

Outreach Language for Village Center Zoning's Phase II Engagement

Drafted by the City of Newton's Department of Planning & Development

Guidelines

- **What is this document for?**
 - These script and email drafts are offered as a possible template for the Community Engagement Network members to use in communicating with their neighbors for the second phase of engagement for village center zoning changes, which will take place September 1 through October 16, 2022. Feel free to modify for your audience - though we encourage you to closely reference the City's available guidance on the proposed zoning for village centers.
 - This was originally drafted for use by the Zoning Redesign Community Engagement Network in doing their own outreach, but can be used by any community member in Newton.
- **How do I read this document?**
 - **Red text marks** where you need to insert your own details and information.
 - ***Italicized text marks*** when to have a less formal and more conversational part of the script.
- **Getting more information:** If the person wants to learn more about Zoning Redesign, send them to <https://newtonma.gov/zoningredesign/vc>. In addition, you can use the 'Frequently asked questions' part of this document.

Phone script: Page 2

Email template: Page 5

Frequently asked questions: Page 6

Contact zoningredesign@newtonma.gov for any questions.

Phone Script

(A) Greeting

You: Hi! How are you doing?

Neighbor: Hello! I'm doing well - the heat has been rough for the family but we're trying to cool off by going to the ocean as often as we can. How are you?

You: I'm also doing well - I'm calling about something I've volunteered to assist the City in getting the word out about. Did you know that the City is considering some zoning changes for its village centers (i.e. Newton Centre, West Newton, Newton Highlands, Waban, etc.)?

Neighbor: No, I haven't. → (jump to B)

Or

Neighbor: Yes, I have. → (jump to C)

(B): Explaining zoning & zoning redesign

You: Ah OK - it's one of the most important things that our City Council is talking about right now. Zoning is a set of local regulations that control what can be built, and where. As in, how tall new buildings can be, sometimes what can be done in that new building, and more. This can impact the village center's economic development, transportation, social activation of a space, housing supply, and more.

Neighbor: *Pause here for your neighbor's reaction or any questions.* → (jump to C)

(C): Village center engagement invitation

You: Today, the city is focusing on possible zoning changes for our village centers. The City highlights that the last comprehensive update to Newton's village center zoning was a bit over 30 years ago, in 1987. Are there any things you want to see changed (*or preserved or come back from the past*) in a village center, or multiple village centers?

Neighbor: *Shares opinions, or, if they are not sure how to answer, you share some of your thoughts and ask what they think about them. Take this as an opportunity to reflect on the built space of a village center (or more) and how zoning can impact important parts of the village center. See page 6 for examples.*

You: So several of the things we just talked about are currently impacted by the zoning regulations, and could be impacted differently if the zoning is updated. And that's why I'm calling you! There's a set of proposed changes on the table, and the city is collecting community input

on them from September 1 through October 16th. I am hosting an engagement session for this on [insert date] at [insert time] at [insert location], where we review the proposals and give our feedback. You *do not* have to be an expert in zoning! And I think your [X*] makes your contributions really valuable. Would you be willing to join?

**X: Insert here the person's connection to Newton - if they live (rent or own a home), study, or work in the city.*

Neighbor: Sure! → (jump to G)

Or

Neighbor: I'm interested but I don't think I know enough to give input. → (jump to D)

Or

Neighbor: I'm interested but I don't think I have enough time. → (jump to E)

Or

Neighbor: No. → (jump to F)

(D): Encouraging someone to recognize the value of their input

You: I totally hear you. When I first heard the word 'zoning', or when I first heard about Zoning Redesign, I thought [insert here what your first reaction was. For example, a lot of folks don't know what zoning is or don't know why it's important.]

But then I learned more about it, and [insert here your reasons for why you got involved and why you think this is important.] I realized that the city should hear from all kinds of folks on this matter, since these rules do impact how our village centers. And that we do not need to be zoning professionals in order to be able to learn more about it and give input! Since we're the ones who live, work and/or shop in the village centers, you could say that we are local experts on these spaces. What do you think of that?

Neighbor: That makes sense. I'm interested in giving input. → (jump to G)

Or

Neighbor: I don't know - I'm still hesitant. → (jump to E)

(E): For someone who's too busy or still feels hesitant to give input

You: I understand that - well, how does it sound for me to at least send you info, and you can let me know? I can send you details about the engagement session I'm hosting. And I can send you the link to the city's feedback tool, so you can get a sense of what we'll be talking about or so that you could complete it at your own pace.

Neighbor: Sounds good. → send them the information

Or

Neighbor: I don't think so. → (jump to F)

(F): For someone who does not want to participate

You: Thanks for letting me know, and I appreciate you chatting with me about this. If you change your mind or have more questions at any point, you have my number - give me a ring :)!

(G): Finalize the invitation

You: Wonderful! I'm really excited that you'll join us. So I'll send you the details about the engagement session. Do you prefer getting info through email, text or other?

Neighbor: *Gives their answer. Jot down what their preference is.*

You: Great, I'll send along the info soon. Do you think there's anyone else who would want to join this? Like any of your family members or neighbors?

Neighbor: *If they say yes, ask if they can pass along the invitation and invite those folks. If they say no, tell them no worries.*

You: Thanks so much [neighbor's name.] I'll see you on [insert date of your session], and in the meantime, let me know if you have any questions!

Email Template

Subject line: Give Community Input With Me?

Hi **[insert name]**,

As you may already know, I have been volunteering since May to prepare for upcoming civic engagement around a topic that impacts our community - zoning in the village centers.

Just in case you don't already know about these things. Zoning is a set of local regulations that control what can be built, and where. As in, how tall new buildings can be, sometimes what can be done in that new building, and more. This can impact the village center's economic development, transportation, social activation of a space, housing supply, and more.

The City is considering updates to its zoning rules, one section at a time. **Today, it's focused on possible [zoning changes for our village centers](#).** The City highlights that the last comprehensive update to Newton's village center zoning was a bit over 30 years ago, in 1987.

I am hosting an engagement session for this, where we'll discuss the possible changes and give our input on them. **Will you join us?** This will take place on **[insert date, time, and medium - like is it Zoom, in-person, etc.]**

I think your contributions are important because you are a 'local expert' on Newton simply by **[living, working or studying]** here. I know zoning can seem like a really technical, or intimidating, topic - for me, **[insert here what your first reaction was to hearing about the topic.]** But then I realized that the city should hear from all kinds of folks on these matters, and that we can learn enough about it to share meaningful opinions.

In other words, I really hope you join us to influence what our councilors will vote on! We don't have to agree with each other on our input. Instead, we will focus on learning about zoning, forming our own opinions and contributing to the overall civic engagement.

Please let me know if you have any other questions! And again, my engagement session will happen **[re-insert details about your session.]**

Best,
[your name]

Frequently Asked Questions

Below are the questions listed in this FAQ. If you do not find the question you have here, [click here to review the Q+A compilation](#) for the Network's first meeting and see if you can find the answer there. If you still can't find the answer, send your question to zoningredesign@newtonma.gov

- Why is zoning important? What do zoning changes for village centers mean? (p 6)
- What is the community giving input on? (p 7)
- How can the community give their input? (p 7)
- Who can give input? (p 8)
- What will be done with this community input? (p 8)
- When can the community give their input? (p 8)
- What is the Zoning Redesign Community Engagement Network? What are the Network members' roles? (p 8)
- I thought there was an engagement effort for zoning changes in village centers last summer. How is this different? (p 10)

Why is zoning important? What do zoning changes for village centers mean?

Zoning laws regulate the use of land within a municipality. They control how the land can be developed and what uses are allowed (such as whether a building is for office space, industrial use, or living in.) Zoning laws have a strong influence on the kinds of changes that take place in a city because they influence the use, feel and look of new buildings.

The zoning for village centers is important for many reasons. For example, zoning impacts:

- Economic development: Business owners have to think about the cost of their rent, how big the space is for them to move in necessary equipment, and how well people walking by can see into the store and gain interest in what they're selling. In addition, zoning can influence the number of people who can visit the store. This could include density in or around a village center - such as how many people are within walking distance of the store. This also includes parking - what parking access exists for drivers to easily access the store.
- Accessibility: Majority of zoning ordinances across the U.S. were established before the country adopted ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). Through development standards, zoning can require or incentivize new development or major redevelopment of existing buildings to provide accessible features like ramps, at grade entry ways, and elevators.
- Green space, socializing and entertainment: Zoning rules can require new buildings to provide green space and public space through a zoning tool called 'design standards.'

- Housing supply and transportation: The amount of people who live in an area can influence the transportation system there, and vice versa. The amount of floors allowed in new buildings can determine the amount of apartments that can be built - which then determines the amount of individuals and families who could live there & access public transportation. This then influences whether the public transportation system has enough demand to make it viable. Or on the flip side, some also argue that allowing higher density would result in new residents bringing along new cars and ultimately increase traffic congestion.
- Cars: Zoning also controls the number of parking spots required for each new building, including residence, retail, and office space. There are arguments around whether requiring more or less parking influences the extent to which spaces are car-centric, encourage or discourage public transportation use, and whether allocating the (sometimes limited) land that cities have for parking is good use or not.



There are many more ways in which zoning impacts the village centers, in addition to what's listed above. The last comprehensive update to Newton's village center zoning was in 1987 during a period of declining population. The additional controls placed on commercial and institutional development in the 1980s are still impacting economic development and village center vitality today.


What is the community giving input on?

The community will give input on 12 major proposed changes to the current village centers' zoning, which you can find [by clicking here](#). To do so the City will ask for community input on the overarching framework and intended impacts of these proposals, not about each of the 12 technical proposals. The community will give their feedback through the 'feedback tool' (an online informational survey.) The feedback tool will have a total of 3 questions about the zoning changes, all with open-ended answers for those who want to provide additional thoughts.

That said, the City encourages community members to contact their City Councilors to provide their feedback directly as well. [You can find all Newton City Councilor' contact information here.](#)

How can the community give their input?

-  Feedback Tool: Community members will give their input through an online survey with educational information and visuals. This will be available through one's cell phone or computer, and as a hard-copy for those who prefer to fill it out by hand.
-  Library Exhibit: In the Newton Free Library, the City will install an exhibit about zoning and the zoning proposals and will have a 'community engagement' station. It will be open at the same hours as the library.

-  (Virtual) Library Exhibit: A document (PDF) that contains all of the library exhibit information, intermittent with discussion prompts and guidance on how to fill out the feedback tool. This is for community members to use in virtual or in-person meetings that are not at the library.
- Share your opinions with the City of Newton Councilors directly: [You can find all Newton City Councilors contact information here.](#)
- Public hearing(s): A public hearing has to take place before the City Council takes a vote on a proposed zoning change. Therefore, there will be public hearings at some point after October 16th (when this engagement phase concludes), and any registered voter in Newton can sign up to give comments.

Who can give input?

All community members who live (either through rent or homeownership), work, and/or study in Newton.

What will be done with this community input?

All of the community input collected will be shared and presented to Newton City Council. More specifically, to the [Zoning and Planning Committee](#) - also known as ZAP. This committee consists of 8 city councilors and oversees the Zoning Redesign project.

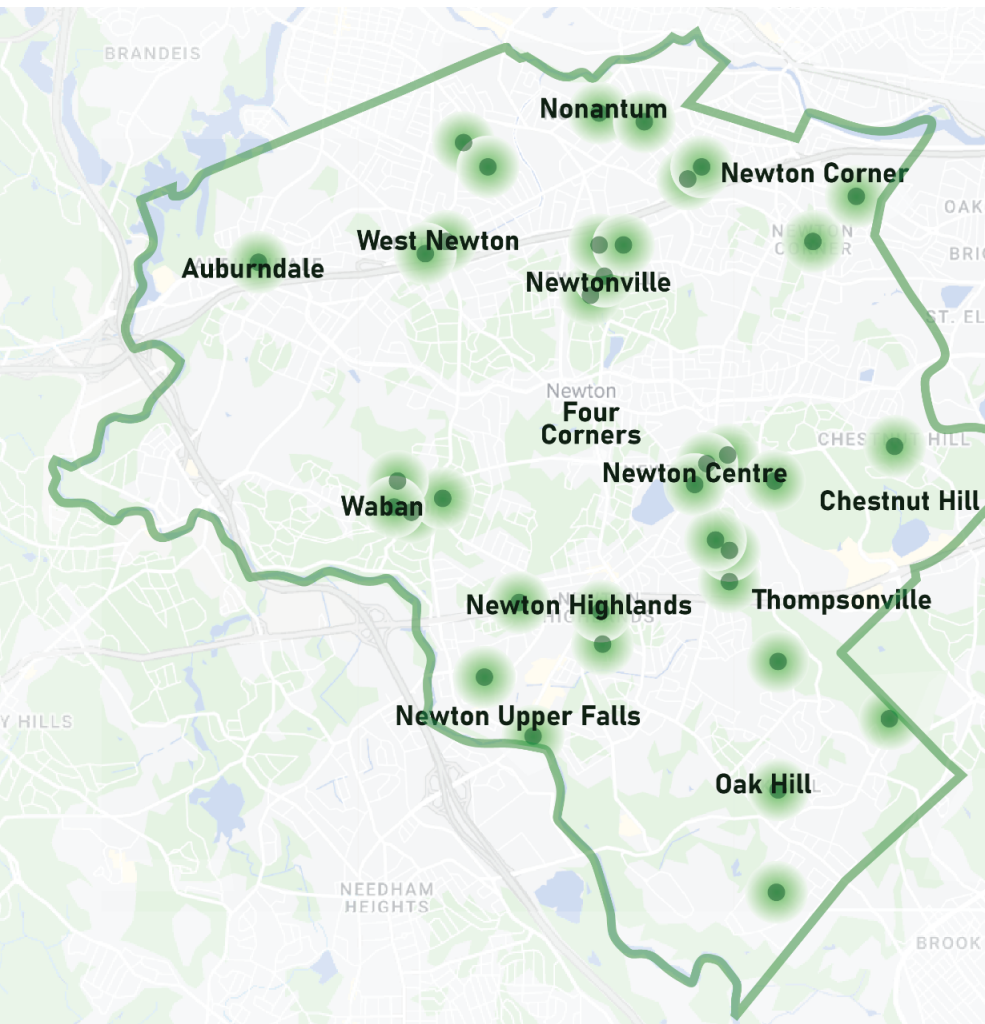
If the ZAP committee wishes to move forward with some or all of these proposed zoning changes, it will hold a formal public hearing on the proposed amendments to the City's Zoning Ordinance. The ZAP committee will then take a vote on whether to adopt the changes. Following that vote, the full Newton City Council will vote as to whether to adopt these changes.

When can the community give their input?

September 1st through the end of October 16th.

What is the Zoning Redesign Community Engagement Network? What are the Network members' roles?

The Community Engagement Network is a group of community members who committed to help bolster this year's village center engagement phase with the City. Over 80 community members applied for, and joined, the Network and represent a wide range of community spaces, as you can see below.



Groups focused on arts, transportation, environmental advocacy, housing, or business	14
City commissions or councils	4
Community & affinity groups	10
Faith-based institutions	5
Neighborhood Area Councils	4
Neighborhood Associations	5
Neighborhood block-based groups	31
School-based groups (of both students and parents)	7

Here is a breakdown of the Network members' roles, per the intention of the Network and the commitments that Network members made:

A Network member's roles are to...:

- **Make their community space aware of the village center zoning updates and of the engagement process**
- **Encourage their community space to give input** on the village center zoning proposals, through the City's engagement process. Network members received ideas from the City on how to do this and also workshopped ideas with one another
- **Give feedback to, and share ideas with, the City on drafts of engagement material** (this took place during the months leading up to the actual engagement window)

A Network member is not intended to be...:

- **A representative of their community space.** Rather, they are meant to be a facilitator of the City's engagement.
- **Responsible for collecting community input themselves.** They are not responsible for synthesizing or translating community input that their community space provides. All community input will be submitted through the 'feedback tool' through an individual's phone, laptop, or a paper copy.
- **The only community member who should be facilitating civic engagement.** Network members are only the individuals who were aware of the Network and chose to join. All Newton community members, and Councilors, are encouraged to utilize the City's engagement material, to spread awareness, and to encourage community members' to share input.

Things can get gray in terms of how a Network member shares their own opinions or brings in their own advocacy:

- A Network member's main role is to help spread awareness of this engagement phase and to invite community members into the conversation. And of course, a Network member is still a person with a range of lived experiences and opinions. The City encourages Network members to use their opinions as a way to dig deeper into a conversation about zoning with their neighbors. This means opening up the conversation to reflect on the various (and sometimes conflicting) perspectives of zoning that exist.

All of the material shared with, or created for, the Network are public at this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/ZRNetworkDocuments>

I thought there was an engagement effort for zoning changes in village centers last summer. How is this different?

The project 'Zoning Redesign' aims to update Newton's zoning rules, one piece at a time. Last summer, the city began focusing on the village center zoning. This kicked off with both an initial analysis of the village centers (transportation, economic development, etc.) as well as a first phase of engagement. This first phase asked community members, "what do you envision for your village center(s)?" This phase focused on collecting the values and goals that Newton community members desire for the village center zoning to achieve. [Click here to find the first engagement phase's results](#) - and how the input was collected (specifically go to the green text that says '2021: Phase I Engagement.')

The results of that engagement led to the drafted 12 major zoning proposals, that this phase of engagement is collecting community input on.