Have you ever done an addition to your home? Added a deck, shed, or a garage?

If you’re a homeowner in Newton, the City of Newton’s Zoning Ordinance regulates your house and any associated structures on your lot. Join us on November 29th to explore zoning for single and two-family properties throughout the city and how those regulations could change in a new ordinance.

Zoning regulates where structures are allowed to be located on your lot, the structure’s maximum height, and how much of your lot must be devoted to open space. These same rules apply to your neighbors as well.

**Flexibility vs. Predictability:** The degree to which zoning rules grant property owners flexibility in using or changing their property generally contradicts with the degree to which the ordinance offers predictability for neighbors (what may be done with a property) and predictability for the property owner (how the rules will apply to their property). In practice, zoning requirements fall on a spectrum between absolute flexibility and absolute predictability. Discussion will include how Zoning rules could vary depending on the regulatory issue or neighborhood context.

**Massing:** City staff will present how the zoning ordinance currently treats setback, height, and massing, using the floor area ratio (FAR) calculation. We will explore alternative ways to address these issues by utilizing prescriptive dimensional controls or design review related processes. We expect discussions to include issues of neighborhood context and fairness.

**Garages:** In some neighborhood contexts, garages can transform the sense of a neighborhood street into a street that feels like an alley. Many communities have begun to regulate the connection between the dimensions of the garage, house, lot, and street. We will discuss what neighborhood contexts, if any, in Newton should require garages to be set back from the front façade of the building and be limited in how much of the home they can cover. Newton residents have raised concerns in recent years about garages that stick out in front of a house or dominate the appearance of a home when viewed from the street.

**Fences:** Fences are not currently regulated by the Zoning Ordinance. Instead, the City Ordinance regulates fences. Bringing the fence ordinance into the Zoning Ordinance could more coherently regulate the relationship of fences to other structures on residential lots. Shrubs, hedges and similar types of vertical plantings may need to be included within the fence ordinance where they serve a similar function and can have similar impacts on corner visibility and related issues. Regulation of retaining walls will also be discussed.

Wheelchair accessible location. For ADA accommodations, contact Jini Fairley at least two business days in advance: jfairley@newtonma.gov or 617-796-1253. For City’s TTY/TDD: 617-796-1089. For TRS, dial 711.
Zoning shapes our city. It ensures that buildings and uses of land promote positive outcomes for the community and are consistent with the neighborhood context.

Zoning is the regulation of our built environment: types of buildings, their locations, and their uses.

Central Elements of Zoning

- **The Zoning Ordinance** is the book of rules and regulations for how private property lots are divided, how buildings are constructed on those lots, and how those buildings are used.
- **The Zoning Map** divides the city into districts, each of which represents a different set of land uses and scales of building types.
- **Dimensional Requirements** control the dimensions of private property lots and the buildings constructed on them, including: width and depth of properties, height and overall scale or mass of buildings, as well as how far buildings are from the street and from neighboring property lines.
- **Development and Use Standards** sets rules and performance standards relating to specific aspects of land development, e.g. rules for signage and parking. Many land uses, like restaurants or health clubs, have their own specific rules as well.
- **Decision Making Processes** for applying the zoning rules are outlined in the ordinance as well.

**What is Zoning Redesign?**

The City is working to make a new zoning ordinance that is effective, responsive, predictable, and fair. Newton’s current zoning does not reflect the existing context - 95% of properties are inconsistent with current zoning. The new zoning will incorporate community input, data-driven analysis, and best practices in order to adequately protect neighborhoods and prepare the city for long-term growth.

With this project, the City will be rewriting the Zoning Ordinance to more closely respond to the Comprehensive Plan, to better respect the current built environment of the city, and to reflect the values of Newton’s residents and businesses.

The City Council’s zoning reform efforts began in 2011. Phase One was completed in 2015. It successfully reorganized the existing ordinance making it easier to understand, but Phase One did not alter the content.

Now in Phase Two, Zoning Redesign is a project to update the ordinance’s content with a “context-based” approach. The first step was to catalogue and analyze the patterns of Newton’s built environment in the “Pattern Book” and gather initial ideas. The next step is to engage the public in developing new and revised zoning content. After this, we will be developing a draft based on the Pattern Book and the community conversations from this event series.

**Zoning is our opportunity to shape the future of Newton**