of zoning. Suggestions from the table discussions included creating more spots that only allow short-term parking (15 minutes); a mix of length of parking – even as low as 5 minute parking; first 10 minute free parking at a meter to encourage short-term parking; ensuring enough long-term parking near T stops; more 12-hour spaces in residential areas as well; creating long-term spaces for employees (such as in Newton Centre); analyzing the need and feasibility for a parking garage over T in Newton Centre; and parking enforcement during Red Sox game nights.

Community Feedback: Site Design



Site Design Policy

Goal: Site design policies reinforce transportation options and sustainable design.

1. Include sidewalk & bike access in site design criteria
2. Enhance safety & sustainability in parking design standards
3. Direct developments to prepare for emerging technologies

Table discussions on site design resulted in some specific site design suggestions including making parking spaces smaller, increasing the number of spaces and **efficient design of sites**, incentivizing building of spaces for hybrid or electric vehicles as well as shared vehicles like Zip Cars, requirements for planting at least 1 tree for every 10 parking spaces and other landscaping requirements, ensuring

parking lots have safe pathways for pedestrians, and ways for zoning to incentivize permeable parking lot materials. Other considerations included limiting the width of driveways in order to limit unwanted increases in car ownership. Groups were supportive of **solar panels and stormwater treatment** on lots. Attendees also asked to see existing parking lots utilized for things like farmers markets, shuttle stops, and other uses. Consider underground parking whenever possible.

There was strong support for **improving bike and pedestrian infrastructure** and enhancing the public realm along corridors. There was also discussion of the need to create a culture around biking with local youth, but it was pointed out that the lack of safe infrastructure is an impediment. In order to add bike racks, one group suggested replacing one parking spot with a **bike rack in commercial corridors and village centers** like Needham Street and Newton Centre. Attendees want zoning site design to encourage electric bikes by encouraging **electric bike charging spaces**. One group suggested electric bike and car chargers in developments should be required by zoning.