

Breakout Room Notes

Reflections on the Zoning Redesign Community Engagement Network for the Village Center Zoning's Proposed Framework

Breakout room notes + GoogleDoc form submissions

These notes were taken in breakout rooms of the last Network meeting (#4) held on November 7, 2022.

of breakout rooms: 6 individuals

of attendees: 31 network members + 4 staff

Notes of answers to the following questions:

Question #1:

- **Rose: What is one thing that you liked about the network?**
- **Thorn: What is one thing that did not work for you?**
- **Bud: What is one thing you learned from your experience with the Network?**

Roses: What is one thing that you liked about the network?

- Enjoyed learning about zoning
- Brought civic involvement to church
- Personally, learned a lot about zoning and its impact
- Made me pay attention
- Made more people aware that this work was going on
- Material was a pretty good attempt to summarize the City's proposal. It was distilled in a useful way
- liked having a formula for engaging community. Had deadlines and structure.
- got me to the library to look at it and go through it with friends. Library was very informative and very good.
- Very good approach to engaging community. Planning department has done an incredible job at a very open process.
- There are no roses.
- Thought it was wonderful. It was very honest and very transparent.
- got to meet 1 new neighbor. The information is super organized.
- great to bring all of these different groups together. Seeing faces to names was great.
- A lot of people [from different congregations] who i emailed filled out the feedback tool on their own, without coming to my meeting
- i was really happy by how inclusive the planning dept was around engaging different groups that weren't just property owners. Renters + students + business owners, - how we tried to engage other minority groups, people with disabilities and LGBT.
- Person really dove into the material and became involved in a way they had not in the past; thinks and hopes this will make them more involved in the city in the future
- Liked the small sessions with Nevena at the plaza by Starbucks and Nero; liked talking to others and getting their opinions
- Liked the final presentation at the library

- Being able to look at the interests with the members of my groups and see how they align with other things like zoning- bring in people who might not know about zoning otherwise
- Talking with neighbors and friends and seeing them realize that they all do have an interest and stake in zoning, even though they might have thought they did not
- Did a field trip to the library and some new members and younger people got involved
- Really appreciated the library exhibit and it generated a lot of interest
- I sent an email with your info which was great, and links to many friends - people were receptive and positive about getting it.
- *City staff's response: We saw a lot of network members host their own engagement sessions, giving us city staff time to focus on equity outreach / being docents at the library. Also brought people with different political opinions into the room.*

●
Thorns: What is one thing that did not work for you?

- Felt like a moving target at times
- When reaching out to my community it was awkward at times
- I knew how I was going to engage and how from day 1 – so I wanted the content right away
- We didn't reach enough people and that was not successful
- My group thought it was a lot of work to engage with the material and thoughtfully respond
- The multiple choices felt like only “yes” and “yes, but” which would skew the results
- Did not understand why the maps were released before the feedback results were calculated
- hurry up and wait. Lots of time to get ready and then had to quickly act.
- hard to find time with busy schedule
- Exhibit didn't provide the correct structure. Need more explanation of what the terms mean. Had a lot of people asking questions about what this means. No consistent expression of building height and context. Outreach wasn't done correctly. Should've gone out in utility bills. Nobody knows about this, they're just hearing about it now with the mapping. Not one size fits all. Nothing was productive. Library was way too dense. Six week was not enough.
- Did two info sessions for area council
- life events happening, family sickness, life events.
- wasn't totally sure what to say - there was a lot of leeway - but it did leave you to figure out how to do things on your own. Spent a lot of time at the library exhibit. I wish i had known more about the zoning and background and all of that. Did feel like a lot of work to figure it all out.
- took me some time on what the network was going to be - what the planning room would be. How explanatory it would be.
- unpleasantness/difficulty of dealing with opposing agendas. Sense that even though we engaged a lot of people there are still many more to engage, groups that we did not hear from
- Tried to diversify their group, but this was difficult
- Had some know-it-all types on their call who wanted to be in charge
- The Library presentation had too much info- you'd need a full week to learn about

- everything
- Timing- lots of parents and students, having it over the summer and fall was tough
- Sustainability teachers who wished to engage students
- Planned the timing wrong and had trouble doing all they had planned for one of the meetings
- Library exhibit was text heavy and made people feel overwhelmed; people weren't sure what to take away
- NCBR [Newton Coalition of Black Residents] - this was also not a pressing topic for this group - tried to get them together around this but could not. These are trying times for Black residents - they have been trying to get a diversity and inclusion staff member at city hall for years to no avail., which is more pressing for them. Police, inclusion - these are top-of-mind issues.
- had a relatively difficult and poor experience reaching people. would say that people in her group could be classified as high-income. neighbors were not around for the summer. felt the tools and the process was complicated to use. Working the online menu was difficult
- She went to the library twice - it was confusing - no way to understand what was going on.
- *City staff's response: The network was a lot of work!!! The meetings also often became debates around the zoning content, versus focusing on the engagement part. And it was hard to balance the fact that we were still developing the engagement material...*
 - -> type of work is never static, never a moment where we really 'stop'.

Learned/ Bud: What is one thing you learned from your experience with the Network?

- There is a variety of opinion and strong feelings
- Actually, got through to some people and had an impact
- There needs to be a stronger feedback loop. The network was not considered enough
- The feedback tool could have been workshopped through a focus group
- liked engaging as many people as possible.
- felt good that more people would have an opportunity to weigh in
- There are no buds.
- learned a lot but wasn't too comfortable explaining it
- Material wasn't translated. Had an interpreter. People found the beginning of the tool a bit difficult. Get material to them before the meeting. Or take it home in their language and then fill out the tool later.
- Valuable to give presentations.
- because we couldn't meet the way we wanted to, being really flexible - about how to engage people
- interesting that so many people came from different POVs. some people had really strong opinions, others didn't. Was interesting to see how different people interpreted their roles in it. Some people were like, here's our take on it. And others were more neutral in the place - shared the information the best i could.
- there were some technicalities that i learned. Details in the exhibit and feedback tool were really good, really informative.
- people learned more than they had known about opposing groups; learned more about detailed issues;

- General comment about the value of breakout rooms, particularly with zoom
- Hope that this has really engaged people in a positive way
- More transparency with the city
- Saw a lot of people engaged about zoning at a public meeting; the network educated people and brought more people in to the conversation about zoning
- Hope that the Community Engagement structure will stay in existence and be used in the future
- It's a challenge to engage the low-income resident group - The topic was not amenable to low-income residents. there are so many issues that are pressing for this group. They are not focused on village centers . It was an excellent opportunity to try and gather these folks though
- It would have been good to have a briefer overview for some folks
- I wish we could have gone back and edited the information
- The idea of having a one-pager would be appealing in future info. [like a] Campaign
- *City staff's response: We saw new faces! (People we have not seen at ZAP meetings before.) It was especially great to have high schools and people from community groups that we haven't heard from before. But it was also difficult to take up enough time to 'train' those folks on zoning and catch everyone up to speed.*

Question #2: Would you want the Planning Dept to host something like the network for future big planning projects? If unsure, is there something you'd want changed if it was used in the future? List 1 reason for your answer

- Yes - majority of group felt the network could be used in other applications
- If the primary purpose was educational, then it was a great process
- Only worth it if we engage more people
- good way to reach people we wouldn't otherwise. Would have different levels - beginner, intermediate and advanced and some prep for those not involved before.
- Like the idea of different levels, meeting people where they're at. Fluidity and back and forth could be more productive. Need to have people who can directly answer content questions. Randomness of inviting people in off the street. Timeline needs to be at least two years. Invite each ward into room for conversation.
- like idea of different levels and longer period of time (though people have other priorities and think this has taken a long time).
- splendid idea for reaching more people. Better than fights in city council committee meetings. Strongly encourage doing this again. Think about people who want to participate but aren't part of a group.
- Appreciate the process, would like to see more of it. Made use of tabling at events that are already happening; a nice way to go to where people already are;
- Yes - hope this models continues. Even just within the 90 people in the network all know way more about this - even without the engagement, .
- Executive summary / mid-level /
- Like to be further trained
- Most people don't take phone calls anymore, [which makes engagement difficult for] people who are too scared [of Covid.],

- Asian community has significant events. New years, performances - if we collaborated with that event, we could have the brochure or one pager and get to those events. That would definitely get the attention and reach to the people - from a technology view, or if we go to this performance, we have the same interest this way.
 - Dragon boat
 - If i could do this again, i would target those events
- Thought this was a great idea, would like Planning Cmte to reach out to us and that the City will be more transparent with their plans and really listen to the people; who knows what the city will really do? Newton will do what Newton is going to go anyway; this is all fireworks
- Also thought the network is a great idea, also wants to be sure that the Council reads people's feedback, otherwise, people will lose trust, this is a waste of time and energy
 - Wondering where are all the ideas from the people they engaged? Did not see any of that in the Newton Highlands redesign
 - Hopeful about the hybrid format
 - More transparency
- This was a "first pancake"- a little lumpy, sticky, but once the pan is prepared, then the following pancakes will turn out better; there is a lot of potential in this structure
 - One change: make sure the City Councilors really actually understand what the Community Engagement Network is and how it works; that this is a tool of democracy, not something for them to be afraid of, a tool for them to hear from their constituents and respond to them in making zoning rules
- Community engagement programming is a fabulous tool for reaching her groups - she would welcome more opportunities and tools for outreach.
- The need for forums that will allow trust-building exercises and sharing would be great.
- The network was a great idea
- Zoom has limitations; I would have liked more time to chat with network members and be able to know them better.
- More reality-based graphics would have been helpful.
- Waban residents tended not to want to spend the time, and their eyes would glaze over at the topic of village centers...
- More info is needed.
- Not enough future looking.
- Waban residents may not care about the village thing.
- This is a great tool you have developed and with refinement, it has lots of applications.
- The idea of people being able to get into the info. At varying depths is essential. Some want the elevator speech... some want 15 minutes, and some can never get enough...
- *City staff's response: We are interested in it but perhaps more as a hybrid, where a couple meetings are for the whole public - anyone who wants to engage their respective spaces - and then more concerted efforts to train/ prepare community members with an equitable lens.*

Zoom Poll Answers

1.How did you engage your community space? (Click all that apply.)	2.How many people of your community space do you think you engaged? (# of people you had a meaningful conversation with and/or completed the feedback tool)
Zoom meeting	5 to 10 people
Zoom meeting; Phone calls	More than 10
Zoom meeting; In-person meeting (not at the library exhibit - at a different location); Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	More than 10
In-person meeting (at the library exhibit); Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	More than 10
Zoom meeting; In-person meeting (not at the library exhibit - at a different location); Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	5 to 10 people
In-person meeting (at the library exhibit); Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	5 to 10 people
Zoom meeting; Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	5 to 10 people
Zoom meeting; Phone calls; Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	5 to 10 people
In-person meeting (not at the library exhibit - at a different location)	5 to 10 people
In-person meeting (at the library exhibit); In-person meeting (not at the library exhibit - at a different location)	5 to 10 people
Zoom meeting	More than 10
Zoom meeting	5 to 10 people
Zoom meeting	1 to 4 people
Zoom meeting; Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	5 to 10 people
In-person meeting (at the library exhibit); Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	More than 10
In-person meeting (not at the library exhibit - at a different location); Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	5 to 10 people
In-person meeting (at the library exhibit); Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	5 to 10 people
In-person meeting (not at the library exhibit - at a different location)	More than 10
Zoom meeting; Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	More than 10
Zoom meeting	5 to 10 people
In-person meeting (not at the library exhibit - at a different location); Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers;	
Other	1 to 4 people
Raised awareness through emails, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and/or fliers	5 to 10 people

GoogleDoc Form Submissions

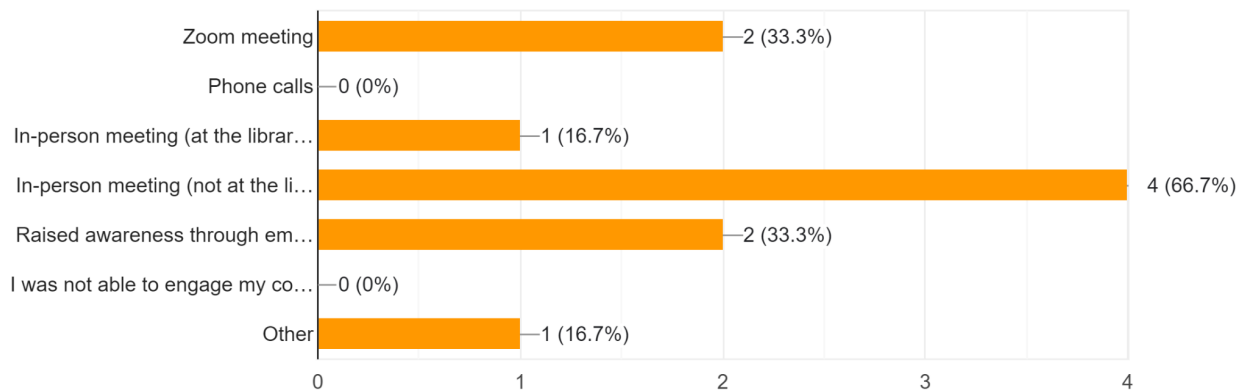
Reflections on the Zoning Redesign Community Engagement Network for the Village Center Zoning's Proposed Framework

The GoogleDoc form listed the same questions asked in the last meeting (meeting #4), held on November 7, 2022.

of submissions: 6 individuals

Answers from all 6 submissions:

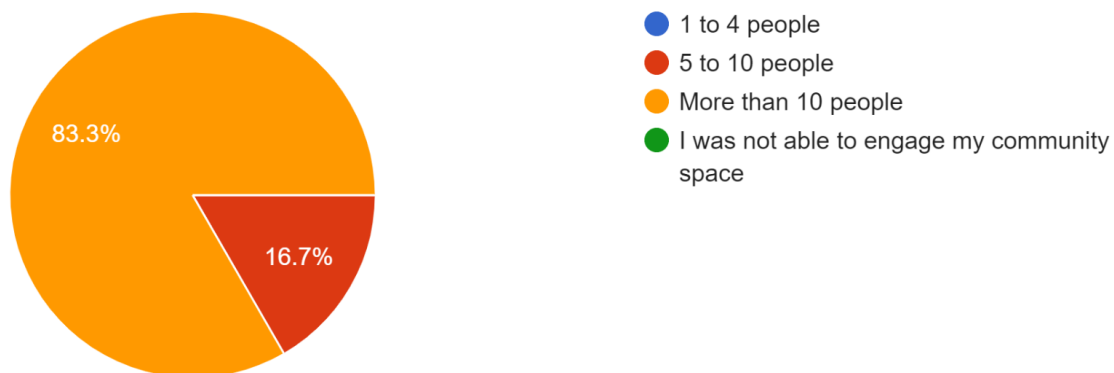
How did you engage your community space? Click all that apply.



If you answered 'other' to the last question, please describe:

- We posted flyers inside the Senior Center.

How many people of your community space do you think you engaged? (# of people you had a meaningful conversation with and/or completed the feedback tool via your engagement)



What is one thing you liked about the network?

- brought together many people from all over newton
- Meeting new people and hearing feedback from them.
- Met some new people who shared my sentiments and displeasure with this whole process
- Excellent materials
- The city's effort to transparently engage the community and encourage conversation and feedback on a complex topic.
- I enjoyed meeting people from various departments and non-profits.

What is one thing about the network that did not work for you or was difficult?

- Some voices and opinions were louder and more frequent despite frequent reminders to share the space.
- We were not provided with information-bullet points, cheat sheet for our engagement.
- "Lack of hard copies to share with participants who aren't comfortable with technology . Our concerns with the process and tool were not listened to in fact they were ignored
- Lack of maps of boundaries was a big problem "
- What our roles would be took a while to understand but was certainly explained and we were very well supported.
- I really needed a slide deck to guide my Zoom meeting rather than phone call and email scripts. I also found it difficult to engage others when I didn't feel expert myself.
- The feedback tool was introduced to us too early. It should have been more developed before we met to discuss it.

What is one thing you learned from your experience with the network?

- "It was a disingenuous process with lack of transparency and it was designed to pretend that the Planning Dept wanted input from residents . Shame on all of you "
- People do need things made very very simple. Zoning does have a "too complicated" reputation. The Feedback Tool impressed me as a simplified structure to guide many layered questions. I hope it generated enough feedback and useful too!
- I'm eager to stay engaged to ensure a wide range of voices and perspectives are heard by the city.
- I learned how important art is to many people and why it should be part of every village center.

Would you want the Planning Department to host something like the network for future big planning projects? Or would you want to see it in the future but on the condition of something changing? Please share at least 1 reason for your response.

- I think that the network was overall a net positive. I would ask that the network consider appropriate ways to moderate community network discussions to discourage disruptive behavior (see what was difficult) in the future.
- Not unless there is more of a chance for discussion of the topic and more educational materials provided. I don't like the style of presentation with no actual opportunity to get honest and unscripted feedback.
- No way because it is not an open process and the Planning Dept is going to do what they want to do
- I'd be open to it. It was more creative than simply going to meetings and I enjoyed talking to 12 neighbors very much. But I'd like to find a way to move the entire process faster. I don't know if Somerville process was more efficient. We need to feel like we are seeing some action and results. Development is happening fast in Newton.
- Yes, to help shape the future of our city.
- Yes, but streamline the process.