



Ruthanne Fuller,
Mayor

Barney Heath,
Director
Planning & Development

Members:

Mark Caggiano
Eliza Datta
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CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Newton Housing Partnership

August 19, 2019

Honorable Mayor Ruthanne Fuller
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Ave
Newton, MA 02459

Dear Honorable Mayor Fuller,

Let me thank you again on behalf of the entire Newton Housing Partnership for entrusting us with the important job of advising you and the City Council on efforts to expand affordable housing opportunities in Newton. As we continue our work to advance your commitment to be a city that is welcoming to all, we are pleased to submit comments on the Planning Department's draft Washington Street Vision Plan.

Your visionary leadership to engage a broad range of community stakeholders in the creation of a long-term vision for transit-oriented development along Washington Street has resulted in a creative and bold reimaging of the corridor as outlined in the draft Washington Street Vision Plan. Having reviewed the Vision Plan and attended many of the public meetings, the Partnership believes that it lays out a future for Washington Street with vibrant village centers, engaging open spaces, beneficial economic development opportunities, thoughtful transportation improvements, climate resiliency, and much needed new housing. We are particularly supportive of the specific opportunities outlined in the Vision Plan for housing that is diverse and affordable, especially as Newton's Housing prices continue to escalate while the need for housing that is inclusive and affordable to all in Newton is unprecedented.

The Partnership believes that the Vision Plan successfully addresses the comprehensive infrastructure changes and contextual design elements that are necessary to support successful housing development along the corridor at a scale and density that appropriately leverages the corridor's proximity to the Mass Pike and Commuter Rail. This thoughtful planning is particularly important because development at the scale proposed will contribute significantly to the City's affordable housing needs in climate-wise locations.

We commend the Zoning and Planning Committee and the Planning Department staff for their thoughtful work on the housing portions of the Vision Plan and appreciate the opportunity to suggest ways that plan's housing recommendations can be further strengthened as the City moves to adopt the Plan.

1. We support the goal to have a range of housing types that support a diverse population (e.g. families and seniors) and suggest that the resulting mix be based on a housing needs analysis to be completed after the 2020 census.

Preserving the Past



Planning for the Future



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2. The plan should include a preference for housing development that has a strong focus on providing housing for low and extremely low-income individuals and families, especially in projects where public land and buildings are involved.
3. To further enhance the City's age friendly goals, including accessibility requirements that support living and aging in community, we recommend that any age restricted or other special purpose/supported housing development along the corridor be required to have a sustainable services plan that is appropriate for the targeted population.
4. We endorse the importance of contextual design principles, while also supporting thoughtful design of larger and taller buildings that leverage the transit location, especially given the need for more affordable housing that scale helps to generate.
5. While we support communal living models, we feel it is important that housing types do not exclude larger units to house families.
6. We strongly support strategies that encourage and require affordable housing development along the corridor and recommend the following specific provisions in support of this goal:
 - a. The Vision Plan should include a strong statement supporting the use of the Armory for affordable housing, pending an analysis of the physical and financial viability of the project.
 - b. We strongly endorse the concept of city-supported affordable housing development, and suggest that "city-led" housing development is better described as "Leveraging public land and buildings along the corridor for affordable housing development".
 - c. City-owned land and buildings are an important resource to create more affordable housing, as the land can be more affordable and the City has greater control over re-use plans. As such, we recommend that the City survey all publicly held land and buildings along and near the corridor and create a plan to make them available for affordable housing development together with public funds to support 100% affordability.
 - d. The Vision Plan should provide for creative strategies for the development of a maximum number of affordable units on private sites, including density bonuses for exceeding Inclusionary requirements and investment of City funds in projects that create additional affordable units, especially those affordable to families and individuals at or below 50% of the area median income.
 - e. Planning Department staff should do an analysis of the impact of/opportunity for TOD specific financing programs (e.g. DOT/MBTA/MHIC programs), including incentives to use these programs. This could allow the City to achieve affordability in excess of the 20% inclusionary requirement.
 - f. During the future rezoning process, we encourage the creation of parking standards based on market demand, including revised parking standards that reduce single-driver trips and reduce climate impacts.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Partnership, thank you again for your leadership on the reimaging of Washington Street. The Partnership looks forward to continued involvement in the Vision Plan process as well as the subsequent process to adopt zoning changes that will

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support implementation of the Plan. We also stand ready to help in any way we can to implement the ideas for expanded affordable housing development we have outlined here.

Sincerely,

Lizbeth Heyer
Acting Chair, Newton Housing Partnership

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Mayor

Barney Heath,
Director
Planning & Development

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