

Act to Promote Housing Choices Needed Now More than Ever

**A letter from Newton elected officials, community organizations and residents
to our Newton State Legislators**

May 9, 2020

By Electronic Mail

The Honorable Cindy Creem (cynthia.creem@masenate.gov)

The Honorable Ruth Balser (ruth.balser@mahouse.gov)

The Honorable Kay Khan (kay.khan@mahouse.gov)

The Honorable John J. Lawn, Jr. (john.lawn@mahouse.gov)

RE: House 4263 - An Act to Promote Housing Choices

Dear Senator Creem and Representatives Balser, Khan and Lawn:

We are writing as a group of elected officials, community organizations and concerned residents who want Newton to become a more inclusive, diverse and sustainable city. We know that Newton needs to create more multifamily, mixed-income housing so that families with children, seniors needing to downsize, our grown children just starting out in their careers, and people who work in Newton will be able to find affordable and appropriate housing. Without it, we will lose these people, our local economy will suffer, and we will be unable to fulfill our goal of creating a community of opportunity.

However, current state law has been a significant roadblock to the production of exactly the type of housing that we so desperately need. Under state law, zoning changes and special permits require a 2/3 vote. In Newton, the special permit granting authority is the City Council, and with a 24-member City Council, achieving this threshold has been very challenging.

In Newton, the permitting process for multifamily housing developments has typically taken more than two years and in some cases far longer than that. Clearly, this lengthy process has significantly slowed down the rate of much-needed housing production and added barriers to the process, rather than removing them.

At this juncture, Newton needs assistance from the state to allow us to create the housing we need. H.4263, *An Act to promote housing choices*, would enable a municipality to pass by a simple majority vote certain zoning changes that would help advance housing production and smart growth development, as opposed to the currently required super majority (2/3) vote. The bill would also allow a simple majority vote to approve certain special permits for affordable housing developments around public transit or in mixed-use developments. Passing this bill would be a significant step towards meeting Newton's critical housing needs, allowing local communities to contribute to housing production.

Despite the barriers posed by the current process, in the last several years, Newton has worked hard to do its part to contribute to new housing production. Most recently, in December 2019, the City Council granted a special permit to the Northland development on Needham Street, which will add 140 permanently affordable units to our housing stock. On March 3, 2020, the Council's Northland decision was upheld by Newton voters by a margin of 58% to 42%, affirming Newton's vision to create more housing opportunity.

While we are proud of this decision and the referendum to affirm it, the 2/3 supermajority remains a barrier to the efforts in Newton and other communities to create multifamily housing. Changing the threshold to a simple majority would allow Newton and our surrounding communities to produce more housing and more affordable housing in a timely manner. While this change will not solve all of our housing problems, it will generate much needed momentum and begin to create the more inclusive, diverse and sustainable city we know we can achieve.

Particularly in this time of COVID-19, it is clear that the importance of creating housing opportunity for all has never been more important. In fact, our collective health depends on safe and affordable homes for all.

For these reasons, we urge you to support H. 4263. We ask that each of you let us know by May 29, 2020 whether you will support the bill, by emailing your response to Judy Jacobson at judyjacobson@rcn.com. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Newton Elected Officials

City Council President Susan Albright
City Council Vice President Rick Lipof
City Councilor Alison Leary
City Councilor Maria Scibelli Greenberg
City Councilor Jake Auchincloss
City Councilor Andrea Kelley
City Councilor Deb Crossley
City Councilor Andreae Downs
City Councilor Vicki Danberg
City Councilor Alicia Bowman
City Councilor Brenda Noel

Livable Newton Affiliate Organizations

Engine 6
Green Newton

Newton-Needham Regional Chamber
Newton Interfaith Clergy Association (NICA)
Citizens for Affordable Housing in Newton Development Organization (CAN-DO)
Newton Community Development Foundation (NCDF)
Bike Newton
High Performance Building Coalition
Temple Shalom of Newton Tzedek Team

Other Newton Community Organizations

League of Women Voters, Newton
Uniting Citizens for Housing Affordability in Newton (U-CHAN)
350Mass Newton Node
Families Organizing for Racial Justice (FORJ)

Newton residents (in alphabetical order)

Jen Abbott	Tom Gagen
Kendra Abbott	Annie Gatewood
Dolores Acevedo-Garcia	Rob Gifford
Cory Alperstein	Frances Godine
Heather Amsden	Ellie Goldberg
Karla Armenoff	Janet Goldenberg
Peter J. Barrer	Diane Gordon
Robert M. Bloom	Aaron Gornstein
Judith Boroschek	Louis Gudema
Marti Bowen (Boguski)	Richard Hassinger
Kathryn Brigham, MD	Susie Heyman
Angela Brooks	Elizabeth L. Hiser
Kelley Brown, AICP, LEED AP	Kathleen Hobson
John Butzel	Ann Houston
Sandy Butzel	Alice E. Ingerson
Joana Canedo	Judy Jacobson
Marsha K Canick	Rosalind Joffe
Ellen Connolly	Howard Johnson
Marcia Cooper	Marcia Johnson
Beverly Craig	Sandra L. Kelly
Andrew Craig	Marian Knapp
Ed Dailey	Jason Korb
Bryan Decker	Henry Korman
Paul C. Doherty	David Koven
Diana Fisher Gomberg	Kathy Laufer
Michael Fogelberg	Lois A. Levin
Gaye Freed	Leonore Linsky

Brooke K. Lipsitt
Bart Lloyd
Michael A. MalecRev.
Wat Matsuyasu
Tatjana Meschede
Andrew Mikula
Harry Minsky
Lisa Monahan
Joan Mullen
Judy Norsigian
Vincent F. O'Donnell
Scott Oran
Susan Parsons
Diane F Paulson
Carol Peacock
John Pelletier
Kathy Pillsbury
Kerry Prasad
Anne Priestley, LICSW
Greg Reibman
John Reichenbach
Helen Rittenberg
Dan Ruben
Laura Rutherford

Cheryl Sacks
Jeff Sacks
Steven Schwartz
Rev. Devlin Scott
John Sisson
Claire Sokoloff
Chagit Steiner
Doris Ann Sweet
Doris Tennant
Andrew Thompson
Susan F. Tornheim
Lexi Turner
Georgios Vetoulis
Mariana Vetoulis-Acevedo
Kyriaki Vetoulis-Acevedo
Jay Walter
Judy Weber
Lynn Weissberg
Dan Wiener
Catherine G. Willinger
Ros Winsor
Leslie Zebrowitz
Nancy Zollers