



Ruthanne Fuller,
Mayor

Barney Heath,
Director
Planning & Development

Members:
Lizbeth Heyer, Chair
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CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Newton Housing Partnership

January 10, 2023

Chairpersons Crossley and Doeringer
Newton Zoning and Planning Committee
Newton Planning Board
Newton City Hall, Newton, MA
02459

Dear Chairpersons Crossley and Doeringer,

The Newton Housing Partnership (NHP) appreciates your leadership and commitment to the zoning redesign process -- an unprecedented and powerful opportunity to modify our zoning code to make it possible to diversify and expand housing options, including housing that is more affordable and accessible than most options currently available in Newton. We are also in awe of the public outreach and engagement process the City has conducted- it's a model of civic engagement that has established a strong consensus for zoning changes that will lead to greater and more affordable housing options in our villages where jobs, transportation and services can be easily accessed.

It has been fifty years since the original version of Chapter 40B passed the State Legislature and yet Newton still has not achieved 10% affordability -- we clearly need more tools. There are four other primary ways to expand affordable and lower cost housing in Newton: build more housing with government subsidies, build more projects with inclusionary units, increase the stock of smaller, more affordable units throughout the City, shift our region's significant imbalance between supply and demand via larger scale and accelerated housing production. For Newton to significantly increase the affordable stock we must do all four and zoning reform is a critical tool for each.

We are supportive of the proposed village center overlay maps and associated allowances and design guidelines that will create more as of right multi-family development opportunities in locations that offer greater and more equitable social and economic opportunities for low and middle-income households. The scale and diversity of apartment



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types this will facilitate will inherently provide the opportunity for a lower price point and help shift the radical imbalance in supply and demand - a regional crisis that has driven up housing costs well beyond what most working families and retired people can afford and the motivation behind the state's MBTA Communities Act which we strongly encourage the City to comply with.

We are especially encouraged that the expanded as of right opportunities that the village center zones will create will lead to greater development predictability; this simplified approval process will expedite and therefore reduce the cost of housing production. Reducing the need for special permits in designated districts will also make the expensive and risky process of developing subsidized housing more feasible. This will ultimately encourage more deed restricted affordable development at scale - which is the quickest and most effective way to expand affordable housing options in Newton.

New as of right zoning options in our villages will also contribute to compliance with the state's MBTA Communities Act, an important step in complying with the state-wide effort to address the housing crisis in the same thoughtful way as is being contemplated here. The proposed village center zones will make it possible for more people to afford housing near transportation and services and ultimately support the sustainability and viability of our workforce - the backbone of our economy.

The Partnership is supportive of the direction the 3 proposed village center map zones and design guidelines are taking and we share the following five suggestions to strengthen what is being contemplated as the effort moves forward, hopefully to adoption this year:

1. We strongly encourage the Council to consider several as-of-right bonus provisions for projects that include greater than 50% of their units as affordable:
 - a. An additional floor in VC2 and VC3;
 - b. A slightly greater maximum building footprint in VC2 and VC3 to support projects that would benefit from scale for operational feasibility;



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- c. An allowance for 100% residential buildings at the full allowable height of 5.5 stories (inclusive of the proposed bonus floor) in VC3;
 - d. A residential parking requirement of .5.
2. We believe the VC1 districts can be expanded, leading to greater opportunities to get more smaller units into contextual structures, and therefore inherently more housing at a lower price point. Opportunities to expand VC2 and VC3 should also be explored in ways that are consistent with stated community impact principles which we generally support, but fear may be applied in ways that unnecessarily prohibit more housing in feasible locations.
3. Overall, we support a lower residential parking requirement than the 1-to-1 ratio currently proposed. We recommend the Council consider a requirement closer to 0.75. This would particularly enhance the feasibility of small to mid-size developments on infill sites near transportation which are common in our villages and is consistent with recent studies on actual parking utilization.
4. In VC3, the proposed height limit drops from 4.5 stories to 2.5 stories if the building is all residential. We understand that this is a means of encouraging desired mixed-use development in our villages, but in some VC3 locations an all residential development may be warranted and beneficial. If the goal is to encourage mixed-use development, we encourage the Council to seek incentives to do so, rather than penalize residential development by restricting the height of all-residential buildings in the VC3 zones, especially because greater scale can support more affordability.
5. The minimum distance of 25 feet between multiple buildings in the design standards feels overly restrictive and will make it harder to achieve a scale that supports meaningful affordability. We encourage greater study on this requirement to appropriately reduce the minimum distance while still achieving the goal of mitigating the bulk of a group of buildings.



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Especially as Newton's housing prices continue to escalate while the need for housing that is inclusive and affordable to all is unprecedented, we urge you to adopt changes to the zoning code for our village centers to support a measured but meaningful increase to our affordable housing supply.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lizbeth Heyer, Newton Housing Partnership Chair

Cc.
Mayor Fuller
President Albright
Newton City Council
Newton Planning Board
Barney Heath