



# Zoning & Planning Committee

## Report

### Part 2

#### City of Newton In City Council

**Monday, September 13, 2021**

Present: Councilors Crossley (Chair), Albright, Leary, Wright, Baker, Krintzman, Danberg and Ryan

Also Present: Councilors Malakie, Oliver and Lucas

City Staff: Deputy Director of Planning and Development Jen Caira, Planning Associate Cat Kemmett, Chief of Long Range Planning Zachary LeMel, Planning Associate, Cat Kemmett, Director of Planning and Development Barney Heath, Community Planning/Engagement Specialist Nevena Pilipovic-Wengler, Assistant City Solicitor Andrew Lee, Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo and Senior Planner Jennifer Steel

Planning and Development Board: Peter Doeringer and Kevin McCormick

Utile Consultants: Timothy Love and Lisa Hollywood

Others Present: NewTV

#### **#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.

Zoning & Planning Held on 01/27/20, 02/10/20, 02/24/20, 03/09/20, 03/23/20, 04/13/20, 04/27/20, 05/19/20, 06/01/20, 06/15/20, 06/29/20, 07/09/20, 07/16/20, 08/13/20, 09/14/20, 10/01/20, 10/15/20, 11/05/20, 11/09/20, 12/14/20, 02/22/21, 03/08/21, 05/24/21, 07/08/21

**ACTION:** Zoning and Planning Held 8-0

**NOTE:** The NewTV video link can be found here beginning at 1:31:28.

<https://newtv.org/recent-video/107-committee-meetings-and-public-hearings/7033-zoning-planning-committee-september-13-2021>

Chair Crossley stated that tonight Planning staff and our consultant, Utile, will begin a four-part presentation/discussion series with the committee focusing on Newton's village center districts. The

quantitative data collection and analyses that have been underway all year will be shared tonight and the qualitative data from the four month community engagement effort which goes through the end of this month - will be presented and discussed at our October meeting. From what we learn, November and December meetings can focus on policy discussions, and how zoning tools might be used to achieve desired outcomes.

Utile Consultant Timothy Love, Planning and Development Deputy Director Jen Caira, and Chief of Long Range Planning Zachary LeMel joined the Committee.

Timothy Love presented Utile's data collection and analyses on eleven Newton village centers, as well as two outside of Newton, for comparison. (PowerPoint (attached) The focus on Village Center Rezoning: Phase 1 Quantitative Data Analysis included transit ridership, population walksheds and business bubbles in village centers and comparable commercial areas.

Mr. Love said that in the June ZAP meeting, Utile heard general agreement that village centers should:

- fulfill the community's local needs
- traditionally be defined by a mix of uses and access to transit

Moving forward, Mr. Love expressed the need to consider and better understand the roles that temporal activity and various mobility options play in making a village center economically successful. To address the issues, Utile conducted broad and thorough analyses to evaluate what factors contribute to a successful village center.

**Mr. Love proposed the following three questions to Committee members on guiding the analysis:**

- 1) Does the presence of a "T" or commuter rail stop affect the vitality of village centers and the diversity (and success) of the retail found there?**
- 2) Does the number of people living within convenient walking distance of a village center affect the vitality of village centers and the diversity (and success) of the retail found there?**
- 3) Does the number of people who work in a village center affect the vitality of village centers and the diversity (and success) of the retail found there? Additionally, how does this relate to the mix of uses and activity?**

**Takeaways from the analysis to the above three questions:**

- 1) Yes, it helps but it isn't necessary.**
- 2) Yes, especially when no "T" or commuter rail stop is present.**
- 3) Yes, generally the more jobs in a village center, the easier it is to achieve a diversity of business types and activity throughout the day.**

**Understanding both the scope and substance of this work and discussion points recorded below requires listening to the presentation here, beginning at 1:31:28.**

<https://newtv.org/recent-video/107-committee-meetings-and-public-hearings/7033-zoning-planning-committee-september-13-2021>

**Committee members' comments, questions and answers:**

Councilors lauded the depth and breadth of Utile's work, expressing appreciation of the value this brings to a clearer understanding of factors influencing the economics of a village center, and moves us closer to zoning proposals that can help Newton realize the vibrant village centers it wants.

**Is data available on the number of people who work within the 10-15 minute walk zone?** Mr. Love did not have this information available.

**(In defining the walkable area of a village) How were the 10- and 15-minute walksheds determined?** Mr. Love described this several times as taking a point from the geographical center of a village developed upon the boundaries defined in the 2018 Pattern Book.

**Is there a pattern to the smaller subsidiary bubbles?** Mr. Love answered that historically, similar businesses cluster in the same area.

**What is the next step for this Committee?** Mr. Love answered in his opinion he thinks it would be a problem if the redevelopment in the village centers in the next 15 to 20 areas was only residential, retail and did not include other uses, such as commercial. Non-retail businesses, such as professional offices, bring activity to village centers during the day. While some building stock is available now for office use, these buildings may be vulnerable to residential development if zoning is not updated. In conclusion, we should think about the preservation of professional offices and the ability to meet their needs as part of the tool kit.

**Is ridership data pre-pandemic?** Mr. Love answered yes, this data is from the Fall 2019.

**Were the number of jobs in the Riverside area counted?** Mr. Love answered no, he would review this and add the information.

**Since public transportation is limited, do most people drive on Needham Street?** Mr. Love answered yes, he would review this and add the information for Needham Street and Chestnut Hill.

**Vision Kit data should be factored into the differences between each of the village centers. It is necessary to determine what each village center needs to thrive and survive.** Mr. Love answered that the community engagement process has resulted in qualitative feedback, which will be compared to and incorporated into the quantitative analysis presented tonight. A Venn diagram has been created on the type of outcome with high mix of uses. In October, we will discuss the synthesis of these two streams of data to help inform perspectives on how this Committee could proceed.

**Is Utile working with the Economic Development Commission (EDC)?** Mr. Love answered yes, and said they met to discuss potential themes to explain the scope of the redesign effort and to receive information on their interest and expertise in terms of economic development, current state of retail leases in village centers, EDC's thoughts on the future of (office) work and whether village centers offer

attractive possibilities for office, shared work environments, etc. Discussions were held with the EDC, real estate consultants/brokers and regional developers. In October, we will discuss this.

**The presentation did not include quantitative analysis on vehicle data including parking, access, transportation and car ridership which may be critical dimensions. Allowing on-street parking supports restaurants. Merchants have expressed concern when parking is removed. The full dimensions of travel that affect village centers should be analyzed.** Mr. Love answered that the technical work will map all village center parking lots, parking convenience and supply. If a parking lot is privately owned, they are vulnerable to redevelopment. When reviewing parking lots it will be determined if a) existing parking supply is working and b) is this village center more vulnerable to redevelopment. The success of a village center is the combination of vehicular access, bus routes and transit lines that connect village centers. Mr. LeMel added that people have expressed the importance of parking and driving through the various outreach platforms, all of which will be reviewed with and compared to the quantitative data presented here. This presentation does not suggest that parking is unimportant or not being considered.

**How many people responded to the (Polis) survey?** Mr. LeMel answered this information will be provided in October once the survey ends. Ms. Caira asked people to continue providing their feedback until the end of day on October 3.

**What is the weekday ridership during the a.m. and p.m. times at Riverside?** Mr. Love answered that ridership at Riverside was not reviewed because it is not a village center. He added that he would review this data and incorporate the information.

**Why was BJ's Wholesale Club on Moody Street in Waltham included on the map, when BJ's (the box store) is 1.06 miles from Moody Street?** Mr. Love answered that BJ's may have an additional facility at this location and would review this data.

**Councilor's suggestions, questions and answers:**

**It was stated that Newton Corner is the least walkable village. There is an opportunity for improvement within the mixture of buildings, pedestrian safety and green space would benefit Newton Corner. Nonantum is one of the highest walkable villages. Walkability is an important concept that adds to a lively village center.**

**What is the right balance in each village center regarding transportation? The cost of driving and climate change issues significantly need to be balanced. Walkability is important for vibrancy, livability and health.**

**Please add the survey deadline date to the City's website.**

**A suggestion was made urging City Councilors to engage and work with residents on the survey and Vision kit.**

**Planning Board members comments, suggestions, questions and answers:**

**When describing village centers perhaps a model could be created explaining the different aspects of vibrancy, number of people on the streets, retail, parking, walkability, walk sheds, what type of business attracts people, affluence of village centers, demographics, etc.**

In closing, Mr. Love stated the success of village centers requires people that walk and drive. A *combination* of people walking and driving will make each village center vital.

Without further discussion, Councilor Leary made a motion to hold this item. Council members agreed 8-0.

The Committee adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Deborah J. Crossley, Chair**