

Phase II Engagement – Village Center Zoning Framework Focus Groups for Equitable Engagement

November 10, 2022

Pages 2 – 3: Analysis of focus group notes, conducted by MAPC (Metropolitan Area Planning Council) as part of a Technical Assistance Program grant that City of Newton received.

Pages 4 – 17: Meeting minutes from each of the three focus groups. Each were facilitated by community members who shared the identify of the focus group, and City of Newton and MAPC staff took notes.

Focus Group Analysis
Written by MAPC
11.3.2022

Renters

Compared to the other two focus groups, the Renters focus group did not have one theme that became more prominent than the others. In generally, participants indicated that they liked living near or going to the City's Village Centers because they offered a walkable way to access important goods and services such as the grocery store and the doctor's office. Several participants indicated that they often opt against using their car to run errands simply because they liked the proximity of services in the Village Centers. Similarly, many participants spoke favorably about the general quality of live in the City's Village Centers, not only about walkability but also about neighborliness. Specifically, several participants indicated that they felt more connected to their community because of the current structure of the Village Centers than if they lived in the more residential parts of Newton. Relatedly, several participants felt that an increase in residents near the village center could help businesses by increasing their customer base.

After viewing the recording of the library exhibit, several participants remarked that they liked the idea of a more standard and transparent zoning process and allowing buildings that were more than two stories. A few participants indicated trepidation at the increase in population that might bring and felt that the zoning should ensure that development was contextual and creative. In general, participants in the renters focus group supported the zoning proposals as currently drafted.

Other themes that arose during this conversation included some insights from participants around density and height of buildings. One participant indicated that they had been a homeowner but had become a renter due to some personal circumstances. They felt that there were few affordable options for single parents who needed to rent and that encouraging more development could help create spaces suitable for families that needed to rent.

Disability Community

While several prominent themes arose from the Disability Community focus group, by far the most prominent theme was accessibility, particularly the accessibility of businesses and public spaces in the village centers. Participants felt strongly that there were lots of businesses across many of the village centers and significant portions of sidewalks that were generally inaccessible due to poor design and/or maintenance. Many participants similarly indicated that if there were a push to create more transit orientated development, or to frame development as transit orientated, attention would need to be paid to the accessibility of the City's current transportation options. Participants pointed out that many of the City's train stations, in particular, were not accessible to residents with disabilities and so could not be relied on by them as a transit option.

Though concerns about parking were not the most frequent piece of feedback, participants in this focus group felt very strongly about parking when they did touch on it. Several participants indicated that, for them, parking was a crucial part of their ability to access and use the amenities and commercial spaces in the village centers. They additionally voiced concerns that reducing the parking requirements would

disproportionately impact Newton residents with disabilities if the City maintains the same level of car usage.

Several other themes that came out of this focus group included the affordability of Newton's homes and concerns about the review process as it exists currently. Regarding affordability, participants agreed that more affordable housing is needed in Newton but voiced concerns that the housing currently being considered "affordable" was not actually that affordable (and that the rest of the housing being developed is very expensive). Regarding the review process, participants expressed feeling like the City often does not follow its own zoning regulations, specifically the perception that waivers and other applications are frequently granted.

Youth

Participants in the youth focus group brought up several inter-connected themes throughout the conversation, all of which centered around their experiences as youth being physically present in or travelling through Village Centers. Many participants indicated that they like visiting the Village Centers because, as one participant stated, "They're just fun!" Many participants indicated that they went to Village Centers to study, spend their free time, visit cafes, and hang out with friends and felt that the Village Centers contributed to a more cohesive feel throughout the community. Several participants specifically identified the outdoor amenities, such as seating and open spaces, as reasons why they might frequent the village centers. Several participants also appreciated that in the Village Centers lots of the things they are interested in doing are accessible to them by foot. A lack of public amenities was also identified by some participants as something that certain village centers lacked, which one participant argued prevents people from going to that center. Lastly, a handful of participants advocated for an increase in public art in the Village Centers, arguing that it would create more welcoming space for young people.

Getting to and from the Village Centers also featured prominently when youth participants discussed their experiences in these spaces. For instance, several participants were previously unaware (unclear if it is before this meeting or not) that there were busses they could take to specific Villages. Other indicated that they had biked to a Village Center but did not feel that it was safe to do so.

Some youth participants also touched on the density components of the zoning proposals. In general, the participants who brought this up felt that Newton needed some density (and height) but that it should be located in particular places where it is best suited. Several participants identified density as one way to produce more affordable housing and encourage more walkable neighborhoods.

City of Newton's Village Center Zoning Engagement - Phase II Renters Focus Group - Meeting Minutes

Day/time: Thursday, October 11th, 2022, 6-7pm

Attendees: 8

Village centers + renters

What are the ways in which you think the village centers are good places for renters?

- Lots of villages have different ideas of what it means to have people come together. We used to have block parties – those were very unifying. I guess that's the best way to answer the question – not sure I understand it.
- I have been both a renter and homeowner and I don't necessarily see it very differently
- I have a car as a renter but if I didn't I could see living in the middle of newton center being really welcoming. If I were younger, for example. I can walk to my haircut, pickup prescriptions, high and low end restaurants, a grocery store, liquor store, etc. There's a lot that I can get done without needing a car.
- It's close to a lot of things I need! I don't walk as much as I wish that I did – the streets around me aren't as inviting so I don't walk as much.
- I maybe would have invested more time in meeting my immediate neighbors – as a renter I feel still very connected to the community because since I walk to all these businesses I feel like I'm seeing friends and have gotten to know people. I don't think I would have had that if I weren't in the village center.
- For me, I hate driving so I like that I can walk and not have to get into my car to go places in newton corner. Newton has all these commercial centers that have these different characters which is really nice. I think a good amount of renters are in denser housing and therefore closer to these centers than homeowners are. You can bike too. It's a good location because there are events in these centers as well which I think can connect renters who may not have lived here as long as many homeowners.
- Newton does an excellent job blending. You don't know whether your neighbors are renters or owners.

If you weren't in a center, what difference would that make and how. What could make a village center better?

- For me, I think a lot about whether I need to go anywhere on the weekends or can I get things done without getting in the car. In Newton Centre a really cool Italian market place opened up so I can get some meals there. A movie theater is the only thing I'm missing.
- I sold my home a couple of years ago. If we were in a smaller home or condo outside of the village center our lives would be very different. We got rid of one of our cars and though Newtonville doesn't have a movie theater we can just go to west newton. For older people.

- I don't walk as much as I wish that I did – the streets around me aren't as inviting so I don't walk as much.
- I live in a portion of west newton that used to be closer with each other – I'd love to see that happen. We would all get to know each other. A lot of times people are afraid of what it means to have affordable housing in a village. Getting to know your neighbors is crucial.

Zoning proposals - after watching [the NewTV piece on the library exhibit](#)

Clarifying questions - was there something you found confusing?

Thoughts - is there something you feel strongly about? Something you feel like you need more time to sit with or want to talk about with this group?

- The only development that you don't have to go through an approval process for is two stories or below, for all of the village centers. Even though a lot of them are over two stories (either grandfathered or through the approval process). To me, her point about how the approval processes makes it harder for things to happen – it's kind of cutting those people out from doing the mid sized buildings as it stands now.
- I went from being a homeowner to being a renter when I became a single parent – others in the same situation have had a hard time finding rentals that are ok for parents. Single family homes are nice but many of them have lead. Encouraging some more development might create some more spaces that might be helpful for families.
 - Anything that can create some consistent rules and change the market dynamics would be great!
 - What I've noticed in some of the development around where I am is that the rules aren't enforced consistently because of the special permit process. Some of the development in my neighborhood – new construction is pretty disruptive and hasn't been coordinated with the school (a school bus crashed into a worker's truck!). Not good pedestrian accommodations in west newton square. The impact on people who are in the neighborhoods when construction happens (city or private). Construction management plans should be required but will have to actually submit them!
- I agree with [the person who spoke earlier] that just seeing straightforward and transparent zoning rules would be great. I thought everything in the presentation seemed very thoughtful and forward thinking. I work with college students and if they do stay in the area I *never* hear about them staying in Newton. If more density were built I would love to see more students living here after graduating. That would be really great to sustain. Very helpful down the road for continued loyalty to businesses.
- One of the things that I haven't even thought of (I'm not wheelchair bound) – I didn't hear anything about accessibility for residents that use wheelchairs. But, as someone said, getting elderly I'm getting there now. I think that in the presentation I was impressed that they want to do the three stories now (I think that's great) but I didn't hear anything about accessibility for disabled people. I think that's a part that needs to be included.

- I guess in short I do support changing the zoning requirements, I think my original concern was the congestion and density when you start adding in the denser housing. I do think that there needs to be more housing – I'd like to see a little bit more creativity with the type of housing. It just seems that it's just "over-priced luxury rental buildings". They aren't really affordable condos or anything like that. That's something that would be great to have more diversity there.
- One of my questions/concerns is not so much about zoning per se but is with the increased density of the population, bringing in more apartments into newton – is there any consideration for the public school systems. Lots of new apartments may be bringing up lots of school enrollment increases.

Concluding

How can the City better engage renters? Any other comments?

- Putting up flyers in rental complexes
- I don't really get any information from people.
- Advertising with PTAs
- Need social media!
- Contact your counselors!
- I get the mayor's emails. I live in public housing, so for me it's hard to try to stay on top of it. I'm on the social media pages to stay abreast as to what's going on but I do feel like it would be nice if there was some kind of middleman or something like that.

City of Newton's Village Center Zoning Engagement - Phase II Disability Focus Group - Meeting Minutes

Day/time: Thursday, October 13th, 2022, 3-4pm

Attendees: 4

Village centers + disability community

What are the ways in which you think the village centers you live in and/or visit are accessible? What are ways in which they could be more accessible?

What kinds of needs/goods do you get from the village centers you visit and/or live in? What do you wish you could get from the village centers?

- Newton Centre - most things are pretty accessible. On Union St, now that they're renovating some businesses that are below ground, in the basement - so I don't even know what's going in there, but I could still do stairs but at some point, if there's no elevator then those won't be reachable. Other than that, everything I could think of that I would need in Newton Centre would be pretty much accessible. The trains in Newtonville station are not accessible, but that's in the process of being fixed. I just remember years ago, decades ago, when the UN had a year for disability and since then, they've been upgrading everything - curb cuts and those things - and I was thinking geeze, it's nice to do something for the disabled - not thinking I would ever be one. But then it was also great for parents with baby carriages and people with all kinds of - it's got all these uses, you know? So I thought, I kind of took it glibly then - and I'm glad somebody pushed that agenda. And I'm glad it's not just in the U.S.
- All the businesses are basically on the first floor that I'd be interested in, and, you know, crossing the street symbol that beeps for people who might not have good vision or what not. Sidewalks need to be more even. Like the tree roots from the maples raise them up or whatever
- So when I go into some of the village centers, they are being worked on, but I feel sad for some of the businesses. As a community, some are at the advantage - their entrances are to the businesses. And I was wondering if maybe, some \$'s, could go to some of the businesses that need work on their entrance ways, because, when people are shopping, some storekeepers are at a great disadvantage as opposed to others, and it kind of affects the shoppers in the area because... and definitely it's noticeable in some village centers than other village centers. More noticeable in some of the smaller, older village centers.
- West Newton & Newton Highlands. Also have steps going up to the entrance. I do get complaints about two steps going up, and there is a law for existing buildings - but if they're not making any renovations or anything, they don't need to do it. But could that be part of an ordinance? And also, funds to help businesses make at least their entrances - in shopping, they don't even necessarily need the bathroom, they need the entrance and the goods that they're selling at least on one of their floors.

- Exactly, because if we're creating a village center and taking care of the roads and the sidewalks, but the shops can't be entered into, it seems pointless. Especially for the economy of the storekeepers.
- Anywhere from 20 to 25% of residents in Newton and around the country have disabilities. Now they may not all be about mobility - but they can still be more welcoming to the customer and they're losing business. But they ended assistance with this, either money wise or backways into buildings for older ones that are more accessible.
- I'm blind and don't have a mobility issue, but a lot of the times my feet feel like, is this slope or this curb cut too high? So I'm always out there with all types of disabilities concerned about accessibility, both for mobility challenges and others. For example, Newton Centre has a lot of businesses without a step, which I find totally surprising. But within the building, I go to the dentist and I go up two major flights of stairs and ask, is there an elevator, and no one tells me there is. You just mentioned on Union St, you go down for some of those restaurants - and sometimes they have a back entrance down a driveway and sometimes they don't. And it is a little discouraging, even though a lot of the door openings aren't too bad.
- Back to what the city could do, as far as ordinances - I want to see more sidewalks and curb ramps to be retrofitted. In Newton Centre for example, there are very steep ones - like on Beacon and Langley, Sumner - those curb ramps, curb cuts, they're not compliant. So people who use wheelchairs pretty much have to avoid crossing in certain places, like in Newton Centre alone, ... We fixed Newtonville, where else? Wholesale, which is great. The walking signal - thanks for mentioning that - they are for folks with low vision or are blind, and even for deaf because they're tactile - but they're also a secondary way to be told, hey, it's time to cross now, it's safe to cross now. But the other issue - and switch to both the city and commercial efforts, the commercial, the merchants, must be shoveling. And they're barely doing an OK job with shoveling from their entrances. And they're not doing it with the customers or out on the street where people are parking, and it's impossible for someone to deploy a ramp or a van. Don't know if they can go into zoning redesign.

Zoning proposals - after watching [the NewTV piece on the library exhibit](#)

Clarifying questions - was there something you found confusing?

Thoughts - is there something you feel strongly about? Something you feel like you need more time to sit with or want to talk about with this group?

- I'm opposed to any changes. I don't see a need for anything.
- I think people assume we have excellent public transportation, and we already referred to how we don't. People can't walk from all of the villages to those three stations. It's going to be a few more years. I know the zoning will take a while if anything changes, but I want that to be clear. And I can't tell you about the MBTA communities - I sure hope they're not looking at communities along the commuter rail line, because they're not accessible. Which will be discouraging because we've been after the MBTA for 15 years.

I hope it's the T. If they want improvements at the commuter rail because it'll improve frequency - I want it to improve so that no one with a physical disability finds it treacherous, and the 3 steep flights that you'll just fall off the top. Those two things - MBTa. And the parking, I could see some reduction in parking but I find that, interestingly enough, and I know that Lucie will back me up on this, a lot of people with disabilities - especially physical ones - she could hardly do stairs. But once she was in her car, and parked with her disability placard and walked just a few steps to the store, she could do an errand. But if she didn't have access to a spot, on the street - and we don't have a regulation for on - street - I have to fight in a village center but I hear of other cities that have no problems. If you're going to reduce parking in parking lots or residential areas, which is problematic as well, yeah, sure, there are a lot that can't afford a car - but many others can and do need their car to get somewhere. They cannot walk, they cannot take public transportation, but they can drive from their wheelchair - or drive, popping their wheelchair in the back seat - so people don't realize how much that does affect people with disabilities to reduce the parking. We only have the bare minimum for the lots that we own, and the streets have even less of the bare minimum. But that's because it's not an official law to oppose.

- Based on that - if there were open parking spots, we wouldn't even need many accessibility parking spaces - but the city's streets are so crowded and so jammed with cars, there's never an open space. So the only place where someone with a disability can park, if the parking space happens to be outside of the store, or the place they need to go. Otherwise, there is never a parking space. So to crowd the city centers, the village center, more, to me, is just ridiculous. I can't see one advantage to the people who currently live here. Whether they have disabilities or not, they need to be able to get to the places and people don't like to walk very far.
- I do agree that transportation in Newton is a factor - and I know that for people who don't even drive, or do drive, and want to use their car minimally - like the old population or disability community - are hesitant to give up their car because even around the City of Newton, it's sporadic to get from one location to another. So their reaction is to get in their car and get somewhere as quickly as possible, and can't rely on the others there. So the reluctance there is to not eliminate parking spaces. And during covid, there wasn't much access to transportation after all - because then we don't know what our option is tomorrow, unless we have a viable resource as a solution to prevent this from happening. But I do think that we need the extra housing, and also housing that is accessible to more transportation. Like the T.
- With the new state law, there's no question that we have to do new zoning around the MBTA transit points. And unfortunately, we need the - the state needs to force municipalities to do these things because otherwise there are no changes, that's why there's the 40B law, the only reason why we have an increase in affordable housing in Newton. Passed in 1969 and requires only 10% and we haven't made it, though now we may make it eventually. So it takes the state to force municipalities to think on a different scale than just uh, I want things to stay the way they are. Basically when you think you only want things to stay the way they are, you're basically agreeing with excluding people. So that's why the state passed that law. Yeah, with the parking - I, um, I mean

we just lost parking when the restaurants started using the streets for outdoor seating, so I don't know if Councilor Crossley's statistics are based on before covid or after covid, because we used to have more street parking before covid. So I don't know if she's, which #'s she's using. I just know that, I moved back to Newton in 1995 and they've been talking about zoning since even before then, so, I'm not very hopeful, and I don't even believe in zoning because every, every special permit is granted. So basically, the city changes beyond its zoning concepts all the time. The land use committee and the council, they're just willing to chuck the rules every time someone wants to chuck it. So I think we do need to have a framework - and I'm not against zoning - but you can understand my skepticism. But we do need more affordable housing, but even that term is ridiculous. Affordable is like 80% of the median, which is even ridiculous - so basically we're keeping housing for doctors and lawyers. Who can afford that? My kids are not going to be able to afford it - they're lucky if they inherit my palace. That's the only way someone could afford to live in Newton. And I can afford it because I bought a 2-family. And that's not so widely available. I'm on Langley Road where on one side we have 2-families, and on one side we have 1-family. I grew up in Newton in my teenage years, I wouldn't have been able to come back if there wasn't a 2-family I could have bought. So I definitely think we need a lot more housing, and not all over the city but around the village centers.

- We have so much new housing, the problem is it's so expensive. There's plenty of new housing coming - more than 1,000 new units coming, and probably more than 1,000, maybe close to 2,000, there are many coming. But they are not affordable to lower income people. I don't want to limit them. I want the powers that be, and the rules to change, so that they can't build so many expensive units. So that our really lower income people can live in them. So if that were to happen, and somehow I'm sure the city can control that if they want to, we would not need to build anything more. We're going to have enough buildings. It's almost impossible in places to drive through because they're digging the roads out to everywhere.
- I went to school at Brown Middle School, all of our students came from Oak Hill Park, which was veteran parking. All formerly affordable. They're now going for \$1M. But the city was responsible - the only way to do this thing is if the city owns the land, like they did in Newtonville with the parking lot.
- Took about 15 years to get Austin St done, huge amount of opposition. And I think if you go there today, it's not ruined, the parking lot is gone - but it seems like normal village life continues, and it's even better now that you can sit around.
- Actually the parking isn't gone - it's just hidden a bit more - and it is municipal parking back there. It looks like it's connected to the building - if you're a resident, they have parking underground. But there is also surface parking. I live in Newtonville now, but I've also been involved with that project. Unfortunately, there was so much litigation - the entire affordable group, which is unusual. A 1/3 of them are affordable, but air quotes around affordable, because it's 80% AMI. So, but you're right, it does look OK - a lot of people were worried and now where the building is, it seems like - and it is putting more feet on the ground for economics, a lot of the stores are suffering, not just during Covid but before, and we want to keep that in the

village centers to group more housing around it. I don't notice though, with land use, and yeah - they completely ignore and give all the waivers, as you mentioned aniel, they give all the waivers of the current zoning. The height of the building - how many units? And then you know what, even the small developers are building very small, expensive units. Basically a detached house. So it's discouraging, and I don't know what's going to fix that.

City of Newton's Village Center Zoning Engagement - Phase II Younger People's Focus Group - Meeting Minutes

Day/time: Monday, October 17th, 2022, 7-8pm

Attendees: 16

Breakout rooms: 2

Village centers + younger people

[1] What are the ways in which you think village centers are good places for young people?

[2] What are the ways in which they could be better?

Breakout room 1 - question 1

- They're just fun. You could go to Newtonville to get food, bubble tea. Really fun place to hang out, a fun time to meet up, rendezvous. It's also just nice having one near school - I have some friends who go to south [Newton South High School] and they say we just have X blocks, there's nothing to do. And you feel kind of grown up to be in village centers, like on your own. That's cool.
- I live right next to Newton North but don't go there. I go to school in Chestnut Hill. We're situated - because we have this village center right next to us, I can just hop over, it's really easy. But we also have the T which can take us into several areas, that's where Chestnut Hill is. I can tell you that having those kinds of stores and shops and restaurants is helpful. I haven't been able to have a free period where I can go off campus yet, but in November, I will and am looking forward to it.
- I agree, I really like the village centers and I think it's a nice way to have a more city-like feel without actually having to go to Boston. Like it's a very convenient way to get food and stuff, you can go to a cafe without having to go all the way to Boston.
- Yeah, I mean I go to school in Boston, in the Longwood area, which has a lot of food and stuff around, but it's also very busy. So what's nice about village centers for young people and students, it's all centralized but also Newton Centre has picnic tables and a little piano and lots of parking, and that's the appeal is that they're very centralized but they're also a place to be rather than just a place to go and get something and leave.
- I resonate with things about picnic tables. Are there specific things you like about village centers? For me, bike racks, transportation - having access to the train to get into Newton Centre is really good. I know there are a lot of village centers and they're very different, they can go different ways. Anything coming to mind?
- One thing that [a village center - I couldn't catch the name] has is games, board games, it's really nice. Sometimes a friend and I, if it's a Saturday rehearsal, we'll walk over during our lunch break and play a few games. But there are other parks - in Newtonville, there's more than just Walnut St - there's also the area by CVS, chipotle, and I feel like

that could be developed more - more trees, more places to sit, I don't see that as much and I feel like that is something needed.

- Also to add on - they give you the soul of the area. Otherwise they're just houses. You don't feel connected otherwise. And small details - tables are really nice to have a surface. Also coverings - if it's raining and you're outside, nice to be able to stay there. But also nice to have nooks and crannies - in Newtonville there are also these spaces between the buildings that you can walk through. Those are cool, and it's nice to have these smaller areas that feel more personal even though a lot of people go to them.
- There's also that area near Cafe Nero and Starbucks where you can sit, and I love going there. I love to just sit out there and maybe get a hot drink, if it's still winter, just sit there and work and relax after a hard day at school. Or on weekends just to relax.
- And also the fact that it's sheltered between the buildings, not right on the street, and there's a parking lot behind it that has a roof over it - because that's a living area - but I see a lot of kids skating there and it's just the small details, to not be right on the street where you feel like cars are going right in front of you,
- I will say in Newtonville - I don't feel like there's quite enough seating, especially for the school and lunch crowds. And it causes problems for some of the stores there - because I was in front of Great Harvest today, and there are a ton of kids standing right outside of that, for 30 minutes, which I could see causing a problem for the store.

Breakout room 1 - question 2

- There are benches in Newtonville but they're also on the street - and when it rains, they don't dry very fast. And they also don't have a surface. Like the tables - it's a small detail and it helps a lot. If you're eating and you have this acrobatic situation, and there are knees and napkins in one hand and food on the other angle.
- There's all the benches outside, but people don't really use them, and it might be helpful to have tables with them
- In West Newton, there's like no seating at all - anywhere - and so I know that a lot of people like that live near me - like they just don't go there much at all because there are a lot of not good areas to sit.
- Something you see in Newton Centre is that there's the central part, or the park, with the picnic tables - I think that's super helpful because wherever you are, getting Ramen or at Gerry's - it's in a very comfortable walking distance for anyone, and you can come there and it's a park. Like nature helps a lot - with plants - that really adds a comforting feel, and the fact that there's a park, it's really nice. And coming out of the pandemic, I realized it's really helpful - small sun exposure - having an outside central area with trees and plants is really great.
- Before I could drive, it was really hard for me to get to village centers. For you all, does public transportation play a role? I personally think there's too much parking. I'm curious if you all have thoughts on that.
- Yes, I have a lot of thoughts. I bike all the time. I actually biked to the Green Expo in Newton Centre yesterday - and I can tell you there are some parts where it doesn't feel safe, and just biking in general, I feel like there could be a better sense of how bike lanes

are established. On Walnut St it's good, but I don't think it's great on Centre St or going into Newton Centre. And I think that's a problem. Or on Hammond St, it's a windy road through BC, you have student drivers, people trying to get to work - and you're trying to get to school and people are going quickly - it's really dangerous. I feel like biking could be better.

- I'm not allowed to bike to school. Even walking, there are multiple times where cars almost hit me - just because everyone's rushing to work. Having more distinguished bike lanes is a good idea - you don't want to be on the sidewalk because that's not safe for pedestrians. And then you can't be alternating between the sidewalk and the street - and then you don't want to
- So I don't know, when people put cat eyes on the road, to establish a bike lane - to make the streets wider - but it would just be nice to establish, because it doesn't feel safe to be on the road. And actually, I was in Montreal in the Summer - I remember seeing one of their systems - it was a kind of sidewalk kind of thingy, and it had a thing for a bike lane - actually in Boston too - that I think is the ultimate goal - and then you could have a little bit of parking. But that at least would be safer because cars can't go along there - and of course, Commonwealth isn't that big of a problem - but those lanes that are raised, there's a middle raised section that's just a bike lane, that I think we really benefit from.
- I agree with a lot of what people have said - because I think one of the main reasons people spend time in village centers is to eat food with friends, chat and hang out. So I think having tables and accessible seating is really important. I live in Newtonville so that's where I'll usually be - there are tables and small chairs, but they're often very disorganized and kind of difficult to navigate - oh maybe Cafe Nero says these are their chairs, or Starbucks said these are their chairs - so you're put in this difficult situation. But having a nice place to sit at a table is very important in the village centers.
- Personally, on the transportation front - I was recently injured. I used to walk anywhere and now I can't really do that. So like, and so recently I've been taking the buses from place to place a lot - and it's a really good resource that is not, many people our age use enough, so like, if that could somehow be more known to kids our age - because there's definitely a few buses that run from Newtonville into Newton Centre and like, there's one from West Newton all the way to Newton Centre and Nonantum and other places.
- I think everyone talks about how great public transportation can be. But I think especially for teens, we're not as aware of the benefits. Yeah, I don't know anyone who takes the bus - but that's a really cool resource we have, there's a bus stop right in front of Newton North. And it's like, wow that's really cool that that's something we have and an option I didn't really know we have. But I think if that was more established knowledge it would be helpful.
- I take the train often but the bus not often, but do you think it runs frequently enough? Have you had a good experience overall with it?
- Didn't realize that there were buses, maybe a problem that no one knows that they are a resource that can be used
- Post bus schedules on the bus stops?
- Just making it known that buses run through Newton

- Also that they don't run frequently enough for people to really know that they are a resource that is available
- Bike racks!!! need more bike racks. people have had their bikes stolen because there's nowhere to put their bikes
- Leaving a bike for 10 minutes and the bike is stolen
- It's happened to a number of people that they know, makes you more cautious about using a bike
- Whether or not there is a bike rack affects schedule/getting around, have to plan around whether or not biking is possible
- Bike racks as art!!! incorporating local art into infrastructure like bike racks and picnic tables/benches
- Want to see more public art/murals in village centers! makes spaces more attractive for young people
- Wanting to see more local artist involvement in putting art into village centers, helping to create more welcome spaces for young people

Breakout room 2 - questions 1 + 2

- Some of the villages are good like Newtonville and Newton Centre. The villages/areas need to be more walkable. For example, 4 corners and Thompsonville could be more accessible by walking. Not having to cross a major road to get something. Village centers are not great. For young people, being a part of the community, a large part of that comes from working. Village centers serve as a hub for that. Restaurants, Newtonville, and Newton Centre are examples of that. Spaces for young people that are able to study and be with friends. Cafe Nero is the alternative right now. You can have a job there and get food there. If a library was closer to Newton Centre, that would be great. 1 library in each village center.
- These should be made to feel more like a village center. The intersection is a killer, doesn't foster walkability. Senior year: having trouble finding a library to go to, so having one close by would be very helpful. Quiet open spaces, conducive to studying, might help the population get work done in an enjoyable manner. Having trouble picturing the 4 corners village, doesn't really stand out.
- Having trouble picturing 4 corners. Forgot it was considered a village center. Cars are always going by. Not someplace to go to after school. Make those environments more accessible to work...like West Newton cinema. Newton center has a green space, outside and relatively new. Would be great to have tents and picnic tables..more like what cafe Niro has to offer with outdoor seating. Want to have a nice place to do work.

Zoning proposals - after watching [the NewTV piece on the library exhibit](#)

Clarifying questions - was there something you found confusing?

Thoughts - is there something you feel strongly about? Something you feel like you need more time to sit with or want to talk about with this group?

Breakout room 1

- I think one of the biggest issues is that there is a lot of housing being built but not much parking. But there are vacant buildings. So the priority for me is the vacant storefronts
- I personally would rather see , allow for more floors to be built in village centers. ESpecially newtonville, Newton Centre - driving forces for Newton - would love for people to live in them and have access to public transportation, like the commuter rail and the green line. Especially have more affordable housing through the inclusionary zoning ordinance.
- I agree with the height thing - I don't think Newtonville is a good place for higher buildings, right now it feels like a residential area. But Newton Centre and Chestnut Hill - they're great places for higher buildings. Places that are more congestible with people would be best for that kind of thing. I was also thinking about this - will we ever see higher buildings here? Because I feel like seeing that would be interesting, because we would get more people to move in, more stores.
- As someone who lives right on the border of Newton & Waltham - I think that it's - one thing I value about Newton is that it doesn't have a super city-feel and it's not super compressed and with like, high-rises, and super tall buildings. And I also really value the amount of green area we have here - so I agree that we need more affordable housing, But as we're building up more and more housing, at least making sure that we still have green areas. One thing is in Newtonville, when they built up the Trio building, and then they put like a dog park next to it - that's like, kind of gravelly - I don't, something about that I just didn't like that much. Because it didn't feel like a green area. It felt like just supplementing high rises with more pavement.
- I agree with the importance of green space. I think back, they were planning on building a senior center on Albemarle field, which was right behind the middle school I went to, Day. And there was a lot of push back because that field was utilized by a lot of sports teams, and it was just a nice green field to have. And that shows that Newton really values that green space, because that ended up not getting passed.
- I also value green space but I do think that I would like to see Newton be more dense. Personally, seeing more of that medium sized housing is something I'd really like to see. Building more walkable and lively village centers is really important to me, and that comes with building higher. And I definitely think valuing green space is important, but I think there's a cost benefit analysis that needs to happen in terms of who gets to move in but I do think green spaces are part of vibrant areas. But not at the expense of trying to build more housing to be more affordable and contribute to a more welcoming community
- I think we should limit the areas where we can have the high rises - and taller buildings.
- I agree with what's said. Everything said about green spaces, I think that's really important because that's the thing that encourages people to go outside and hang-out more

- There needs to be affordable housing. But I also don't want the city centers to be super high. There's something about walking into Newtonville and having all of these one-story buildings. They don't have to be one-story, but when they start shooting up into the air, then it takes away from the feel of it. And I'm not saying all of that shouldn't be addressed. But I also don't want to lose the feel of the village centers.
- I agree there. And if you go to Newton North, I am pretty much 100% sure that you walk by my house when you go to Great Harvest or Cafe Nero, and I like the feel. But when I get closer to Boston and Chestnut Hill, I feel like it could be more developed.

Breakout room 2

- Consider how density and housing are relevant. Useful for young kids, more density, less outdoor space. Relax and have privacy. Density can be good, if houses are smaller, maybe more affordable. More spaced out.
- If there is more density, more people, there will be more kids there or kids living closer together. If housing was compacted, other space can be used to access more parks, etc.
- Space is expensive and not easy to come by. Ties into public green spaces in Newton. Most village centers, there is green space available. Hard to analyze the impact on kids there.
- How parking is relevant. That's what caught my attention. In the video, there are two spots for every unit, even if one person is in a unit, two spots. A lot of space is being taken up. Sustainability aspect: a lot of cement, all over Newton -> that's a lot. Doesn't seem like a big deal, large scale, interesting impact, and how large numbers can get.
- Newtonville: parking, don't know how change will help that kind of space. Like a big parking spot. Can walk around, go to different places.