



Land Use Committee Agenda

City of Newton In City Council

March 25, 2025

7:00 PM

Council Chambers Room 207

The Land Use Committee will hold this meeting as a hybrid meeting on March 25, 2025 at 7:00 pm that the public may access in-person or virtually via Zoom. To attend this meeting via Zoom use this link <https://newtonma.gov.zoom.us/j/84516758536> or call 1-646-558-8656 and use the following Meeting ID: 845 1675 8536

Submitted documents for each petition can be viewed via the digital hyperlink following the item below

#7-25

Request to amend Special Permit #426-18 at 55 Tower Road

NORTHLAND PATTERN DISTRICT LLC petition for SPECIAL PERMIT/SITE PLAN APPROVAL to amend Special Permit #426-18 to eliminate five buildings, convert Building 1 from office space to residential use, increase the number of residential units by 22 units, modify building designs of certain proposed buildings, and alter surface and structured parking at 55 Tower Road, also known as 400 Main Street, Ward 5, Newton Upper Falls, on land known as Section 51 Block 28 Lot 05, containing approximately 22.6 acres of land in a district zoned BUSINESS4. Ref: Secs. 7.3.3, 5.13, and 5.13.7 of Chapter 30 of the City of Newton Rev Zoning Ord, 2017.

55 Tower- <https://newtonma.viewpointcloud.com/records/851691>

Land Use Held 8-0; Public Hearing Opened on 2/4/25

Respectfully Submitted,
Andrea Kelley, Chair

The location of this meeting is accessible and reasonable accommodations will be provided to persons with disabilities who require assistance. If you need a reasonable accommodation, please contact the city of Newton's ADA Coordinator, Jini Fairley, at least two business days in advance of the meeting: jfairley@newtonma.gov or (617) 796-1253. The city's TTY/TDD direct line is: 617-796-1089. For the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS), please dial 711.

2024-2025



Newton City Councilor Randall Block

To: Barney Heath; Jennifer Caira; Katie Whewell

From: Randy Block, Ward Councilor, Ward 4

Date: Feb. 19, 2025

Cc: Andrea Kelley; Tarik Lucas

Thank you for your memo of January 24, 2025 regarding the request from Northland Pattern District LLC to amend the Special Permit for 55 Tower Road. The most significant change proposed by Northland is the elimination of 97% of commercial space and using the mill building on Oak Street for residential units. Based on your memo and on public statements by Northland, the primary reason for this change is the weak demand for commercial space.

As a member of the Land Use Committee, in order to make the required determinations, I will need information and analysis regarding the near-term demand for commercial space in the Boston suburban market. In this context, I note the following:

- The CDC declared that the pandemic was over almost two years ago.
- Employers increasingly require workers to return to the office (see <https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/news/2024/08/02/boston-return-to-office-growth.html>, Boston Business Journal, Aug. 2, 2024).

Furthermore, because of the historic nature of the mill building, it could become an unusually appealing building for certain types of tenants.

The information and analysis regarding the demand for commercial space in the Boston suburban market should address the following:

- Since the end of the pandemic, what major changes have there been to the Boston and suburban Boston commercial office markets? Have certain kinds of locations become more or less desirable? At what rate are office workers returning to office buildings?

- How do office space trends in Newton compare to other suburban Boston markets (e.g., Waltham, Burlington, or Framingham)? What major commercial office space rental agreements have been signed in the last six months? (Please note that Greatland Realty, owner of 275 Grove Street, Newton, recently announced that a new tenant agreed to lease 100,000 square feet of office space.)
- How do commercial property taxes in Newton compare with neighboring municipalities, and how does this influence the attractiveness of Newton for businesses?
- How do commercial rents in Newton compare with neighboring municipalities and what rent could the mill building command?
- How will the announced tariffs on goods from Canada, Mexico, and other countries affect building costs? Will these tariffs make adaptive reuse of the mill building more economically attractive?
- Are there commercial voids in the suburban market, based on the internet economy or emerging needs, that the mill building could meet? Are there types of businesses that are likely to increase their demand for office space in Newton?
- Are there business clusters or economic sectors (e.g., biotech, tech, finance) that are experiencing growth in Newton?
- How important is proximity to public transportation, highways, retail amenities, and housing for potential tenants in Newton?
- What work has Newton done in conjunction with Northland to find commercial office space tenants?

In my opinion, the Land Use Committee will need a comprehensive economic analysis of the future demand for commercial office space in order to make the determinations necessary to approve or disapprove Northland's petition to amend its Special Permit approved in 2019. I look forward to continuing this conversation at the upcoming Land Use Committee meeting tentatively scheduled for March 25th.

Thank you for your assistance.