



To: Zoning & Planning Committee
Planning Department

From: Engine 6 Zoning Redesign Group

Date: April 24, 2020

Re: Draft New Zoning Ordinance—Recommendations

[As we have said](#), we think Zoning Redesign should address Newton's two biggest challenges—the housing shortage and climate change—and should have goals to match: 1) enabling the creation of a lot more multifamily and affordable homes; and 2) ensuring that their creation enhances our sustainability.

We have a few broad, practical recommendations (for starters) for accomplishing these goals:

- Revise the zoning maps to locate higher-density districts such as R4 and N within a half-mile walk from village centers and transit nodes—[see the maps Kathy Pillsbury made](#) of areas around rail stations, based on actual walking distances (taking into account obstacles like the Mass Pike and Route 9). ** We should seriously consider Express Bus stops, not just rail stations.**
- Plug the hole between the small apartment-building type and mixed-use types: Add one or more all-residential apartment-building types with 12+ units (12 is minimum for elevators).
- Expand the definitions and use of small-scale density—especially multifamily housing—throughout the residential districts and building types, including accessory units, multi-unit conversions, and rear lots.
- For all these housing options, reduce or eliminate special-permit requirements.

Some general considerations:

- The new code should allow for housing in all economic ranges, all across the city, but should especially encourage [“missing middle” housing](#), for the many who don't qualify for subsidy and can't afford high-end, market-rate housing.
- For Newton's rapidly growing senior population, it should also encourage [accessibility](#), particularly near village centers and public transit, including elevator buildings and stacked multifamily homes with accessible ground-floor units.
- Much more [multifamily housing](#) should be [allowable by right](#). If we're going to meet our housing objectives (e.g., our share of 185,000 units by 2030—see [Metro Mayors Coalition Regional Housing Task Force](#)), we need to [substantially increase production](#), all across the city.

The principles guiding our thoughts on Zoning Redesign:

- Social inclusion and diversity
- Environmental sustainability
- Economic fairness and prosperity

These are the same principles that prevailed in public conversations around other recent policy efforts (Housing Strategy, Transportation Strategy, Climate Action Plan, “visions” for Needham Street and Washington Street)—not to mention the successful citywide campaign to save Northland. They should also carry Zoning Redesign. We look forward to continuing to work with the City on this.