



# Zoning & Planning Committee Report

## City of Newton In City Council

**Monday, January 9, 2023**

Present: Councilors Crossley (Chair), Albright, Danberg, Wright, Leary, Baker, Krintzman, and Ryan

Also Present: Councilors Lipof, Bowman, Kalis, Oliver, Downs, Kelley, Lucas, Malakie

City Staff: Barney Heath, Director of Planning; Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director of Planning; and Jaclyn Norton, Committee Clerk

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link: [01-09-23 Zoning & Planning Committee Meeting](#)

**Chair's Note:** *For the following item the Zoning & Planning Committee will be hearing from community groups on Version 1.0 of the [draft zoning text](#) and [draft maps](#).*

**#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)

**Action:**      **Zoning & Planning Held 8-0**

**Note:**      The Chair noted that tonight is set aside to hear directly from Boards, Commissions and many community groups who have been closely following committee work since ZAP began to study village center zoning in early 2021. Understanding that the committee and staff are continuing to evaluate the maps and metrics, and a version 2 will reflect changes in about two months, the intent is to hear constructive criticism regarding Version 1.0 of the draft zoning text and draft maps. Twenty groups registered to speak this evening, many registering just before the deadline, so it was decided there would not be time to allow visual presentations. Each group submitted short descriptions of themselves, when founded, their mission and who they represent, which the chair will read into the record ahead of each testimonial. Two Councilors raised objections to the decision to not allow presenters to share slides during the meeting, but the sense of the committee was to proceed according to the expectations of all groups. The Chair encouraged groups to send any visual presentations and testimonials to the Zoning & Planning Committee Clerk, Jaclyn Norton, ([jnorton@newtonma.gov](mailto:jnorton@newtonma.gov)) to be posted on the website [here](#) and forwarded to the Committee.

The following groups testified before the Committee for almost 3 hours. Below are short summaries of key points made.

*Note: if a group submitted testimony in writing it is linked to the name of the group. Visual materials submitted with testimony may not have been vetted for accuracy against versions 1 of the proposed zoning. Full audio visual is linked to the report above.*

[Newton Housing Partnership](#), founded in 1989, works to support the preservation and creation of housing to promote economic diversity in Newton. Chair Lizbeth Heyer presented on behalf of the Partnership and proposed the following revisions: expanded use of VC1 district, lower residential parking requirements, increase maximum height of residential development in VC3 districts, reduction of the minimum building separation on a lot, and to consider incentives for projects with over fifty percent (50%) affordable units.

**The Planning & Development Board** is created by chapter 705 of the Acts of 1975 and serves as the Community Development Board, the Planning Board, the Board of Survey, the designator of Scenic Roads, and as an advisory board to the Newton Community Development Authority (NCDA). Chair Kelley Brown, spoke about the Board's involvement in the process so far and expressed support for the core concepts of the proposal.

**West Newton Preservation Initiative** was founded in 2016 and works to support restoration and renovation to meet evolving needs. Laura Foote and Peter Dimond presented and noted the need to document landmarked buildings and cited concerns over a potential increase in the demolition of important existing buildings.

The Chair and Deputy Director of Planning Jennifer Caira clarified that documentation of landmark buildings, and the adaptive reuse section will be added in Version 2.0. Ms. Caira further noted that nothing in the zoning proposal would preclude the existing landmark process.

[Unite! West Newton](#) was founded during the City's "Hello Washington Street" rezoning initiative. Ellen Weinberger and Richard Heald presented. Both noted concerns regarding increasing density in West Newton and the impact this could have on small businesses. They do not feel that the Washington Street Vision Plan is sufficiently guiding the zoning proposal.

**The Newton Historical Commission** was created by city ordinance for the preservation, promotion, and development of historical or archeological assets of the City. Chair Doug Cornelius presented for the NHC and urged for zoning requirements that encourage the preservation of existing important buildings.

**The Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council** was created in the 1970s according to the City Charter and serves an area comprising Newton Highlands and Four Corners on City

matters affecting their district. and was represented by Nathaniel Lichtin. He expressed a community desire to preserve and incentivize open green space within the village center, and opposition to the VC3 zone being applied to the Newton Highlands map.

Staff made clear that existing public open space will not be changed resulting from the proposed zoning and that in fact design standards increase sidewalk width required for new construction and certain minimum distances between buildings.

**The Newton Affordable Housing Trust**, established in early 2022 by city ordinance, whose charge is to create and preserve affordable housing within Newton. Ann Houston, Chair, and Peter Sargent, Vice Chair, were present. Ms. Huston expressed general support for the direction this zoning is going, and proposed AP consider a 1 story height bonus for projects that are one hundred percent (100%) affordable units.

**Right Size Newton**, founded in 2019, advocates for human-scale development and was represented by Diane Prunte. In her testimony, this mission was echoed along with advocating for increased green space within village centers.

Doris Ann Sweet and Kathy Pillsbury presented for the [Zoning Subcommittee of Engine 6](#), who formed in 2013 to promote more equitable, affordable, and abundant housing. They support the zoning initiative as an important climate action and advocated for more equitable housing near transit along with the need to create more housing in Newton.

The [Newton Corner Neighborhood Association](#) was represented by Robin Boger. Ms. Boger noted the history of the Newton Corner village and the impacts of the Massachusetts Turnpike on the village center. Caution was expressed regarding further increasing density within the village without considerations for walkability and preserving open greenspace.

**Charles River Regional Chamber of Commerce** was represented by their president, Greg Reibman. The Chamber serves to champion economic and cultural vitality among its member communities. Mr. Riebman noted the urgency of providing adequate housing for the workforce, that 44% of Newtonians are now working from home (up from 10.5% preCOVID) and the overall economic benefits of the zoning proposal.

Marc Hershman presented on behalf of the members of the [Architects + Newton Zoning Consulting Group](#) which was founded during the redesign of the garage ordinance. This group advocated for preserving the existing physical character of individual villages and limiting increases in density.

MaryLee Belleville represented the **Warren/Glen/Elgin BP Committee** which works to foster a sense of community for Warren St, Elgin Road, and Glen Ave residents, and recently broadened its mission to follow development issues. Ms. Belleville advocated for increases in affordable housing but expressed concern with increasing by-right development.

[The Green Newton Building Standards Committee \(GNBSC\)](#) works to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions in Newton's buildings and was represented by Dan Ruben. Mr. Ruben noted the urgency of addressing climate change for the sake of our young people's future prospects. He noted the positive impacts this zoning proposal can have on mitigating the effects of climate change, and that it represents a critical component of Newton's adopted Climate Action Plan. GNBSC also urges Council to act swiftly to adopt this plan – or to strengthen it.

**Newton Node 350.org Mass** also works to limit greenhouse gas emissions but is part of a national and state organization. They were represented by Peter Barrer, who explained what that 350 stands for the amount of carbon that can exist to achieve a stable climate, that we are now far exceeding this number, and we must act to reverse this trend. He echoed the messages of the Green Newton Building Standards Committee in support of the zoning proposal.

**Clafin St/Washington Park Neighbors** formed in Dec of 2022 after the Village Center community meeting, to provide residents with information about zoning redesign efforts. They were represented by Peter Bruce and Susan Reisler. Mr. Bruce expressed concerns with the current transit-oriented development within Newton, while Ms. Reisler focused on gentrification concerns. When asked for clarification on how to improve transit-oriented development Mr. Bruce advocated for more development near rapid transit.

[The Building Professionals Zoning Working Group](#) has been working to analyze proposed zoning revisions in Newton over the past several years. Jonathan Kantar and Russel Feldman represented this group, expressing broad support for the zoning proposal and making specific suggestions for inclusion in the upcoming adaptive reuse section to incentivize renovations of important existing buildings.

[The Fair Housing Committee](#) works to support the City's efforts to eliminate housing discrimination and was represented by Tatjana Meschede. Ms. Meschede noted the importance of zoning to achieve this mission and urged for the development of more multi-family accessible housing.

One Councilor asked regarding progress toward compliance with MBTA Communities. Director of Planning Barney Heath responded that the Planning Department is currently using the DHCD Compliance tool to evaluate compliance, is seeing progress with the current version of draft zoning and will do the same with subsequent versions. Multiple Councilors noted the need for more housing in the City. Committee members voted 8-0 on a motion to hold from Councilor Albright.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15pm.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Deborah J. Crossley, Chair**