

Livable Newton

Coalition for inclusive, sustainable development

October 1, 2020

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller (rfuller@newtonma.gov)

Zoning and Planning (ZAP) Committee Chair Deb Crossley (dcrossley@newtonma.gov)

Dear Mayor Fuller and Councilor Crossley:

We, affiliate members of the broad-based coalition “Livable Newton,” are writing to express our appreciation for [the letter](#) the Newton Housing Partnership sent you on August 26. In this letter, they lay out their own goals for Zoning Redesign, explain how the latest revision of the draft ordinance conforms to these goals, and suggest further changes.

The NHP’s professional experience in housing development is impressive, and we trust their overall assessment that Zoning Redesign is headed in the right direction. It is sobering, however, to contemplate the facts they highlight and attribute to the excessive constraints of our current zoning code and permitting rules:

- Our current average rent is \$2,800 and our median sales price is \$1,300,000—with no sign of leveling off.
- Chapter 40B has been in force for over 50 years, and we still haven’t achieved 10% affordability—which was always a minimum goal, not a measure of actual human need, which [we know to be much greater](#).

The NHP helpfully clarifies why allowing various forms of “gentle density”—contextually appropriate, “naturally” lower-cost multifamily—throughout the city, and higher density near transit and village centers, has to be part of the solution to housing scarcity and unaffordability here.

We support the NHP’s recommendations for increasing “gentle density” opportunities in the new ordinance: allowing detached accessory apartments by right, reducing the minimum unit size, and (within appropriate dimensional and parking bounds) increasing from two to four the allowable number of by-right units for any given lot.

We in the Livable Newton coalition represent a broad range of interests and expertise—environmental sustainability, transportation, economic development, social justice, a well-functioning democracy, in addition to housing—but we all understand the crucial part that safe, convenient, varied, plentiful housing must play in progress toward a more inclusive, fair, and sustainable city.

We hope you will be guided by the NHP’s letter, and you’ll consider sharing it with the city in your next email update.

Sincerely,

Fran Godine for Engine 6

Kerry Prasad for Families Organizing for Racial Justice (FORJ)

Rev. Devlin Scott for NewCity Church

Marion Pollock and Carol Berlin for Temple Shalom of Newton Tzedek Team

Newton Community Development Foundation (NCDF)

Susan Davidoff for Progressive Newton

Citizens for Affordable Housing in Newton Development Organization (CAN-DO)

Brendan Keegan, President, Bike Newton

Jonathan Kantar