



Zoning Redesign: Yes—for Newton’s future!

Rev. 12/13/20—before 2021 community engagement & City discussions re village center rezoning

Planning for an inclusive, sustainable Newton

Our **outdated zoning ordinance**¹—the laws governing development and renovation—has created a city with very few housing choices and limited ability to address climate change. To realize our shared vision of a diverse, welcoming city with a smaller carbon footprint, Newton urgently needs a redesigned zoning ordinance that reflects our values and the times we live in.

Zoning Redesign: Building a better future

Newton is at a crossroads. We have a once-in-a generation opportunity to make Newton a more sustainable and livable city, where anyone—seniors, young folk, growing families, single parents, city employees, and people of all incomes and abilities—can find a safe, affordable, planet-friendly home. Read on for how we can:

- **Increase** our housing opportunities citywide
- **Promote** economic and environmental sustainability

The problem

In Newton, 76% of “developable” land is zoned for residential use. On 80% of that, only detached single-family houses can be built “by right,” without a special permit. Getting a special permit to build a house for two or more families in a single-family district is only possible in the rarest of cases, due to high minimum-lot-size and lot-area-per-unit requirements, and the need for at least 16 of our 24 City Councilors to approve them.²

This regulatory exclusivity effectively bans multifamily homes, even small-scale, “infill” apartment buildings, in large swaths of the city. This has helped push up rents and home prices beyond the reach of far too many.

The impacts are hard to ignore. For example:

- **The median** sales price for a detached single-family house has increased dramatically in the past 10 years, [from \\$737,750 to \\$1,260,000](#).
- **Compared with 2010**, Newton in 2019 had 4,200 fewer households with annual incomes of less than \$100,000, and 3,800 more households with annual incomes greater than \$200,000.

¹ See Alice Ingerson’s “[Newton Zoning Timeline, 1921–1953](#).”

² Exception: “Internal” accessory apartments are allowed by right everywhere. Detached ones need a special permit.

- **We are [less racially diverse](#)** than Massachusetts as a whole: Only 3.1% of our population is Black or African-American (vs. 6.7% statewide), and only 5.5% is Hispanic or Latino (vs. 11.2% statewide).

Seniors who can no longer manage the houses they've lived in for decades, people with disabilities, young professionals who want to live close to public transit and amenities such as grocery stores and restaurants, people who work for the City or in local businesses—without a wider variety of housing options, we're shutting them out.

Our current ordinance limits our housing stock and keeps it unnecessarily large and [expensive](#). We simply can't build the kind of homes we need—2- and 3-family homes, denser forms of "[missing middle](#)" homes, even smaller single-family houses on smaller lots—in the places where we need them: within walking distance of transit and amenities. This limits our prosperity and our environmental sustainability.

The way forward

For Newton to become affordable to more people and less dependent on transit by car, we need to redesign our zoning ordinance around these priorities. This is exactly what the Zoning and Planning Committee of the Newton City Council (ZAP), together with the city's Planning Department, is attempting to do with Zoning Redesign.

But there are strong headwinds. For whatever reason, some groups and individuals are misrepresenting recent changes to the [draft new Article 3](#) (Residence Districts). Some are calling for a halt to Zoning Redesign, or for scaling it back to a set of "tweaks."

We support the ambitious goals and direction of Zoning Redesign, and will share accurate information, correct misunderstandings, and generate enthusiasm for this exciting project. To become the community we want to be, we can't settle for anything less.

How you can help

To ensure that the ordinance we adopt reflects our values and achieves our shared vision, we don't need to become planning experts—but we do need to care! Please pay attention to the [ZAP discussions](#), and get informed. You could explore the zoning resources on our website and subscribe to our updates. When you're able...

Speak up for a more inclusive and sustainable city! Our City Councilors need to hear from you. They receive a constant stream of emails and calls from residents who oppose the kinds of changes we seek, and they need to hear from you, too.

- **Get informed**—explore our website (especially [Zoning Redesign](#), [Zoning & Newton History](#)). [Sign up](#) for updates! See also the [City's Zoning Redesign resources](#).
- **Attend** ZAP meetings—dates, agendas (often with background material), and reports [here](#).
- **Send emails** to City Council, Mayor, and Planning Department—click [here](#) to start (Council email), and paste the following into the cc line: rfuller@newtonma.gov, bheath@newtonma.gov, zlemel@newtonma.gov, ddelaney@newtonma.gov.
- **Talk** to your City Councilors—contact info [here](#).
- **Testify** at public hearings—eventually. Stay tuned!