

**From:** Kathleen Hobson khobson65@gmail.com  
**Subject:** Zoning Redesign: Racial Justice as Housing justice  
**Date:** June 15, 2020 at 9:11 AM

**To:** Ruthanne Fuller rf Fuller@newtonma.gov

**Cc:** Newton City Council citycouncil@newtonma.gov, Barney Heath bheath@newtonma.gov, Dana Hanson dhanson@newtonma.gov



Dear Mayor Fuller,

In recent newsletters, you write movingly about our community's responses to the deaths of black Americans at the hands of police in other cities, and to Newton resident Tim Duncan's frightening encounter with our own police a couple weeks ago. You hear the clamor for racial justice and real change. We hear it, too, in sometimes surprising conversations with neighbors and City Councilors. This moment feels different, somehow. Many people are suddenly seeing the world more clearly, ready to try something new. We look forward to hearing you speak tonight about our current challenges, and about new possibilities.

Police killings of black Americans and Mr. Duncan's run-in with the Newton police reveal a hard truth about the United States in 2020: 52 years after the passage of the federal Fair Housing Act, we are still a segregated society. Whites and blacks for the most part live separate and unequal lives. Changes in Newton policing will not change this underlying truth, which will continue to inform police behavior. For this truth to change, we need to change how we live. To have racial justice, we need housing justice.

This is the challenge and the promise of [Zoning Redesign](#). As a [young marcher in the June 4 Line Up for Black Lives said](#), there are reasons we don't see many black families in Newton. The main reason is our housing policy, embodied in our zoning ordinance. We will not achieve "[the truly welcoming, equitable and inclusive community to which we aspire](#)" without transformational Zoning Redesign: a new ordinance with a new map that allows us to create substantially more housing, and more housing choices, serving a broader range of people and human needs—equitably, all across the city.

For this to happen—for Zoning Redesign to produce housing justice—we believe your leadership is required. We have great respect for the members of the Zoning and Planning Committee, and for the attentive and hard-working Planning Department staff assigned to the project, but they need help. The draft ordinance now under review (which it seems none of the current planners had much if anything to do with) is narrowly focused on lesser concerns: reconciling lot nonconformities, deterring speculative tear-downs, preserving neighborhood character, and generally minimizing change.

Without your intervention, the new ordinance would produce a Newton that is barely less segregated than the one we have now, just as economically exclusive, featuring essentially the same physical and social boundaries as the ones in the 1938 Home Owners' Loan Corporation "redlining" map of Newton. [This side-by-side comparison](#) of that old map and the October 2018 draft zoning map tells the story. Zoning Redesign is an enormous opportunity for you, your biggest to date. It should be something you and everyone can all be proud of. It should not simply perpetuate the status quo.

We'll be listening tonight to your address to the city. We hope the racially discriminatory impact of zoning will be among the critical issues you speak to, and that you'll identify a reinvigorated Zoning Redesign process as a way to start us down a better path. We have some ideas about this, and we hope you'll meet with a few of us very soon to discuss them.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Hobson, Alice Ingerson, Lisa Monahan, Kathy Pillsbury, Sean Roche, Doris Ann Sweet, Jay Walter  
*Engine 6 Zoning Redesign Working Group*

Fran Godine, Lynn Weissberg, Nancy Zollers  
*Engine 6 Leadership Team*

P.S. Here are two short videos about segregation you could recommend, to prepare Newtonians for the kind of change we need: [Housing Segregation in Everything](#), [Segregated By Design](#).