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**CITY OF NEWTON**  
**Planning and Development Board**

8/3/2022

To: The Honorable City Council President, Susan Albright  
City of Newton  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton, MA 02459

**RE: #38-22 Discussion and review relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance regarding village centers**

ZONING & PLANNING COMMITTEE requesting review, discussion and possible ordinance amendments relative to Chapter 30 zoning ordinances pertaining to Mixed Use, business districts and village districts relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance. (formerly #88-20)

Dear Honorable Council President Albright:

Village center zoning has been on the Planning and Development Board's agenda since January when it learned that this would be the focus of zoning reform in the coming year. The Board held its first discussion of specific zoning proposals on June 6, 2022 after receiving the proposals outlined in the Planning Department's May 27, 2022 memo on Docket #38-22. Straw votes on the first six proposals were taken at that meeting, all of which were unanimously approved by the public members of the Board by a vote of 5-0-1, with *ex officio* member Barney Heath abstaining.

Proposal 1 to reduce parking requirements received the most scrutiny as the Board sought to find the right balance between the advantages and disadvantages of reducing parking requirements. Board members acknowledged that fewer parking spaces could encourage more car-free alternatives that would contribute to the vitality of village centers and could also help to achieve a variety of other Newton-wide goals. However, some members were concerned that the success of village revitalization might depend on attracting more shoppers and diners who live beyond walking distance to village centers and who would need parking. For villages that are at or near their parking capacity, additional drivers could mean more traffic congestion in village centers and nearby neighborhoods as drivers searched for parking, and a worst-case outcome would be the loss of business revenue if drivers decided to go elsewhere.

Page 1 of 2

These differences led to a fruitful discussion about the limits of zoning-based parking policies that would be applied on a case-by-case basis and the need to plan for village-wide solutions for managing traffic and parking. Examples of such policies included monitoring traffic congestion and parking capacity in village centers in order to anticipate future bottlenecks, making better use of existing village parking capacity, improving public transportation, and investing as needed in additional public or public-private parking infrastructure. This broader policy perspective, along with evidence of excess parking capacity in some recent development projects, persuaded the Board that the proposed reduction in current parking requirements was appropriate.

The remaining six draft proposals were reviewed by the Board at its July 11, 2022 meeting and straw votes on each of these proposals (4-0-1) again revealed the Board's support for the proposed changes in village center zoning. Given the consensus for all twelve proposals (which included amendments previously voted by the Zoning and Planning Committee), the Board voted 4-0-1 to endorse the direction of the Planning Department's proposals.

The Board also wanted to take this opportunity to comment on its discussion of Proposal 8, which included the Planning Board in the site plan review process. Board members were enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate in the site plan review, which they believe will increase the predictability of outcomes for petitioners and conserve the resources of the City Council for reviewing larger and more complex projects. They are also supporters of the types of design standards described in Proposal 9 and they look forward to collaborating with the Urban Design Commission on site reviews.

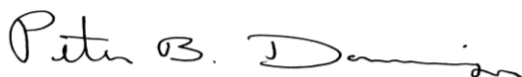
Nevertheless, the Board members noted several points in Proposal 8 that need to be clarified:

- The time commitment of the Planning Board remains uncertain because the threshold for triggering this review process has not yet been defined;
- The coordination channels between the Planning Board and the Urban Design Commission are not yet defined;
- There were concerns about the amount of staff support needed for conducting the review process

None of these points diminish the Board's enthusiasm this for its proposed role in the site review process, but the Board hopes it will be consulted as its responsibilities become clearer.

More generally, the Board understands that village center zoning is still a work in progress and that the current language of these draft proposals may change because of additional input from the Planning Department and other sources. Nonetheless, the Board wanted to communicate its strong endorsement of the direction for village zoning embodied in this package of zoning proposals.

Best Regards,



Peter B. Doeringer, Chair