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Subject: Zoning Redesign—Community Engagement around Village Centers
Date: May 6, 2021 at 8:50 AM
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Dear Zoning and Planning Committee members and Planning Department staff,

Engine 6 is excited about the community engagement plan for rezoning around village centers. We especially appreciate your determination to hear from groups that were underrepresented in previous Zoning Redesign outreach, such as young people, renters, people of color, and people with disabilities.

As you, we, and others have affirmed before, the areas around village centers offer the greatest opportunity for addressing the housing shortage. Allowing more multifamily housing development in these areas will help revitalize local commerce and reduce car use, and can satisfy all three of the goals you adopted a year ago: increasing the supply and variety of housing across the city; creating a more sustainable built environment; and ensuring that new development is contextually respectful. This actually takes us back to the historical origins of village formation, before the advent of zoning and cars. In this way Zoning Redesign is partly about restoration and repair.

We have some concerns for your consideration:

- **What do we mean by “village center”?** We believe the upcoming discussions should cover not just the places already defined by retail and other forms of commerce, but any place that generates an increase in human activity—commerce, transit, recreation, what have you: places that have the potential to become walkable village centers. We should be looking not just at Newton Centre, Nonantum, Upper Falls, and Waban, for example, but also at the areas around the Chestnut Hill and Eliot T stations, and close by Needham Street and Washington Street.
- **What is the extent of the areas to be rezoned?** The discussions should broadly cover areas within walking distance of village centers, commercial corridors, and transit hubs—for any given area, the entire “walk shed,” not just the tight “center.” The actual size of the area would naturally depend on the location.
- **What housing types are we talking about?** We reiterate our [recommendations from a year ago](#). Areas defined by proximity to commerce, transit, or both—which in Zoning Redesign discussions to date have been identified as potentially Village, Neighborhood General, or R4—could feature a wide range of multifamily options (again, depending on location), from mixed-use projects like Austin Street, to medium and small apartment buildings, to “[missing middle](#)” housing types. It’s worth noting that some of these options are valuable not just for their relative affordability and sustainability, but also for their physical accessibility.

We look forward to participating in the coming public conversation and seeing what we can create together.

Sincerely,

Engine 6 Zoning Redesign Working Group
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