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Barney S. Heath  
Director

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## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** April 23, 2021

**TO:** Councilor Deborah Crossley, Chair, Zoning & Planning Committee  
Members of the Zoning & Planning Committee

**FROM:** Barney Heath, Director, Department of Planning and Development  
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director Department of Planning and Development  
Zachery LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning  
Nevena Pilipovic-Wengler, Community Engagement Planner

**RE:** **#88-20 Discussion and review relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance**  
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING requesting review, discussion, and direction relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance.  
**CHAIR'S NOTE:** *For the following item our consultant, **Utile**, will join Planning staff to introduce the upcoming work on village centers (Phase I): planned scope, schedule, and the community engagement process planned for the next several months.*

**MEETING:** April 26, 2021

**CC:** City Council  
Planning Board  
Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer

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### Village Centers – Phase I

#### *Introduction*

Planning for the future of Newton's village centers begins with gathering and understanding community visions. Jointly, staff and our consultant, Utile, have developed an initial scope of work that will engage the community around fundamental questions such as, what is a village center (historically and today)? By combining quantitative analysis (historical development periods, mapping of uses, transit ridership, etc.) and qualitative analysis (surveys, focus groups, vision kit activities, etc.) we aim to create a starting point for substantive discussions around appropriate zoning options.

At the end of Phase I engagement efforts, we hope to have a better sense of:

- The City's village centers, including their role as part of the larger social fabric of Newton and the mix of uses that contribute to that role;
- The existing village center boundaries, beginning with the Pattern Book categorization, based on current land uses and direct observation;

- What economic development experts feel are market trends to respond to that not only competitively situate Newton within the larger region, but also foster greater equity and social cohesion;
- What other cities and towns are doing to promote a revitalized sense of place and community in their village centers;
- The synthesized community vision of uses within a 21st century village center; and
- How zoning has played a role in shaping the village centers over time and if the current Zoning Ordinance is hindering or facilitating the 21st century vision

With this foundation of work, staff and Utile will develop a prioritized list of technical zoning recommendations to be researched and refined in Phase II. Per the ZAP Committee's guidance, some of the zoning recommendations may be taken up as standalone items.

### **Agenda for 4/26 ZAP Meeting**

Staff and our consultant, will present on the following items at the upcoming ZAP meeting to introduce Phase I for village centers:

*Introduction and General Overview (see above)*

*Phase I Schedule (Attachment A)*

*Engagement Strategy*

Our engagement strategy aims to gather Newton community members' experiences of and visions for their village centers. In addition, it aims to equitably conduct community engagement such that it hears from voices disproportionately underrepresented in previous Zoning Redesign outreach.

The community engagement strategy consists of a Vision Kit, a Polis survey, focus groups, on-the-spot surveying, one outdoor charette, and a paralleled engagement strategy with the Economic Development Commission (EDC) for the business communities:

- Vision Kit & Polis Survey

The Vision Kit will be an interactive guide to help any individual or a group reflect on how they experience their village center(s) and what their village center(s) could look like in the future. It will be accessible through the internet, one's phone, or hardcopy. It will be broad and flexible so it can apply to any village center(s) the user chooses.

Vision Kit users will be encouraged to submit photos, drawings, and vision statements for staff to post on social media accounts created for Zoning Redesign and accessible to all. Staff plan to hold a general information session on how to use the vision kit in May and are reaching out to local groups, like the Neighborhood Area Councils, as well.

In addition, the Vision Kit will work in tandem with the Polis survey. Polis is a tool used across the world to help generate consensus around complex and complicated issues. Rather than simply asking questions for people to answer in a survey, Polis asks respondents to agree or disagree with submitted statements as well as submit their own. The tool analyzes all of the statements and respondents' choices and categorizes them all into various opinion groups, which helps show the full range of opinions shared by the community. Most importantly, basing all of that analysis on the actual statements submitted means that the tool becomes more of a conversation, one that most

accurately reflects the issues that matter the most to everyone. The analytic results of the tool are visualized live as new responses come in, and they are fully available to the public, to better ensure confidence that the process is transparent and open.

To learn more about Polis, please visit <https://pol.is/home>.

- Focus Groups

In addition to the Vision Kit and Polis survey, the following focus groups have been identified to further equitable engagement. A starting point for choosing these groups came from analyzing who did and did not participate in our December 2020 Zoning Redesign events (see results [here](#)). These groups include:

Focus Group	Co-Facilitator
Young People (15-35)	Youth Commission (confirmed)
People with Disabilities	Commission on Disability (confirmed)
People of Color	Human Rights Commission (pending)
Renters	Newton Housing Authority (confirmed)
LGBTQ+	Human Rights Commission (pending)
Older Adults	Council on Aging (pending)
Creative Community	Newton Cultural Council (pending)

In addition, working with the EDC, staff and Utile will host focus groups for the business community. Community engagement of the business communities may also include a survey and canvassing.

- On-the-Spot Surveying & Outdoor Charette

Following the frameworks of the Vision Kit and the Polis survey, staff will conduct in-person, outdoors and distanced, surveying of community members in and around village centers. Staff also plan to host an outdoor charette – an outdoor, in-person and distanced version of the Vision Kit.

**Looking Ahead**

Following this meeting, Utile will return to ZAP to present some baseline information relating to Newton’s village centers citywide at the May 24<sup>th</sup> meeting. In addition, staff will present on the initial status of community engagement to date, upcoming engagement activities for the month of June, and provide an overview of how City Councilors can lead guided outreach in their ward village centers.

**Attachments**

Attachment A Village Center Schedule – Phase I