

Project Summary

The City of Newton Planning & Development Department held a series of 12 focus groups between May and September 2021 as part of the overall engagement and outreach for the [Zoning Redesign: Village Centers project](#). This phase of the ongoing Zoning Redesign project focusing on village centers began by asking Newton community members to share their experiences of and their future visions for their village centers. The input gathered will help the City of Newton identify areas of research for how to update the zoning for village centers.

Eight focus groups were identified to further equitable engagement in an effort to facilitate outreach with groups of the Newton community that have been underrepresented in our past engagement efforts. When possible, these sessions were co-facilitated with the appropriate Newton board or commission, like the Commission on Disability, Youth Commission, Council on Aging, the Human Rights Commission, and the Newton Housing Authority. Four focus groups were identified for the village center economic development communities, which were co-facilitated by the Newton Economic Development Commission and our consultant, Utile.

Introduction

City staff and the Newton Council on Aging held the Older Adults focus group on September 9, 2021. 70 people expressed interest in participating through the Focus Group Interest Form. In total this focus group had:

- 52 focus group participants

These sessions were not recorded in order for participants to feel comfortable and speak freely. What follows below are the “raw” notes compiled by the focus group notetakers and co-facilitators.

Demographics

In Newton, Older Adults aged 65 and above represent 18% of the total population according to the 2019 ACS 5-year estimate.¹

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<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=1600000US2545560&tid=ACST5Y2019.S0101&hidePreview=true> (2020 Census Data not yet available for this dataset.)

Focus Group Notes

Q1: What values do you want to see present in the planning of Newton's village centers?

- They should be places to meet, gather, and do things together.
- Focus more on sustainability and green space.
- I value historic preservation- centers that still have anchors that feel like true villages are the ones that attract me.
- West Newton and Newton Highlands and Waban have historic buildings that have evolved over time but still have character. Newton Corner doesn't feel like a village center at all. A mix of old and new should be valued.
- Newton Center used to have a wide variety of stores and I went often to do all kinds of activities. Now it is just banks. Why does any village need so many banks and nail salons? There is nothing to do, it isn't family friendly. That has changed during the pandemic because people use the picnic tables in the parking lot, but it is still not lively or family friendly for the most part.
- I value family-friendly and cultural attractions. Newton Center is focused around a parking lot, which is embarrassing. Some plan must be made to use that space for cultural activities.
- Newton lacks culture. We need something vibrant and alive.
- Auburndale Center isn't as nice as Newton Center. We should value inclusivity- Auburndale would benefit from more people there. There are empty parking lots that could be housing. Many buildings here are not historically worth preserving, so they could be different housing to allow for more people. It would make the place more interesting and help local stores. Being more dense would help support car-free transportation as well.
- I do not want to see the villages turn into areas of great congestion, which I think will happen if we put a lot of multi-family houses there. I think the character of the city is changing sadly enough with current developments. For example, the new library mirrored city hall and fit the architecture and the fit of the city. But some of the condos, particularly down in Newtonville, it's like downtown Boston. And I don't want to head in that direction.
- In order for Newton to remain a viable city, it needs an availability of housing options. I live in West Newton village center and see that place in dire need of help. I think having more housing there will actually be very helpful.
- I'd like to see the city centers be more walkable, with more traffic calming. Have had many bad encounters with drivers in intersections in West Newton, just going through stop signs & red lights. Would like to see village centers that are more like Newton Center, more walkable, more life, and attracting people. I think part of that is making more housing available- don't think we need to become Boston, but don't see any harm in having more density in village centers.
- It's unfortunate that 20% of the houses are selling for over 2 million dollars. If we want any younger families moving here, we need more options. Like a variety of 2-3 unit buildings. I see that as vital to village centers.

- Accessibility is extremely important on all different scales - to be very available, walkable. Not like our current commuter rail station, like in Newtonville.
- I also think having stores that are vibrant, functioning - not having empty storefronts- is really important. I think it's a real challenge - because of pressures - two terrific restaurants in Newtonville closed because of COVID. So having a variety of stores that can meet individuals' needs, having them be walkable
- I live along the Washington St corridor - feeling is that Newtonville, West Newton, believe me, we will have and get our share of new housing. But I want more equity across the city in terms of villages embracing housing. Everyone can share in this and shouldn't all be put in Newtonville or West Newton. Will we have some new housing? Absolutely, but I want equity across the city.
- Accessibility is an issue - have spoken alot with Jini Fairley and she points out it's really hard to get fully accessible housing without getting buildings that are big enough to have an elevator. But if we build multi-families where each flat is one floor instead of townhouses, maybe that could work.
- How do we get these vibrant combinations of stores back into village centers in an era when take out and delivery and online shopping has been reinforced because of the pandemic? We can't zone for 'locally owned businesses' only - but maybe zoning can help in some way to encourage that.
- A lot of people who were worried about businesses creeping out are now worried about losing the businesses.
- The few one-story houses that exist in Newton are getting torn down and replaced with giant houses. So that's a concern. And walkability is an important one from that point of view - we're trying to think ahead for when we can't walk that far and can't do those stairs.
- I don't mind higher rise apartment buildings - I wish more of them were condos. I don't understand why they're just building rental housing.
- I would like different kinds of stores in different villages - so that every village has a drug store and a grocery store.
- Want housing increases extended to all of the village centers. West Newton is a big concern for me as well.
- Size of the buildings. Against having 5 and 8 and 10 story buildings in our village centers. It seems that every developer who comes around says he has to have a 5 story building because he can't afford to do it if he doesn't have it.
- Question of diversity is one that gets talked about - there are obstacles to diversity that never get discussed, and one is that I don't know who the buildings are for - I think we've had a program in Newton that has worked very well over the years, building apartments for people at the lower income scale, and I very much support that.
- Newton is an example of what happens when you have for profit developers coming in, they're interested in making money, they're not interested in providing housing or helping poor people or diversity or anything else. I look at the building on Washington Street, it reminds me of Fall River. I think that the building looks like an old industrial building or mill building. I see that the siding is all synthetic, and I wonder how long of a life that has. I probably will be here to look at it. But even so, it's a concern - and I look at the roof of a

parking lot. They used to hide those things and make sure it looks nice. Whereas today's developers, I don't think they care about how things look.

- I want more affordable places to rent for small / locally owned businesses.
- Also concerned about the health issues that arise in Newtonville -there is an infestation of rats. I saw one run up my driveway a few weeks ago - and that's from all of the construction going on.
- Thoughts about diversity and vibrancy are good thoughts and desirable objectives - but I think the path we're taking defeats the good intention.
- Diversity of businesses - I would like to see fewer banks filling the empty storefronts. Could use people-friendly rather than money-friendly institutions in some of those spaces.
- Lovely historic aspects to the Newton villages surrounding them - although I'm in favor of development, I'm also very much appreciative and want to make sure the historic neighborhoods get preserved. I don't have a problem with converting a historic building into a 2-3 condo building. But I want to preserve architecture.
- Idea of small businesses - the landlord wants a bank because they'll be able to pay the rent. If they do that, the landlord should put aside money for smaller businesses who are less likely to develop. Sort of like what they did with the inclusionary zoning ordinance. Maybe on the commercial side, they could come up with some sort of plan like this?
- If you add multi-family homes, people will not be able to walk around. So we have to be cautious about overdoing some of this.
- Green space & greenery - we're thrilled in Newtonville to have some new trees right along Walnut St. But the problem with heat islands - in Newton Corner in particular - is pretty significant. So we need to value green space so that we don't end up developing every space we have.
- Newton Corner doesn't have an adequate village center. There is little that ties the two sides together. Doesn't feel cohesive like other village centers.
- Would like to see the integrity of house lots/living areas for people maintained. Alarmed by the number of build-out projects that are adding on to nice old homes and pushing to the limit. Maintain integrity for both full demos and additions.
- Lower Falls is not really a commercial center. Think of Hamilton field as a village center. Think about village centers as more than a commercial center.
- Concerned about how Riverside development will affect the Lower Falls community.
- Communal gathering spaces are important.
- Auburndale has a volunteer-run community library. Auburndale has an underutilized municipal parking lot that could be a place for multifamily housing.
- For older people, being within walking distance of shopping is a great idea.
- There's an ugly fence walling off Auburndale from mass pike.
- Auburn Street, main center for shops, and some shops have ramps and some have stairs. Ramp entrances should be standard.
- Disability access is incredibly important. Ramps, door push buttons, etc.
- NewMo is a wonderful service but not entirely reliable. Has seen improvements in recent months.

- Access to transit is important for those with certain disabilities. There are people with disabilities who relied on the express bus to Boston who are now in a bind.
- Shuttles could be useful to get in between villages.
- Would love to see the book mobile back for seniors.
- Transportation and housing in village centers is critical.
- Village centers would be a great place for 55+ deed restricted housing. This could be a requirement of special permits that a % of housing be 55+ deed restricted.
- City has to be proactive in generating development options through the Newton Housing Partnership. Use CPA, developer linkage fees, and land value capture to fund development.
- The rezoning process has been very upsetting. Don't understand where the impetus has come from saying we have to rezone and we have to build more housing. We don't have to do anything. We worked and put off having kids and saved money to buy our first house here. I worked hard to live here and why are people telling me that I'm elitist to live in my home and that I shouldn't live here. People are saying I shouldn't have this much space. I moved here to have space. I resent the whole thing.
- The thrust of rezoning is to give people more options, not tell someone that they shouldn't have a single family home or big yard.
- Think about rezoning as making villages more fun and inclusive.
- Would like to see more projects available to artists to display their work- in all the banks, in the storefronts.
- Pianos in the parks are wonderful.
- In Cambridge when there's construction, local artists post their work on the construction fences.
- I understand the impetus of rezoning but it's been divisive. Vision kits were not the best way to engage people. Was a waste of time and cost a lot of money.
- Don't see a lot of revitalizing village centers in what the city approves. Lots of high density housing that makes people unhappy. Don't see a vision for what we want Newton to be a leader in. There are a lot of ways to make affordable housing and support local business and the same kind of development is not always the answer. I like old houses and different architecture in different villages. Neighborhoods have a sense of community that has been established over time and how do you maintain that with the influx of new housing?
- Grew up in a garden apartment complex in NYC that was the best of both worlds, not urban or suburban.
- Afraid we're going to lose the reputation that Newton has for a fabulous school system.
- I want to see the city and elected officials deal with facts and reality. Lots of discussion of 'solving' problems- these are broad philosophical problems that can't be solved. In reality, look at cases where developers buy a home, tear it down, put up a multi-family home, and sell the units for millions of dollars. I do not feel it does anything for affordable housing.
- Heavy dose of respect for people who have lived in these neighborhoods for decades.
- Drafts of reports have talked about taking down single family homes to put in multi-family homes, civic centers, etc.

- Apartments that are currently going up in some city centers are far too expensive. They are not affordable and it is impossible to live here. City needs to build affordable housing/affordable apartments. These rents are not welcoming.
- Would like to hear what other 'groups' of people are saying. Focus groups are 'too grouped.' Do not feel the focus groups are representative enough of the 'bulk of Newton.' There have been very dominant progressive groups in past meetings and some community members have been uncomfortable.
- It seems there is a predetermined path that zoning will be taking.
- There may be unintended consequences in taking this path with density and upzoning.
- We need a lot more respect for realism. Crucial case for the Washington Street Corridor. Development is going up next to the Masonic Hall and there is not a zoning plan, just a vision plan. A large five story building should not be going up next to the Masonic Hall, it doesn't respect the building.
- Newtonville is not transit oriented. Trains run so infrequently that it seems unlikely that residents will use the trains. The Green Line is far more transit oriented.
- Residents need to be respected and welcomed.
- Rents and taxes have increased significantly.
- Don't like the stress on identity politics. Interactive survey was not good.
- It is great that the planning department has decided to approach changes in zoning and village centers based on the core values we hold.
- During the village walkaround, not a lot of values were seen. No people of color, no people of disabilities, no 2-family houses (only single-family houses), not a lot of young people with children. All of these are the opposite of what I value in the Village Center. I need a Village Center where I can walk and don't have to rely on driving. A Village Center that is reflective of Massachusetts in general. There were three apartment buildings at the walkaround which is great, but we also need 2 and 3-family homes to easily downsize in the future.
- Safe access
- Parking lots converted to outdoor patio spaces
- Would like to see Newton revise zoning districts to allow for conversion of single-family houses to 2-family houses. There was discussion about accessory apartments. The current size requirements for accessory apartments are not acceptable, they are very small. It also needs to be attached, which is not good. It needs to be revised, it is very restrictive and not very usable.
- Safety and accessibility
- Community space where people are invited to come and sit down. Sitting areas are not very comfortable to relax for a couple of hours, or read a book.
- Don't use materials that are just nice looking, they should be comfortable (no cobblestone). Make sure access and exit ways are flat.
- There is a co-op in Jamaica Plain which is a great model. 10-15 families in the co-op. There are single older adults, some young small families, racially diverse, affordable, people exercising together, it's an alternative lifestyle.
- Currently village centers look like strip malls. They should look like villages, with more flowers.

- Seating on sidewalks should face inwards, not outwards towards the traffic.
- There should be historical signs in each village with a rationale for the name- with the tribe name and original owners of each village.
- It will be nice to see younger and older people communicate. Encourage intergenerational activities. Cabot Woods is an example of where it could be done. When schools were redesigned, they were said to be community centers but that's not the case. It will be good if NewCal can be used for intergenerational activities in the future.
- Village centers should be distributed throughout the city. As someone who lives on the south side of the city, they don't really think we have a village center. I miss having a local village center and I always have to drive. I would love to be able to walk somewhere to do my errands and/or go out.
- There is a potential to move past a village center being solely a commercial center (I don't consider Needham St or Chestnut Hill actual village centers). Village centers should be more than just businesses.
- Village centers are places to gather – civically, socially, economically, etc.
- Spaces for people of all ages, multigenerational. Thinking back to the south side of the city, you could create a village center near the high school to ensure a diversity of users.
- Newton village centers need to be viewed not only within the context of Newton, but also within the context of the region. If we place our village centers into the context of the regional needs, then the village centers are the places to address the many and various regional issues we have (housing, climate change, traffic/transportation, etc.)
- Civic and cultural opportunities are necessary to improve the quality of life in Newton.

**Q2: Where do you already see these values happening in Newton's village centers?
Please provide specific examples (and specific village centers)**

- Auburndale was ravaged by the Mass Pike. There are many Victorian homes that have become two families over time. But now some are also becoming four families. They are looking to make as much money in rent as they can get. Low income people are not moving into these places.
- The traffic is very bad- we can't add more housing, it will make it all worse.
- Auburndale Cove looks very sad. Why isn't funding going to make this look better? The facilities are terrible. There is litter there.
- Newton should upgrade and restore facilities it has, not always focus on building new ones.
- The old community buildings that used to be good places to come together are not being maintained.
- Waban + Newton Highlands are on a T stop, which helps bring people in, and they have libraries and things to do. Could use more recreational activities, walking trails, and events.
- Many village centers used to be defined by churches and houses of worship. But many now have more capacity, and fewer people going to church, and the city should work with them strategically about how to use those spaces.

- The plaza next to Austin Street is a great neighborhood gathering space- it works well, and I wish Newton Center could have that kind of plaza and green space instead of the parking lot. Parking lot could go underground.
- Why was the library parking lot redone to have better drainage? It failed, it is flooding!
- City office building in Newton Center should be used for classes or events, not as city offices.
- In Oak Hill Park, we have nothing- even less than Auburndale. The former Schechter School could be used as community space, or housing. It is the only playground in the area, and that should remain open to the public.
- All of the small buildings in Oak Hill are being knocked down and replaced with McMansions, and the Schechter School shouldn't become more McMansions.
- Having a mix of different activities- classes, movies, shows, shopping, dining- is better than having just one type of store.
- Austin Street is a good example, with parking underneath and ground floor retail.
- The Lower Falls community center is an example of central community space.
- Auburndale library.
- Lincoln Street multifamily conversions. Also examples in Auburndale.
- There is a problem with voting- only a minority of people in neighborhoods are actually voting.
- A large proportion of the workforce and jobs are in healthcare, education, science, etc. I like that it's more of a cultural, artistic, and scientific city.
- I like the nineteenth century architecture and open spaces
- I don't like the electrographic signage for the marijuana dispensaries.
- There is too much commercialization.
- I don't like the term "values."
- Don't like NewCal.
- Like community centers where people can engage in zoning and planning at a local level.
- Newtonville is close- it has wider sidewalks, tables and chairs are good. Patio spaces are good. Parking lot turned into a plaza area and housing is a good example (28 Austin Street and Bram Way plaza). It is a good model for other communities as well. Newtonville has been good about building housing.
- Price of homes in Newtonville has increased due to all the new housing.
- Newtonville Village Center from Pike to High School is human-scale. The proposed 5-story building is out of scale and will change Newtonville. That property is zoned for 3 stories (CVS site). Very concerned about 5-story buildings, we should maintain human scale.
- Emphasize that we don't want any more boxes, they have no character. Don't want to see the community with 5, 6 or 17 story apartment buildings.
- Newtonville has been recently developed to have new outdoor spaces for meeting people.
- Think regionally-, we should look to Watertown which has taken a very different path to allowing development and Watertown is able to afford to pay for school and transportation investments without having to do budget overrides.

- A great example is Newberry Street in Boston. It is a great human scale. It has good design and functions well with providing ground floor amenities and upper floor businesses and residential.
- In some cases, "what was sounds like it is better than what is." Need more places for people to get daily needs served

Q3: If there was no budget, no law of physics - what would your dream Newton village center look and feel like? (This could mean preserving things that already exist, bringing things back from the past, or having something there that doesn't exist right now)

- All village centers should have a good playground, public bathrooms, dog parks, open space, and there should be a limit on a particular type of store in one area. Limit the number of banks so you can have a good mix of uses.
- Better publicity for events- big events should be plastered all over town, and it should be more creative.
- More buildings like the masonic building in Newtonville- a denser center, but with more shops, playgrounds, and stuff going on. There are too many 1 and 2 story buildings for many village centers to have a real village feel.
- There should always be public transit options.
- There should be a bus that makes a loop through all of the village centers.
- I hate driving more and more as I get older, and having better public transport would be better.
- In Newton Center- replace the parking lot with a tall building with senior housing, an arthouse movie theater, dining, underground parking, and an indoor greenhouse.
- Allow for options for intergenerational living and interaction - things like Lasell Village.
- More exciting programming in open space - for example, ranger led tours of Webster Woods.
- This whole issue came up in the Washington Street vision - dealing with the Mass Pike. One of the ideas is building over the pike - particularly for Newtonville and West Newton, though I don't know how to deal with Newton Corner. Building over it and, which would be counterintuitive, but to create more open green space so that you're really connecting the two parts. I think it's a fantastic idea and totally unfeasible.
- Walking bridges across the mass pike - but would be really really hard to pull off.
- Wondering if something could be done around the sound problem near the Pike, because it's so noisy. Especially in West Newton and Newton Corner. There's a lot of traffic coming in and out, and it's hard to attract businesses if it's an unpleasant place to be. If we could deal with things that are difficult to deter people - like the sound, like the heat islands, make it really nice, that would help. There are nice parks in Newton Corner, but who really wants to hang out there?
- Have appreciated the work done on Newtonville for the streets.
- Just so grateful to live in Newton, where I want to be careful to not ask too much. I feel like I get so much, and it's good for me to learn how to be more flexible in certain ways, because we can't have all the things we want. So I've been hanging out at 28 Austin St

plaza. Even driving by there is a nice feeling. I don't go there often enough to be bothered by the noise.

- I too have thought about parks over the pike - but I'm wary of that, because I'm thinking about a little bit for everybody. Driving into West Newton, it's nice to have a bike lane. I'm a car guy and I'm not going to give up my car, but I don't like having more traffic and congestion already. And I'm trying to imagine more parks...
- In general, I'm more focused on the Senior Center - and what I can influence there. Given that I have a good amount of professional experience working with older adults and senior centers - and as I am a senior, more and more everyday - I am aging in place in my home in Newtonville - and I look forward to being involved with the center as it develops. Again, I continue to be very grateful to be living in Newton.
- Really worried that rents are going to be higher for commercial buildings and so afraid we're going to lose some unique things. I can't imagine that the West Newton cinema will be able to afford the new rents imposed in that building. So I do think that there will be major chains moving in. I do think one thing we have in most of the villages are unique stores - I'm very afraid that they will all disappear.
- Turnpike covering - came up with a plan to do that in the 90s. And as I recall, the plan involved 5 and 7 story, or 10 story buildings. And it turns out that it was mostly wonderful buildings that they were going to put up for wonderful people and wonderful businesses - but there was very little green space. I get concerned when people start talking about building over the pike - because what I saw from the last plan was a wall that divided the city. A wall of high rise or mid-rise buildings. And I'd like to keep Newton the way it is. Having a lot of little village centers and not a big downtown is unique and I would support programs that try to keep that concept.
- On West Newton - they've tried changing the traffic pattern multiple times. But I want you to know that the new version is wonderful - just like the version that was there in 1962. So I'm not sure what will happen, those white lines will be gone by next year- they put in an island and have already figured out that it's too low so they have a cone on top of it. So I just think that the Planning Department sometimes doesn't give consideration to what happened in the past. They just want to make some changes because they think change is good.
- I don't go shopping to meet people, I go shopping to buy food. Going somewhere to walk comfortably is what I'm looking for - I have no interest in living in Allston or Brighton or those communities that have a lot of apartment buildings.
- Allan House on Weston St - I think there is a sense of community that develops around that sort of thing. I don't think it develops around the villages - I can't tell where the villages begin or end - but I think there's more of a sense of community around that area (Webster St) partly because that's a draw. And it's an interesting model. You need something to draw people in - I run into neighbors there. That gives me a sense of community. There are a couple little shops like that - Paper Mouse - but you need to have a draw. Maybe there are some new developments in Newtonville where people are hanging out and that's a bit of a draw. But Allan House - the concerts are wonderful. That's a great model.

- I've been here for 14 years. Something that helped me be a part of Newton were the community plans.
- I worked a lot in history and Newton history - what we've done since WWII is widen the streets, round out the corners, speed up things for cars - and pushed back the villages that were there before. It would be a good idea to let what was there before come back. Beware of the immediate fad. So having a variety of developments is a way of hedging our bets against the fad. Would love places where people get groceries, people live in buildings with elevators and are not limited just to cars - and use public transit or Lyft. We've always managed with one car but I would be happy to get along with zero cars.
- I think there are others in Newton who are getting older who would be happier to share buildings like that in the village centers.
- As I get older, I find it more difficult to go out for a walk. So I need to drive another car.
- That project - Allan House - is a beautiful historic renovation. Shows the value of historic renovation, plus it has green space around it, it's a fabulous spot. But one thing to think about - for me, having kids who have grown up - schools were a really key part, a central part of our community. I worked for over 30 years in Boston, so that was my professional life. But schools are really important. If we think about some of the village centers - we have schools and they're an important part of the village. For us, the high school in Newton Corner is a great facility. So one of the issues - how do we embrace the kids, the teens, who go to Newton north? You'll hear people complain about the kids, which I don't think is productive.
- I would like to see each of the villages have a similar mix of housing availability - and diversity, not just racially and ethnically and economically, but also age-wise. And I would like to see fewer banks. And see a grocery store and drug store in every village. And a park of some kind in every village. And a cafe.
- Have people enjoyed outdoor restaurants?
 - Yes
 - Yes - I think it should last forever
 - One thing we talked about on a village center tour - creating outdoor 'cafeterias' - so people could eat from all of the restaurants, a shared space to sit and eat
- Would like to see a grocery store and a café in Newton Corner. Beautiful old children's library in Farlow park is in need of restoration and would love to see it as a community center.
- Expanding and renovating the Lower Falls community center.
- Improved recreation facilities for all Newton Residents like what was built in Wellesley so you don't have to pay exorbitant gym fees.
- Parks need attention.
- Put money towards open space and green space instead of being swallowed up by new housing developments. Seniors don't necessarily want to move to these buildings, they want to age in place.
- Conversions to multifamily housing like Lincoln Street Victorians (has also happened in Auburndale). Have seen a number of large old single family homes converted to two and three units and they fit right in the neighborhood.

- I had plans to sell an old Victorian single family home but we were able to convert into a second unit for our grown son.
- What is the old library building in Newton Centre being used for now? Nobody knows anything about it.
- Hut building at Mason Rice is an ideal building for community uses and is rotting in place.
- Get rid of Trio on Washington St.
- Up-scale restaurants are not welcoming. People don't want to spend \$25 on pizza.
- Want village centers to be clean. Village centers near high schools get trashed at lunch time. There needs to be more partnership with the city and schools to keep village centers clean in the spring and fall and free of snow in the winter. Other cities do much better at clearing snow and keeping streets clean.
- Walkable village centers, more stores, more restaurant options.
- There had been a lot of discussion about what would go into the old Peet's location. There are too many banks in that area now.
- Walkable, clean, and clear streets and sidewalks.
- Need to encourage more diversity in what businesses come in.
- I like the idea of preserving the kind of style that Newton has and a quiet, slower approach to modernization. Some feel in the dark about what zoning is.
- View the village centers as a destination. Things to do, appointments to attend, etc. We're not going to get the traffic we want if we don't address parking issues in the village centers. Can't make village centers vibrant without addressing this issue first.
- Would like for the city to expand the Senior Center by purchasing the building/church next door/across the street. Need more rat control at the senior center.
- Would like to see more charging stations for folks with electric cars. Glad that the city is electrifying its own fleet and would like to see the city offer incentives for individuals.
- Would like a bagel and a bookstore.
- Newton Highlands needs a serious redo. Undergrounding utilities and cables, and all the things available now in Newtonville.
- Change zoning to disincentive tear downs and incentivize reusing and rehabbing.
- Tree ordinance is toothless and does not extend into all trees in the city. Property owners just tear down all the trees when they tear down buildings.
- Lots of businesses, only 2 banks, lots of places with tables outside, not just for cafeterias but also for art etc., and second story housing.
- Mixed-use, a street with no traffic, like a mall where you could walk with cars in the back area.
- Connection to public transportation is important.
- It would look like a village in England.
- Human scale, it only takes a few 4-5 story buildings to create a canyon effect.
- Maybe a pedestrian mall on side streets but not on the main street because of traffic patterns. If there's no parking, then businesses can't survive.
- Gigantic mansions are not human scale and not good for neighborhood character, and they need to be addressed.
- We are fortunate to have T going through Newton, but it is not accessible.

- 2 and 3 family dwellings – close to T stations.
- Zoning code is promoting flat roofed buildings, it is changing the character of the city and needs to be addressed.
- Access to commuter rail needs to be addressed. Why don't we have an elevator shaft? Ridership on express buses is higher because it is more convenient. Commuter rail is good if it meets your schedule, and you can take the stairs.
- When it comes to West Newton I would redirect the traffic, which is terrible.
- Green space, particularly that allows for socializing.
- Upgrade the movie theater in West Newton.
- You need to have adequate parking, even though I want village centers to be walkable. Particularly for seniors who are not going to hop on a bicycle.
- But also, seniors won't be driving either, so we need things like NewMo...but bigger and broader. Not just transportation within Newton but also to other places in the region.
- NewMo and other transit services should be expanded.
- Spaces for nightlife. Families are constrained by children, but seniors are not and "we don't all want to eat dinner at 5:30 and go to bed at 8pm."
- If we do push for nightlife, our village centers will become hubs bringing in people who live outside of Newton.
- Village centers are more suited to apartments and more housing than allowing more multi-family housing on residential streets in the neighborhoods.
- New traffic pattern in Waban to make the crossing of Beacon Street easier.
- Large parking lot behind Waban Square should be developed as something (community space, housing, etc.)
- I would love to see a movie theater in each village.

Q4: How can the city better engage older adults of Newton?

- The senior center does a good job getting word out and offering programs.
- Mayor's newsletter, sandwich boards.
- Make a once a month flier that goes to everyone in Newton focusing just on events.
- Older citizens have been here a long time and have invested in Newton. Doing things that older citizens don't want or may jeopardize them financially is not a good idea. Hard to get people engaged unless it affects their next door but the city has to do better.
- There should be a scientific survey that questions every adult living in Newton that questions and floats some of the ideas represented here.
- Should have this kind of focus meeting in the early evenings rather than the early afternoons. This meeting is missing a huge number of seniors who are missing.
- Don't like the idea of being grouped as a senior. Would like a broader group like this to understand more of what other people think. Too few people in this group.
- It is so important to bring all the groups together. This group should not just be older adults because crosstalk between different groups of people is important.
- Wish that when seniors called City Hall, people would call back.
- It's wrong to assume that people who cannot attend meetings don't care. Hopeful for a general consensus.

September 9, 2021
Older Adults (65+)

Zoning Redesign: Village Centers Focus Group Summary Report

- Caution anyone in the city when using Zoom. Easier for folks to talk to each other in person. Zoom is not the greatest. Would prefer to do this in a real way.
- A regular community meeting, maybe biweekly. Sometimes Zoom meetings or maybe at Village Centers to engage pedestrians in conversations. Some other participants said Zoom is better due to social distancing and convenience too.
- Open office-hours
- Engage with Area Councils
- Polling tool was not a good outreach tool. There should be a well-constructed scientific poll.
- Public hearings through ZAP don't happen much, it's a very insular process.
- Not many people engaged in Vision Kits, maybe around 300-500 out of 85,000 population, which is not enough.
- Regular emails are good
- Councilor Emily Norton holds a meeting every month, which is helpful to get updates. Other Councilors could do something similar.
- I do go to the Senior Center, but I don't talk about Citywide issues there.
- The Senior Center and the Mayor's newsletter are great resources.
- I wish we had a worthwhile local paper. The TAB is not good anymore.
- Shovel the sidewalks in the winter. Because they often aren't.
- Sidewalks as well - repair the sidewalks.
- Not just the 1 new building - but multiple programs that are more spread out around the city.

Next Steps

The community findings from these focus groups will be compiled with the other forms of village center engagement and quantitative analyses to establish synthesized community desired outcomes to assist the City Council in determining policy. If you have any questions on this report, please email zoningredesign@newtonma.gov.