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Barney S. Heath  
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Planning & Development

John Sisson,  
Director Economic  
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## CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

### Economic Development Commission

Mayor Fuller and City Councilors  
City of Newton  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton, MA 02459

Re: Village Center Zoning

October 12, 2022

Dear Mayor Fuller and Honorable City Councilors,

The Economic Development Commission (EDC) was established under General Laws Chapter 40, Section 8A to promote and develop business and industry within the City of Newton. The Commission is charged with strengthening the local economy, leading to new job opportunities for residents and an expansion of the City's tax base. Per City Ordinance Article V, Section 22.95, the EDC is tasked to "advise and make recommendations to appropriate officials, agencies, boards, department, and commissions of the City." This letter, approved by the EDC on 10/11/2022 by a vote of 9-0, is intended to provide the EDC's advice and recommendation regarding the proposed Village Center rezoning.

EDC has voted to support the proposed *framework* for village center rezoning that has been developed by the City's Department of Planning & Development and endorsed by the Zoning and Planning Committee. We recommend that the Zoning & Planning Committee continue to engage productively with the Planning Department on village center rezoning, focus on key economic development issues therein, and help to move forward a proposal that can achieve a successful vote of passage by the full City Council.

This letter outlines below the major points we considered in our reasoning.

#### **BACKGROUND**

EDC'S support and recommendation is informed by our review of Planning's current rezoning materials, our ongoing engagement, and our relevant historical perspective. Specifically, the presentation made to the EDC on 9/13/2022 titled *Village Center Rezoning, Zoning Proposals* a copy is attached as Appendix A.

# CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## Economic Development Commission

EDC has stayed closed to the Planning Department throughout the current process of village center rezoning. To date, the EDC has received six presentations by Planning staff on this work in progress. Furthermore, for the last three years, EDC has had a subgroup focused on zoning to delve constructively into questions impacting economic development (e.g. building heights and micro-fulfillment centers) and encourage small business input (e.g. facilitating small business focus groups for village center visioning). EDC is also familiar with, and actively participated in, the City’s past zoning-related efforts, including clarifying definitions for lab and R&D uses; developing new rules for last mile delivery and micro-fulfillment centers; and decoupling floor height and number of stories to enable increased interior flexibility.

### **KEY POINTS IN SUPPORT**




EDC supports the proposed framework for village center rezoning because it:

#### **1. Creates new opportunities for economic development.**

The framework for village center rezoning enables greater potential for economic activity across the City in villages where it would be most appropriate. The plan would allow for offices, stores, customers, workers, residents, jobs, and transit to concentrate and connect in ways that could boost economic vibrancy, neighborhood quality of life, and the City’s commercial tax base. Newtonville’s village center serves as a proof point. A series of complimentary development projects there have led to new business openings, a steady flow of foot traffic, and a general sense of neighborhood vitality. The proposed village center rezoning framework would help set the stage for other village centers to also achieve their economic potential at the scale most suitable to them. Moreover, the framework encourages smaller, by-right, projects in the villages as opposed to specially permitted “mega” developments.

Zoning Proposals

### Building Design - Village Center Core Districts

	Small Village Centers (revised BU2)	Medium Village Centers (revised BU3)	Large Village Centers (revised MU4)
			
<i>Maximums</i>	Existing / Proposed	Existing / Proposed	Existing / Proposed
<i>Building Height (# of stories)</i>	2 / 2.5	3.0 / 3.5	3.0 / 4.5
<i>Building Footprint</i>	-- / 5,000 sf	-- / 10,000 sf	-- / 15,000 sf

Source: TPUDC

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# CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## Economic Development Commission

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### 2. Aligns with the City's stated priorities for economic development.

The proposed framework closely reflects, and could help achieve, several of the stated goals and objectives of *The Economic Development Action Plan for the City of Newton* (prepared by Camoin Associates and approved by the City Council and adopted in 2019) [Link to the document](#) . For example, with regard to village centers, the Economic Development Plan calls for maintaining uniqueness; supporting economic vibrancy; promoting multimodal transportation; reducing parking footprints; and encouraging mixed use and walkability near mass transit. Many of the same themes can be found in the *Riverside and Washington Street Vision Plans* as well as the *EDC's 2020 COVID Recovery Plan* ([link to the document](#) ) for small businesses, which was informed by a cityside survey filled out by 245 local businesses.

### 3. Supports the City in meeting its housing and sustainability needs.

Newton needs to increase the supply of affordable units to meet the needs of current and future residents. Furthermore, meeting the State's *40B "safe harbor"* threshold allows the City more local control around residential developments. The City also needs a plan for more mixed-family development near transit to comply with the State's new *MBTA Communities Law* in order to remain eligible for various State grants. The proposed village center rezoning framework is a step towards addressing these housing challenges by appropriately planning for added housing density where it can be best accommodated.

Similarly, the proposed framework also supports *Newton's Five Year Climate Action Plan* which calls for developing more housing in proximity to public transportation to encourage mode-shift and decrease over-reliance on automobiles.

### 4. Recognizes and respects the unique characters of Newton's village centers.

Newton's different villages are of varying sizes and characters depending on their locations, surrounding neighborhoods, institutions, and transportation and housing options. The sort of development projects that may work well in one village would not necessarily suit or succeed in others. And so, the village center rezoning framework sensibly proposes a range of sizes for village center districts and scales of development to best correspond to each village's unique characteristics. Under the proposed framework, future re/development could be better tailored at the outset to preserve and protect those aspects which the community values and introduce new growth at the appropriate levels.

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# CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## Economic Development Commission

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**5. Provides opportunities for local developers and smaller scaled projects.**

Newton's existing zoning code has long been in need of updating, and the special permit process has become the default starting point for too many development projects in the City. Because the special permit process is typically lengthy and expensive, it shuts out smaller local developers in favor of larger, well-resourced developers, who are likely to seek the largest possible size and scale of projects to make their expense worthwhile. The proposed framework would help "level the playing field" by delivering zoning guidelines that are pragmatically updated to correspond to commercially viable projects and the present and future realities for our village centers. If implemented, the framework would provide a set of clear and transparent zoning parameters that developers, including smaller local ones, could use equally to best "match" (not "force") possible projects to certain village areas and determine feasibility.

**6. Makes sensible parking proposals to encourage small business growth.**

Newton's existing zoning regulations on parking minimums have been identified as barriers to small businesses in both the Economic Development Action Plan and EDC's COVID Recovery Plan. Inability to meet these minimum parking requirements delays and prevents the opening of new businesses, the expansion of existing businesses, and the hiring of additional employees. As it currently stands in the City, special permit waivers are routinely granted to restaurants and other commercial users who can afford the cost and time to seek a waiver from the existing parking requirements. The proposed rezoning framework would better align the City's zoning regulations with our de-facto current parking practices and better support smaller village businesses, for whom the special permit process may be too onerous. In general, smaller scale development benefits from changes to the existing parking requirements because only the very well-funded "mega" developments can afford to build under the current parking minimums.

**7. Represents an inclusive, city-wide, community-wide effort.**

Newton's Economic Development Action Plan has a set of objectives around improving the city's development process (Goal 4) that includes the call for citywide, community-based conversations and community consensus in planning efforts. In this regard, the village center rezoning initiative has progressed successfully. The Planning Department has made tremendous outreach efforts over the many months and phases of the village rezoning effort to engage different residents and stakeholders, community groups, neighborhood groups, and interest groups. The Department has undertaken public meetings, surveys, websites, emails, postcards, presentations, office hours, and public displays to enable the community every opportunity to access information and provide input as easily as possible. Moreover, unlike some past ( unsuccessful) City efforts to re-zone select village centers, most notably Newton Centre, the current initiative considers all of Newton, thereby engaging the interest of community members citywide and inviting them to consider Newton as a whole.

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**Economic Development Commission**

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**EDC RECOMMENDATIONS**

The EDC recommends moving forward with village center rezoning aligned with the framework being proposed. As explained in the points above, the EDC finds that the proposed framework would provide greater economic development and economic opportunities in Newton. As the village center rezoning efforts move to the next phase, we encourage the City to continue with the current citywide community outreach efforts. We also encourage a continued focus on maintaining and expanding the commercial spaces in our villages. The commercial tax rate is 1.89 times the residential rate, and the commercial revenue raised would benefit the City fiscally.

Sincerely and on behalf of the EDC,

Sarah Rahman

Sarah Rahman,  
Vice Chair,  
Economic Development Commission



Phil Plottel,  
Chair,  
Economic Development Commission

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**CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**Economic Development Commission**

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Appendix A: Sept 13, 2022 Zoning presentation to EDC







# City of Newton Zoning & Planning Committee

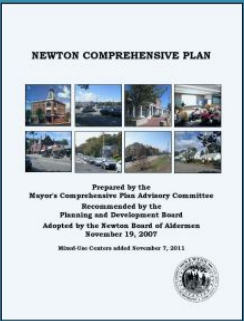
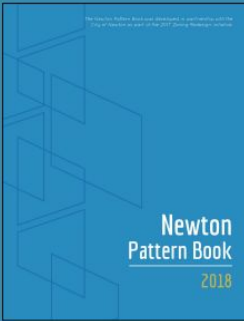
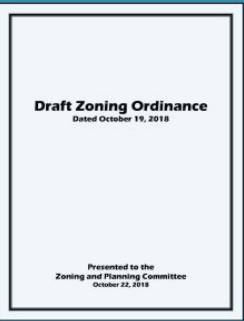
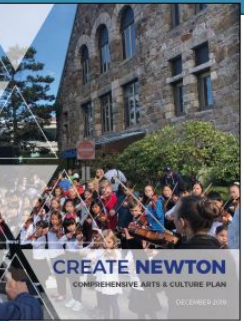


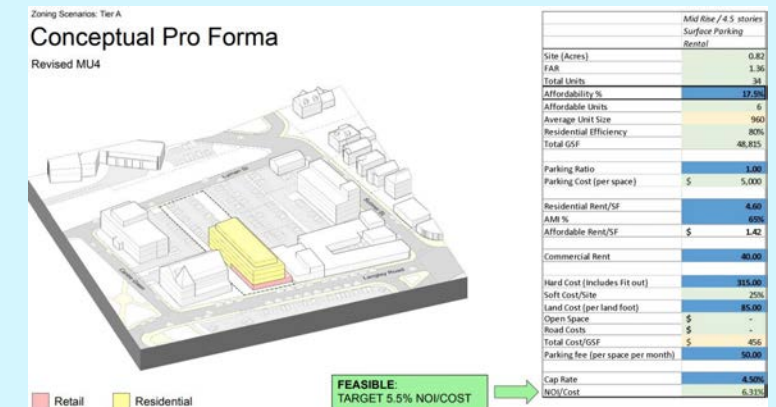
## Village Center Rezoning Zoning Proposals

# Grounding the Zoning Proposals

1. Alignment with the community takeaways
2. Supported by City plans and policies
3. Produces economically viable projects that are varied and diverse

 <p><b>Vision Kit</b> 290 participants / 102 submissions</p>	 <p><b>Online interactive forum</b> 1,249 participants</p>	 <p><b>Equitable focus groups</b> 139 participants 18 community facilitators</p>
 <p><b>Economic development engagement</b> 41 participants</p>	 <p><b>History presentation</b> 88 attendees/ viewed 165 times</p>	 <p><b>On-the-spot Surveying</b> Over 500 engaged in-person</p>

 <p><b>NEWTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN</b></p> <p>Prepared by the Mayor's Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee Recommended by the Planning and Development Board Adopted by the Newton Board of Aldermen November 19, 2007 Wind-Up Coasters added November 7, 2011</p>	 <p><b>Newton Pattern Book</b> 2018</p>	 <p><b>Draft Zoning Ordinance</b> Dated October 19, 2018</p> <p>Presented to the Zoning and Planning Committee October 22, 2018</p>	 <p><b>CREATE NEWTON</b> COMPREHENSIVE ARTS &amp; CULTURE PLAN OCTOBER 2018</p>
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# Organizing the Zoning Proposals

## Parking

1. Reduce parking requirements

## Building *Design*\*

2. Allow for industry standard floor-to-floor height
3. Incentivize varied rooflines with half-story
6. Set maximum building footprint
- 10/11/12. Allow increased height proportionate to the village center size

## Lot Configuration

4. Eliminate lot area per unit minimum
5. Remove minimum lot size

## Review Process

7. Modify Special Permit thresholds
8. Develop a standard site-plan/design review process
9. Incorporate strong design standards within the Ordinance

\*Zoning does not regulate style

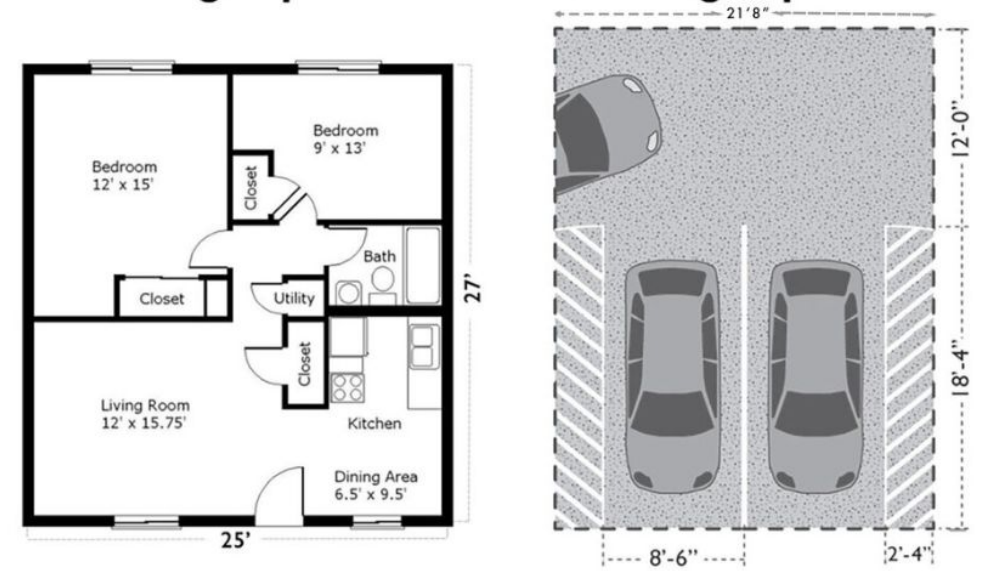
# Parking - Reduce Requirements

	Residential	Office	Ground floor commercial	Other Commercial
Existing	2 per unit	1 per 250 sf	Retail: 1 per 300 sf + 1 per 3 employees Restaurant: 1 per 3 seats + 1 per 3 employees	Retail: 1 per 300 sf + 1 per 3 employees Restaurant: 1 per 3 seats + 1 per 3 employees
Proposed	1 per unit*	1 per 700 sf	Exempt	TBD

## Why & Intended Outcomes:

1. Reduces cost of construction
2. Easier to build more, and varied units
3. Improved site design
4. Easier for businesses to open

## Living Space vs. Parking Space



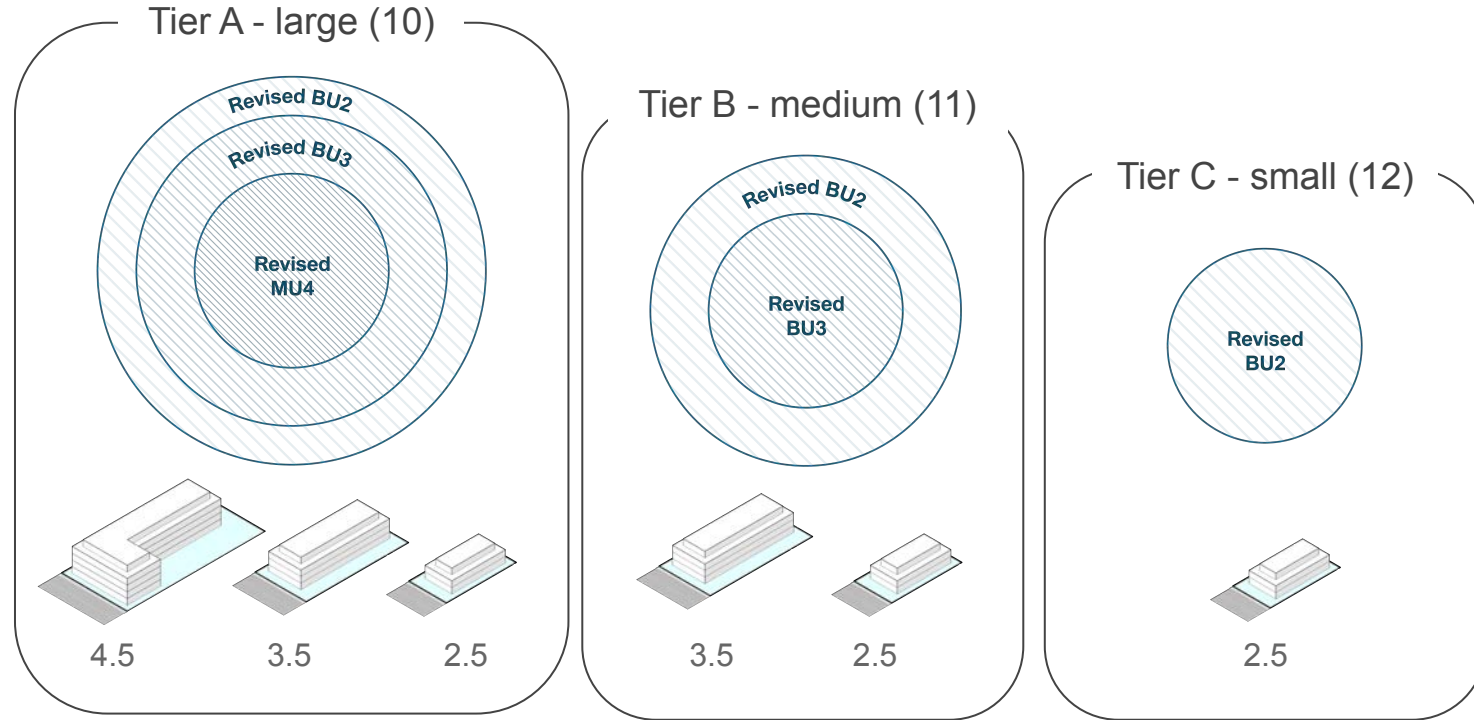
size for 2 bedroom apartment: 675 FT<sup>2</sup>

size for 2 parking spaces: 650 FT<sup>2</sup>

Sources: Transportation Cost and Benefit Analysis II - Parking Costs Victoria Transport Policy Institute ([www.vtpi.org](http://www.vtpi.org))  
Graphic Adapted from Graphing Parking (<https://graphingparking.com/2013/07/23/parking-across-cascadia/>)

\* Or lower based on further analysis

# Building Design - Tiered Framework Based on Village Center



## Why & Intended Outcomes:

1. Allows for more units, which will lead to an increase in deed restricted affordable units
2. By-right pathway leads to greater predictability, efficiency, and variety
3. Enliven village centers and increase commercial tax base

# Building Design - Village Center Core Districts

Small Village Centers  
(revised BU2)



Medium Village Centers  
(revised BU3)



Large Village Centers  
(revised MU4)



*Maximums*

Existing / **Proposed**

Existing / **Proposed**

Existing / **Proposed**

*Building Height  
(# of stories)*

2 / **2.5**

3.0 / **3.5**

3.0 / **4.5**

*Building  
Footprint*

-- / **5,000 sf**

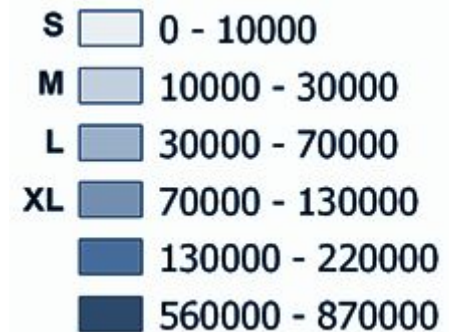
-- / **10,000 sf**

-- / **15,000 sf**

# Lot Configuration - Eliminate Existing Minimums

Lot Area per Unit (4)		Minimum Lot Size (5)	
	MU4 / BU Zones		MU4 / BU Zones
Existing	1,000 / 1,200 sf lot area/unit	Existing	10,000 sf
Proposed	none	Proposed	none

Newton Centre parcels coded by lot size (sf)



## Why & Intended Outcomes:

1. Removes artificial barriers to more, and greater variety, of unit and building sizes
2. Reduces barriers to entry for smaller property owners and developers
3. Aligns with MBTA communities guidelines

# Review Process

Special Permit Threshold (7)	
Existing	Greater than 20,000 sf of gross floor area
Proposed	Any lot over $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre

Site-Plan/Design Review (8)	
Existing	Required review by City Council for projects between 10,000 - 19,999 sf / No requirement
Proposed	Required review by the Planning Board at a TBD threshold / Required review by the UDC for all Special Permit projects

Design Standards (9)	
Existing	Minimal for larger developments, most robust standards exist for residential garages
Proposed	Create intentional standards calibrated to project size

## Why & Intended Outcomes:

1. Reduces barriers to entry for smaller property owners and developers (greater predictability)
2. Planning and urban design professionals reviewing appropriately scaled projects (greater efficiency)
3. Aligns with MBTA communities guidelines

# Next Steps

## **June**

1. ZAP wrapped up review of these proposals and provided straw votes of agreement

## **Summer - Fall**

2. Engage the broader community on the zoning proposals (educate and receive feedback)
3. Draft the Zoning Ordinance language and district mapping

## **Fall - Winter**

4. Present, review, and approve the Zoning Ordinance and district mapping at the City Council

# EDC Actions

## **Tonight**

1. Ask questions

## **Summer - Fall**

2. Help bring in constituents to the engagement process (ex. business owners)
3. Ensure the draft zoning language and mapping districts remain in alignment with framework

## **Fall - Winter**

4. Engage with City Councilors and other constituents as appropriate

**Signature:**   
Sarah Rahman (Oct 12, 2022 13:22 EDT)

**Email:** srahman11@gmail.com







# Binder1

Final Audit Report

2022-10-12

Created:	2022-10-12
By:	philip plottel (philip@telshire.com)
Status:	Signed
Transaction ID:	CBJCHBCAABAkke0AOV08ynmwo6eGyczzh-HyleYnjDS

## "Binder1" History

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