Newton’s Zoning Ordinance is the major determinant of the locations, types and amount of housing that is permitted in the city. The 2016 Newton Leads 2040 Housing Strategy clearly shows the increasing exclusivity of the city as the wealthiest residents of the Boston region are drawn to the desirability of Newton and low and moderate income households have few, if any, options.

**Multi-Family Zoning Close to Transit and Jobs**

Environmentally sustainable development strategies have identified that the more cities can locate housing options close to public transit and jobs, the more we can reduce the negative impacts of car-oriented transportation and long commute times. Newton’s Comprehensive Plan recommends new housing development in certain village centers with transit options and in major employment centers like Needham Street. Over the last several years businesses of all sizes in Newton have faced challenges in accessing sufficient workforce in part due to lack of housing options near jobs. Meanwhile, the millennial and baby boomer generations continue to demand more multi-family residential in mixed-use, village center type locations. Newton must decide how it will respond to these needs and reflect that decision in its zoning. Encouraging this type of housing development in appropriate locations could include lower unit to lot area ratios and clear guidance on the City’s expectations for this type of development.

**The “Missing Middle” Housing Choices**

Historically, neighborhoods across greater Boston featured a range of building types such as triple deckers, fourplexes, courtyard apartments, townhouses, cluster housing, and live/work buildings. With the advent of zoning, these types of buildings required special permits, which generally discourages smaller multi-unit projects because they don’t allow a developer to absorb processing costs (time, attorneys, redesigns, etc.). What if Newton were to allow some “missing middle” buildings in multi-family zoning districts with a more expedited review process?

**Affordable Housing through Inclusionary Zoning**

An inclusionary zoning ordinance requires that every residential development over a certain size contributes deed-restricted affordable units. Newton was one of the early adopters of inclusionary zoning and has had such an ordinance since 1977. There is currently a proposal to update that ordinance and increase the percentage of affordable units a development must provide, depending on size, from 15 to 20%, perhaps even 25% in certain circumstances, as well as proposing to include middle-income units.

**Fair Housing**

Newton’s Fair Housing Policy states that each person shall have equal access to and equal opportunity in housing throughout the City, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, familial status (families with children under 18), public assistance (including rental vouchers), genetic information, or military status. To what extent can the City’s Zoning Ordinance promote this important goal and support fair housing throughout all of Newton?
Zoning is our opportunity to shape the future of Newton

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... 

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.