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Barney S. Heath  
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**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** November 30, 2018

**TO:** Councilor Susan Albright, Chairman  
City Council

**FROM:** Barney Heath, Director of Planning & Development  
James Freas, Deputy Director of Planning & Development  
Rachel Nadkarni, Long Range Planner  
Lily Canan Reynolds, Community Engagement Manager

**RE:** **Committee of the Whole Meeting** on the Washington Street Vision Plan & Zoning Redesign – First Draft Zoning Ordinance

**MEETING:** December 6, 2018

**CC:** Planning and Development Board  
John Lojek, Commissioner of Inspectional Services  
Marie Lawlor and Jonah Temple, Law Department

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Throughout 2018 the Zoning and Planning Committee has been working closely with staff to advance the Washington Street Vision Plan and Zoning Redesign projects. On December 6, 2018 staff along with the consultant for the Washington Street Vision Plan, Russ Preston of the Principle Group, will present updates on these two projects to the entire City Council. Each presentation will include opportunities for dialogue and response to key questions.

**The Washington Street Vision Plan**

The Washington Street Vision Plan is a community planning process to envision the future of Washington Street including the villages of West Newton, Newtonville, and the areas leading up to Newton Corner. In late October 2018 the consultant team published the first draft of the Vision Plan and Zoning Toolkit for Washington Street. A month-long open comment period on this first draft is nearing conclusion. The project team is now turning to reviewing these comments and using them to inform the second draft vision plan and zoning recommendations.

In addition to providing an overview of the project so far, Russ Preston will present a draft Vision Map of the areas on Washington Street that are being considered for new zoning. This map will show the

heights being considered for future buildings here as well as the design principles that would be integrated into the zoning.

Staff and the consultant for Washington Street, the Principle Group, are seeking Councilor feedback and guidance on key decision points as the first draft options are refined to recommendations. Some of these questions include:

- Should new zoning for Washington Street require varied building sizes, heights, and roof types to provide a more authentic village-like and human scale experience?
- If taller buildings are allowed on Washington Street, is locating them adjacent to the Turnpike an appropriate place to reduce the impacts on the neighborhood?
- Because parking is the main factor that dictates the shape of buildings, how important is the width of future buildings, compared to the amount of parking spaces?
- There are two locations on either end of the proposed zoning boundary: the “West Newton Station” area to the west of the village center and “Crafts Street” area to the east of Newtonville. Are these the right locations for more transformational change in order to reintegrate them into the village context, to provide major improvements to the commuter rail stations, and to add some office space and commercial tax revenue for the city?
- Should new buildings also contribute new public open spaces such as parks and plazas?

There are additional questions and ideas that are listed in the first draft vision plan. The planning team welcomes questions or discussion on topics in the plan as well as those listed above.

### **Zoning Redesign – The First Draft Zoning Ordinance**

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Zoning Redesign is the second phase of the City’s zoning revision efforts that began in 2011, when the City Council issued the Zoning Reform Group Report. In the course of 2016-2018, the Planning Department, along with the consultant team from Sasaki, analyzed existing patterns of development across the city, and engaged the community at large around topics that the zoning ordinance could address. On October 22nd, 2018, the Planning Department delivered the first draft zoning ordinance and zoning map to the Zoning and Planning Committee.

October 22<sup>nd</sup> marked the beginning of the middle of the Zoning Redesign process – with a draft now on the table, the conversation shifts to discussion of the details of the draft ordinance – the specific outcomes sought, the mechanisms used, and finally the standards applied. The desired outcomes guiding the first draft are the 11 themes of the 2011 Zoning Reform Group Report, further informed by the input of the community from the past two years. The mechanisms are derived from best practices in zoning from around the country. Finally, the standards are taken from the database of Newton’s patterns of development. The challenging next step is to adjust the mechanisms and standards to meet the specific policy goals of the Council.

The meeting on December 6<sup>th</sup> is intended to be a starting point of the conversation. In the course of the presentation staff will provide an orientation to the first draft ordinance and introduction to key

ideas that will be discussed in the coming months, as we build toward a Second Draft, expected in May 2019.

The Zoning and Planning Committee will be discussing aspects of the first draft at most meetings for months to come. In addition to the committee discussions, these Committee of the Whole meetings are currently targeted to occur once a quarter. In February staff will be presenting a Build Out Analysis – a comparative build out analysis and tear-down vulnerability analysis, comparing the current ordinance to the first draft ordinance. We expect these analyses will provide a strong basis for adjusting the first draft standards.

There are many questions that could be discussed at length regarding the first draft ordinance, but since this December 6<sup>th</sup> meeting is an entry into the conversation, staff has a few key questions for the Committee of the Whole to start the discussion:

- What are the top priority issues that you see relative to the zoning ordinance?
- What questions are you hoping the build out analysis can answer?  
(we are still developing the methodology, feedback will inform that development)
- What topics are most important to you to have discussion on in the next committee of the whole meetings?