



Zoning and Planning Committee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Monday, September 29, 2025

Present: Councilors Baker (Chair), Oliver, Albright, Wright, Kalis, Getz, Danberg, and Krintzman

Also Present: Councilor Malakie

City Staff: Deputy Director of Planning and Development Jen Caira, Chief of Long Range Planning Zack LeMel; Director of Planning and Development Barney Heath, and Economic Development Director John Sisson

All agendas and reports, both past and present can be found at the following link: [Zoning & Planning Committee | City of Newton, MA \(newtonma.gov\)](https://www.newtonma.gov/zoning-planning)

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfyW46AGl8s&list=PLqJiDbsvfNjVeJmlcTaLj6ThJcNU7UtWB>

#181-24 Request for discussion and possible amendments to remove or reduce parking minimums for commercial uses in commercial centers

COUNCILORS ALBRIGHT, DANBERG, KRINTZMAN, AND LEARY requesting discussion and possible amendments to Newton's zoning ordinance to remove or reduce the parking minimums for first-floor commercial uses in commercial centers.

Zoning & Planning Held 8-0 on 02/10/2025

Zoning & Planning Held 8-0 on 06/23/2025

Zoning & Planning Held 7-0 on 07/09/2025

Action: Zoning & Planning Held 8-0

Note: Deputy Director of Planning & Development Jen Caira and Chief of Long Range Planning Zack LeMel joined the committee to discuss this item and shared the attached presentation. Mr. LeMel explained the background of the item, including the challenges parking requirements posed to local businesses and shared case studies of businesses that have taken advantage of the flexibility allowed within the Village Center Overlay District. He noted the recommendation is to create an exemption in the Business 1 and 2 zones and align parking requirements across different commercial uses for other commercial zones.

A councilor expressed support for this proposal.

A councilor asked if the Planning Department was suggesting no parking requirements at all or parking requirements by square footage. Mr. LeMel explained there would be a blanket exemption for two zoning districts, BU1 and BU2, which mostly align with village centers. Outside of that, there would be a simplification across certain commercial uses that typically lead to the most special permits. Ms. Caira noted this simplification would be better practice since the City's parking requirements currently are overly complicated.

A councilor asked for information on what surrounding communities are doing with commercial parking.

A councilor noted different village centers may have different needs.

The Chair noted the Committee invited the Charles River Chamber of Commerce and the City's Economic Development Commission to provide comments on these items. The Chair also noted that if members of the public wished to speak, they would be allowed to comment as well.

Greg Reibman, of the Charles River Chamber of Commerce, shared that the city needs to think of attracting business as a competition and make decisions that help make the city more competitive. He invited Elizabeth Holmes, a commercial real estate broker, and Jodie Zussman, from the Boston Development Group. Ms. Holmes gave an overview of pre- and post-pandemic vacancy rates for office space and times to lease in the Central 128 region. She noted that most of the demand for office space is in the 1,000 to 3,000 square foot range for tenants. She also noted there is extreme competition in the current market for 10,000 sf and larger office space users. She shared that the successful leases include brand new amenities and finishes, or the owners have discounted rents. Ms. Holmes noted pre- and post-pandemic changes in the average number of months businesses are deciding on whether to resign their leases. She suggested an expedited process to support quicker office space build out experiences. Ms. Zussman noted her company has seen a significant reduction in office space and that parking has come up as an issue. She reiterated Ms. Holmes' comments on landlords having to give discounted rents. She noted there are life science spaces in Watertown that the owners are considering converting to apartments because there has not been a resurgence in back-to-office work.

Hedy Jarras, from the Economic Development Commission, noted her experience as a business owner in Newton and expressed support for easier processes to open a business in the city. She also expressed support for removing parking requirements for businesses. Debora Jackson, from the Economic Development Commission and dean of the business school at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, expressed support for removing parking requirements since young people are preferring to drive less and, in the future, there may be less cars.

MaryLee Belleville, 136 Warren Street, expressed support for a public hearing on the parking item.

Janet Sterman, 120 Church Street, expressed concern around removing parking requirements as the City is considering removing the overnight parking ban.

Terry Sauro, 44 Cook Street, expressed concern around removing parking requirements.

Director of Economic Development John Sisson noted an opportunity to improve the speed of issuing permits for commercial fit-outs of buildings.

A councilor noted the City is increasing housing which may increase cars and expressed concern around businesses that have a significant parking need using more parking and limiting parking opportunities for other businesses nearby.

A councilor expressed support for this proposal.

A councilor asked if the City should play a role in providing more parking. Ms. Jarras said she supported more free parking but did not know how the City would play more of a role in providing parking. Mr. Reibman noted that businesses will decide whether a potential space has enough parking or not before agreeing to locate their business in that spot.

A councilor expressed support for removing parking requirements that dictate the number of seats in a restaurant and making process improvements to help businesses open faster.

A councilor expressed support for this proposal and more research to understand how to improve employee parking for businesses in village centers. The same councilor expressed support for a potential centralized parking facility that businesses pay into when they expand.

Councilors expressed support for this proposal.

A councilor asked for more information on the parcels that are designated BU1 or BU2 but are outside of the village centers.

A councilor expressed concern about how this proposal would impact the residential community immediately adjacent to the businesses.

The Chair noted the discussion on this item would continue at a meeting in the near future.

Committee members voted 8-0 on a motion to hold from Councilor Baker.

#80-25 Requesting discussion on the current state of Newton's commercial office space

COUNCILORS LUCAS, OLIVER, WRIGHT, MALAKIE, GETZ, LAREDO, KALIS, LOBOVITS, and FARRELL requesting a discussion with the Director of Planning & Development and the Economic Development Director focused on, but not limited to, new commercial office leases signed within the past three years, the current commercial office space that is available to lease, office tenants that have left Newton or have downsized, and strategies to recruit new commercial office tenants to Newton.

Zoning & Planning Held 7-0 on 07/09/2025

Action: **Zoning & Planning Held 8-0**

Note: The report for item #80-25 can be found with item #181-24.

#295-24 Discussion on Parking in Village Centers

COUNCILORS ALBRIGHT, LAREDO, OLIVER, GETZ, FARRELL, LUCAS, GREENBERG, KELLEY, HUMPHREY, MALAKIE, DOWNS, LOBOVITS, KRINTZMAN, AND MICLEY requesting a discussion on the parking needs in our commercial village centers with the Planning Director, the Commissioner of Public Works, and appropriate staff from both departments. This discussion should focus on (a) the perceived parking needs in our commercial village centers; (b) a review of past parking studies in Newton's commercial village centers, subsequent implementation efforts, and the results of those efforts; (c) parking studies in neighboring cities or towns to provide appropriate parking in commercial village or town centers, and d) best practices in parking provision as defined by parking professionals.

Zoning & Planning Held 7-0 on 07/09/2025

Action: **Zoning & Planning Held 8-0**

Note: The report for #295-24 can be found with item #181-24.

#252-25 Appointment of David Boronkay to the Newton Upper Falls Historic District Commission

HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing David Boronkay, 187 Melrose Street, Auburndale as a member of the Newton Upper Falls Historic District Commission for a term of office set to expire on October 6, 2028. (60 Days: 11/01/2025)

Action: **Zoning & Planning Approved 8-0**

Note: Mr. Boronkay shared his experience in historic preservation and past service to the City. He noted that he had been an alternate on the Auburndale Historic Commission but had to resign due to a conflict of interest. Currently, he has been serving as an alternate on the Upper Falls Historic District.

A councilor asked for Mr. Boronkay's thoughts on the balance between historic preservation and modernization. Mr. Boronkay shared that there are non-historic districts in the City where

people can live and they will not be held to the standards that are required in a historic district. He noted that homes and the streetscape should be preserved but renovation is possible.

Councilors expressed support for Mr. Boronkay's appointment.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

R. Lisle Baker, Chair

City of Newton
Zoning & Planning Committee

Supporting Businesses in Newton: Parking Req. for Commercial Uses

Docket #181-24
September 9, 2025

Content

Parking Req. for Commercial Uses

1. What is this
2. Why parking req.
3. Where to regulate
4. Zoning Recommendation
5. Next Steps

Content

Parking Req. for Commercial Uses

1. **What is this**
2. Why parking req.
3. Where to regulate
4. Zoning Recommendation
5. Next Steps

Newton's villages are home to businesses, institutions, and other service providers that the Newton, and regional, community come to gather, shop, and play at. Running these businesses comes with many challenges. The City Council has made *business friendly* regulatory changes over the years and has tasked the Planning Department with identifying others going forward.

What is this

Council is prioritizing support for small businesses

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#133 24 Requesting discussion and amendments to Newton Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 30 to incentivize small businesses

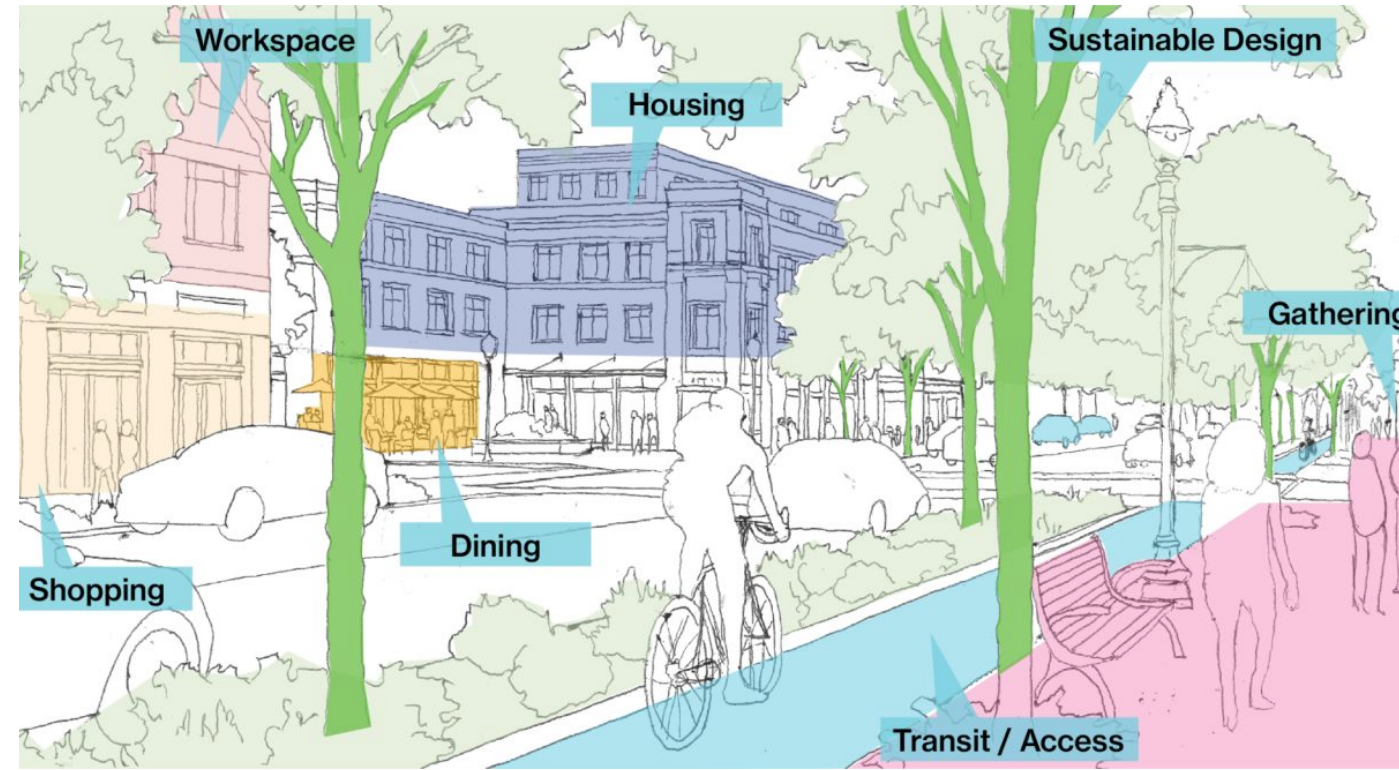
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting discussion and amendments to the Newton Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 30, in order to incentivize and promote small businesses.

What is this

Work to date



Experiential Retail



Village Center Overlay



Craft Beverages

Content

Parking Req. for Commercial Uses

1. What is this
- 2. Why parking req.**
3. Where to regulate
4. Zoning Recommendation
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Parking requirements consistently come up as barriers for opening new businesses in existing spaces and for existing businesses to expand (more space/employees = more parking spaces required).

Removing Barriers for New & Existing Businesses to Locate/expand

Recognize most existing buildings do not have private parking

- Changes of use, with no new construction, often trigger a special permit

Land/space is limited

- Space required for parking could be utilized for other services to meet community needs (other businesses, open space, housing, etc.)

Parking is expensive

- Surface parking can cost thousands and structured parking can cost tens of thousands of dollars



Without Minimums: Vacant Buildings Occupied. In Fayetteville, Arkansas, reducing the required spots from more than 30 to eight allowed one small business to turn a vacant building into a buzzy downtown hot spot. Photo courtesy of [Feed and Folly](#).

Businesses Taking Advantage of Greater Flexibility in the VCOD

2-8 Hartford St



- Newton Highlands
- Restaurant to restaurant
- Allow more seating without a parking waiver
- Certificate of Occupancy issued

749-759 Beacon St



- Newton Centre
- Existing commercial spaces
- Allow more seating without a parking waiver
- Certificate of Occupancy issued

309-321 Walnut St



- Newtonville
- Existing commercial spaces
- Ability to remove parking area to create public plaza in rear
- In process

Content

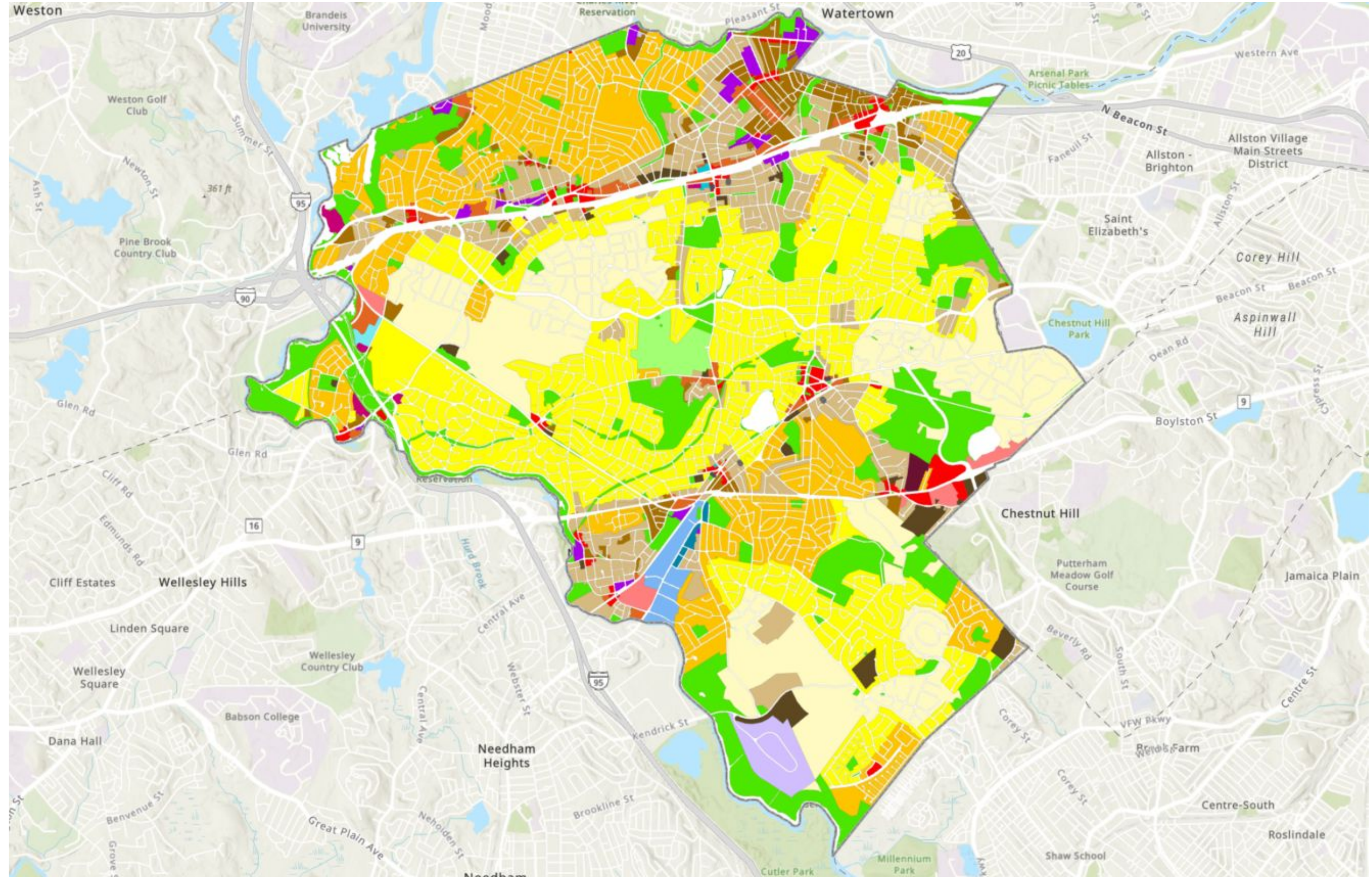
Parking Req. for Commercial Uses

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Focusing in/around village centers ensures the scope of the proposal is limited and will truly benefit existing businesses/commercial property.

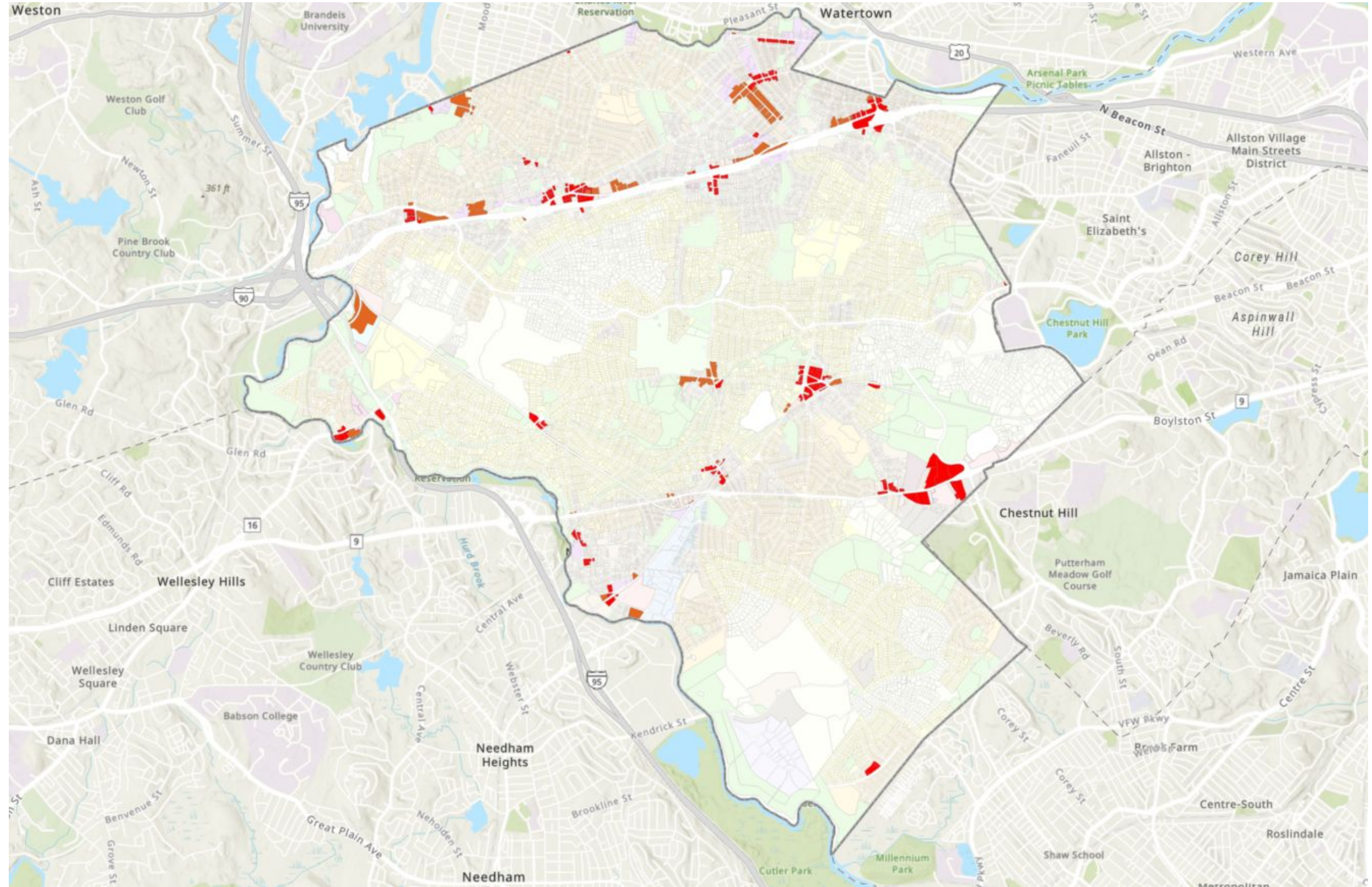
Where to regulate

Newton's Zoning Map



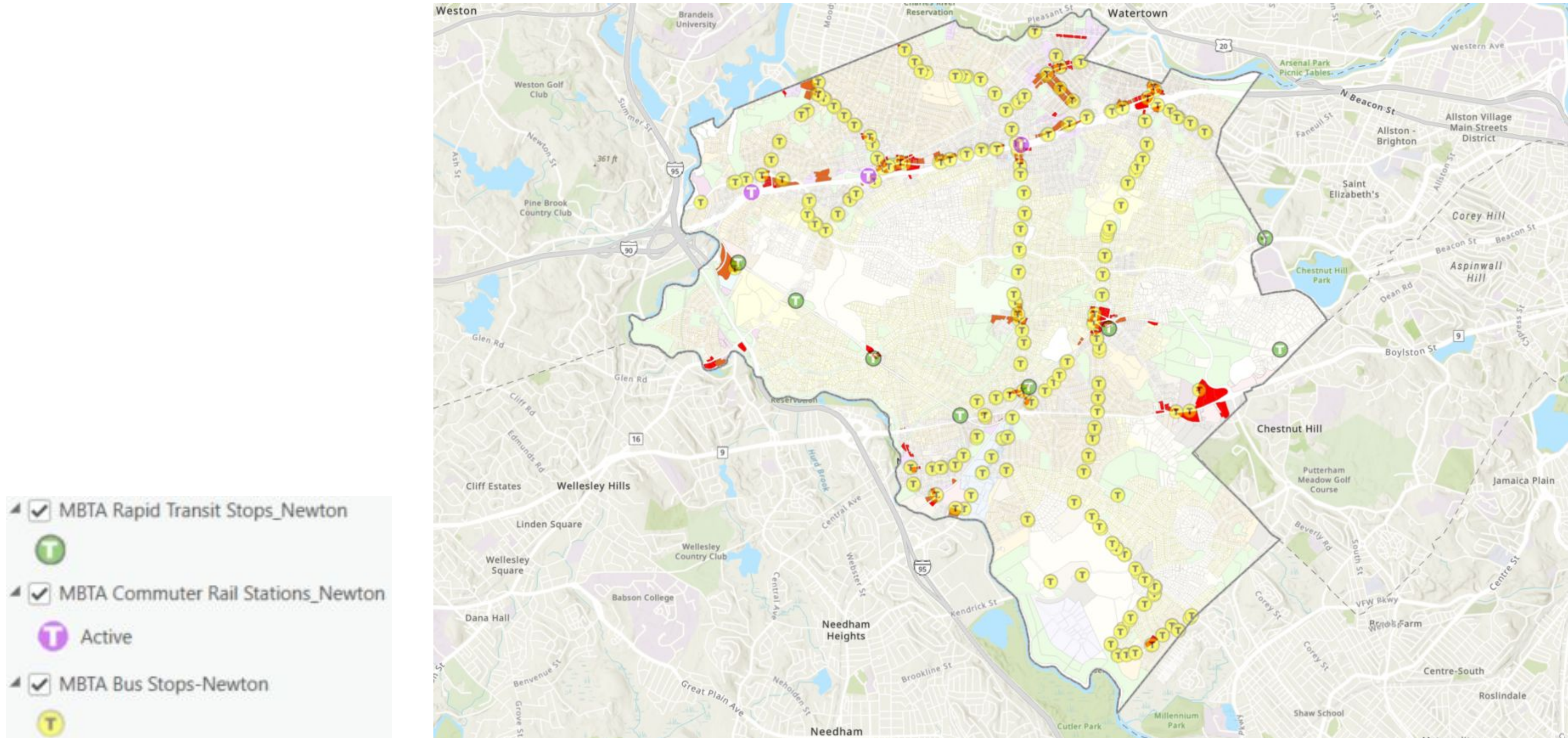
Where to regulate

Business (BU) Zones Represent Less Than 3% of Property Citywide



Where to regulate

Business (BU) Zones Mostly Adjacent to Transit



Where to regulate

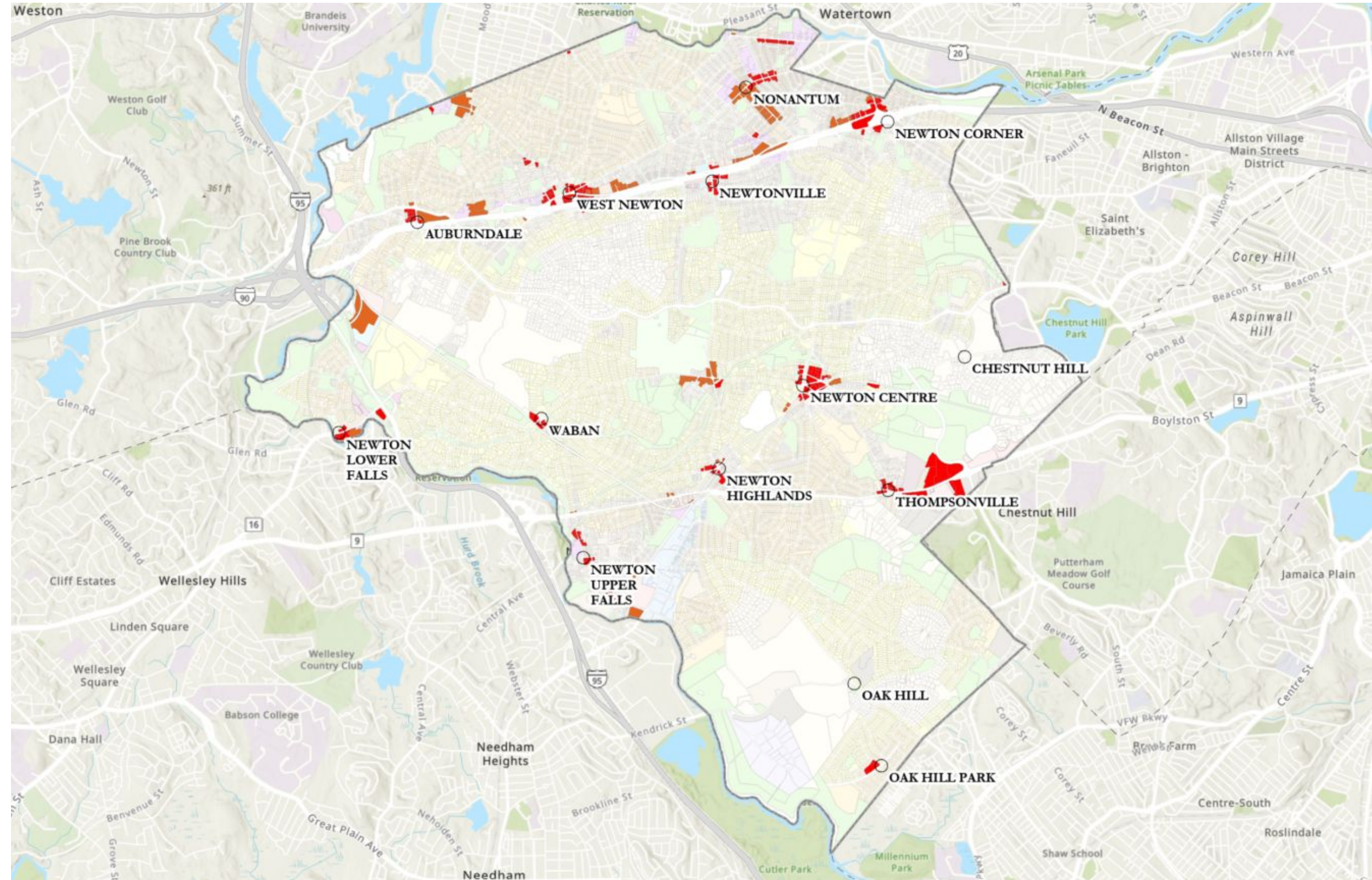
Business (BU) Zones Mostly Align with Village Centers

BU1 and BU2 Parcels

178 Total Parcels

- 60 BU parcels in VCOD

= 118 Impacted Parcels



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Parking Req. for Commercial Uses

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- 4. Zoning Recommendation**
5. Next Steps

Allow, but not require, parking within Newton's BU1 and BU2 zones for all commercial uses.

Align parking requirements across different commercial uses for other commercial zones.

Exempt commercial uses from parking requirements in BU1 and BU2

5.1.4. Number of Parking Stalls

- A. The minimum number of parking stalls to be supplied for each type of building or land use shall be in accordance with the following requirements, **except:**
- 1. No parking stalls are required for Commercial Uses in the Business 1 (BU1) and Business 2 (BU2) zoning districts.**
- B. Where the computation results in a fractional number, the fraction shall be counted as one stall.

Align Parking Requirements for Predominant Commercial Uses

Existing Requirements

Restaurant, food or beverage establishment (for sidewalk and parking space café seating, see 12-70)	1 per 3 patron seats, permanent or otherwise plus 1 per every 3 employees excluding any sidewalk and parking space seating permitted under Sec. 12-70
Restaurant, food or beverage establishment in a hotel, motel	1 per 90 sf plus 1 per every 6 employees
Retail store, showroom	1 per 300 sf plus 1 per 3 employees
Service establishment	1 per 300 sf plus 1 per 3 employees

- **Difference in requirement by use makes it difficult to fill existing commercial spaces with new businesses**
- **Regulating by number of employees prevents successful businesses from expanding**

Align Parking Requirements for Predominant Commercial Uses

Proposed Requirements

- Remove parking requirements “per employee” and “seat”
- Right size parking requirement for other commercial use (ex. Personal Service, Retail, Restaurant):
 - 1 per 300 square feet

Content

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If the Committee agrees with the proposal then staff recommend setting a public hearing.