



**City of Newton**

**Department of Planning & Community Development**

Marc C. Laredo  
**Mayor**

1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, Massachusetts 02459  
(617) 796-1120 | [newtonma.gov/planning](http://newtonma.gov/planning)

Katie Whewell  
**Acting Director**

---

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Mayor Marc C. Laredo  
Joshua Morse, Chief Operating Officer

**FROM:** Katie Whewell, Acting Director, Department of Planning and Development  
Zachery LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning  
Nora Masler, Senior Planner

**DATE:** January 14, 2025

**RE:** Docket request to amend Article 1 of Newton’s Zoning Ordinance to amend the definition of Two-Family, Detached

**CC:** Alissa O. Giuliani, City Solicitor

---

The definition of a two-family building has either been updated, or reinterpreted, multiple times over the last decade. The core of the existing definition developed to prevent what was then known as the “linguine” house. In other words, two units built almost entirely independently from each other with limited connections to appear like they are two single-family homes on a lot.

The updated definition to prevent the “linguine” house caused other problems, particularly overly bulky, garage dominant, designs. To address this, the City Council adopted a new definition, and the first Garage Ordinance, in 2015 that prevented the garages of each unit from touching each other. An unintended consequence of not allowing side-by-side garages is typically additional paving and multiple curb cuts where one could suffice.

Most recently in 2021 and again in 2025, staff recommended simplifying the definition. First, definitions are not the appropriate place to impose design standards. Instead, standards should be created for the use type and laid out within the specific zoning districts. This is the case for things like lot coverage, FAR, setbacks, etc. Second, with the adoption of the Façade Ratio requirement in 2025, the building width is further limited/controlled. At this time, the Two-Family, Detached definition and the Façade Ratio operate against each other and may cause overly complicated designs and layouts to comply with both regulations.

Below is the draft docket language for consideration. In addition, attached is the June 2025 ZAP presentation where this was last presented and provides additional context and visuals.

*Draft Docket Language (note this was previously #27-25)*

#XX-26 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting amendments to Section 1.5.1.B, Two-Family, Detached of Chapter 30, Zoning.