

Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2022

Mayor's Update



More Affordable Housing Needed

In Massachusetts, developers of housing have greater leeway in cities and towns that do not have a sufficient amount of affordable housing.

The state law known as Chapter 40B was enacted in 1969. It allows developers who include a particular amount of affordable housing in their proposal to bypass certain local zoning requirements and apply for “comprehensive permits” through Zoning Boards of Appeals until municipalities have a sufficient amount of affordable housing.

In order to meet the affordability requirements set by the state, Newton needs to meet one of two affordability thresholds to achieve Chapter 40B “safe harbor.” Safe harbor status is available to municipalities that have met either the *General Land Area Minimum*, achieved when housing units eligible for inclusion on the state’s Subsidized Housing Inventory (“SHI”) exist on sites comprising 1.5% or more of a municipality’s total land area; or the *Housing Unit Minimum*, achieved when a municipality’s SHI Eligible Housing units exceed 10% of its total housing units.

If a community meets either of the safe harbors, it can enforce local zoning requirements for affordable housing projects proposed under 40B guidelines.

The City just updated its calculations. These show Newton’s total *housing unit* calculation is now at 9.80%, an increase from the 9.59% last year, and still below the 10% threshold. Newton’s *land area* percentage of affordable housing is 1.35%, a slight increase over last year’s calculation of 1.32%, and still below the 1.5% threshold.

Please know that the achievement of a “safe harbor” still allows our Zoning Board of Appeals the ability to grant additional comprehensive permits to developers seeking to construct housing. In addition, we still will have plenty of work to do once we achieve “safe harbor” as we all know that we need more affordable housing in Newton than we have today.

Read the detailed memo on Newton’s current 40B status [here](#).

Vapors from piles of wet, oily rags can ignite and literally cause a fire. That's why it's important to take steps to make sure rags used to wipe paint brushes or clean spills of oil-based paint, varnishes and stains are dried out and stored properly. Find more information at [nfpa.org](https://www.nfpa.org).

Historical Commission Rejects Plans for Demolished Landmarked Home

The Newton Historical Commission voted unanimously 7-0 to reject the latest plan presented by the owners of the demolished historic property at 29 Greenwood Street near Newton South High School.

(Photo: The original Gershom Hyde House at 29 Greenwood Street.)

Background

The home at 29 Greenwood Street, known as the Gershom Hyde House, was constructed in circa 1744, making it one of the oldest residences in Newton. The home was designated as a Newton Local Landmark in 2005.

A "Certificate of Appropriateness" was granted by the Newton Historical Commission in 2017 (and extended in 2018 and 2019) to allow restoration of the house and construction of a rear addition.

The property changed hands in January 2021, and work started based on the plans previously approved. In April of that year, building inspectors from the Newton Inspectional Services Department visited the site and found that the historic house had been demolished and replaced by new framing. This had not been in the approved plan.

A stop work order was issued immediately for violation of the Historical Commission's approval for this project. The Historical Commission then took the most swift and decisive action available to them under the City of Newton ordinances and directed ISD to maintain the stop work order. This stop work order is still in place and the Historical Commission imposed the maximum daily penalty of \$300 a day, which continues to accrue.

Latest Historical Commission Vote

The Historical Commission's latest vote was based on findings that cite a failure of the proposed remediation plans for the property to adhere to the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties for "reconstruction" of historic property. Additional findings cited by the Commission in their decision include a failure to demonstrate that the proposed substitute materials for the reconstruction would be able to convey the same appearance as the traditional materials and insufficient documentation of the historical basis for a number of proposed exterior features. (Find the decision [here](#).)

This latest rejection of the owner's proposed plans to attempt to reconstruct the demolished landmark property represents the second time in the past nine months that the Historical Commission has voted unanimously not to endorse the owner's proposal for reconstructing the property.

The owner can not restart any construction at the property prior to receiving approval from the Historical Commission.

As Mayor, I share our Historical Commission's and our residents' outrage that the owner at 29 Greenwood Street demolished one of the City's treasured landmarked properties.

The End of Summer and A New Year Begins

Summer is winding down. The chill is even in the air first thing in the morning and the sun is setting earlier.

Next week is the first day of school for our educators, people who went the extra mile through a time of tremendous strain, day after day after day, month after month after month. I look forward to welcoming them back on Wednesday as they double down on this noble profession.

Students get back into their classrooms for their first day of school on Sept. 6, the Tuesday after Labor Day. Walkers, bikers and buses will be out in the mornings and afternoons. Let's all be mindful as we drive through the City with more kids making their way to and from school.

September 6 is also the State Primary Election day. In-person early voting begins early at Newton City Hall this Saturday, August 27 and continues through Friday, September 2. More details are [here](#). Polls open on election day across Newton at 7:00 a.m. (Find your polling location [here](#).)

As the mother of three boys, the first day of school always feels like a new beginning, a new year. In my faith tradition, as we start a new year, we pray for a good and sweet year ahead. For all of us, here's to a good and sweet school year.




Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Ice cream from Wally's, kids' crafts, family portraits by Family Photography, sidewalk sales, a free cannoli or biscotti with lunch at Bocca Bella, free swag, music and more: Head to the 'Dale this Saturday, Aug. 27 from 10:00 a.m. to noon for **Auburndale Village Day** (at Lexington Street and Auburn Street). Have some fun and support our small, independent Newton businesses.

P.P.S. Looking to release your inner Marlon Brando or Carol Burnett? Enjoy the excitement of working on scenes and monologues in a supportive environment at a new **Theatre Workshop** at the Newton Senior Center, 347 Walnut St., starting on Thursday, Sept. 8. The workshop is for anyone interested in acting or simply looking to strengthen public speaking abilities or ready to try a new experience. The classes run on Thursdays from noon to 1:30 p.m. through Dec. 22. Registration is required. Email Illana at lseidmann@newtonma.gov or call the Senior Center at 617-796-1670 for more information or to register.

P.P.P.S. We want to hear what you think about **proposed zoning changes for Newton's village centers**. The City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee is now working on updating Newton's zoning for our village centers. Zoning impacts what can be built and where, and thus is important to ensure that what is built in the future in these commercial centers supports what we want - economic vitality, housing availability, good design, sustainable buildings, appropriate amounts of parking, among other things. Newton's Planning staff will be collecting community input online starting next week on Thursday, Sept. 1 through Sunday, Oct. 16. To get involved:

-  [Sign up here](#) to get the engagement material next Thursday, Sept. 1.
-  Attend the virtual Engagement Info Session on Thursday, Sept. 8, from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. [Click here to register](#)
-  [Click here for the flier](#)



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