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Barney S. Heath  
Director

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## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** November 5, 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  
Cat Kemmett, Planning Associate

**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.

**MEETING:** November 8, 2021

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

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### Introduction

At the October 25, 2021 ZAP meeting, Planning Staff and Utile presented on the findings from the first phase of engagement focused on updated to the village center zoning districts. We heard from nearly 2,000 community members through the online interactive forum (Polis), Vision Kits, equitable focus groups, and economic development focus groups. You can find all the input received at this link:

<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/planning/village-centers>

Staff then synthesized the community input to identify the shared observations, hopes, and concerns from these different engagement platforms, which can be reviewed here:

<https://www.newtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/76305/637705033647430000>

From the synthesis, staff found seven takeaways that the majority of public input prioritized:

- Creating more communal & public space + activation
- Increasing accessibility to buildings and infrastructure within Village Centers
- Incorporating climate resiliency through built structures and green spaces
- Helping small businesses to begin, stay and thrive in Village Centers

- Making permitting process easier, clearer, and multi-tiered
- Adding more diverse housing options and encourage mixed-use projects (although to what extent had a spectrum of opinion)
- Prioritizing safe and accessible routes to and through village centers, especially walking and biking

These findings, representing the last 5-months of work are substantial. Understanding that, staff have scheduled a public info session, with the same content presented to ZAP, but followed by a Q+A for community members on November 15<sup>th</sup> at 6pm ([register here](#)). In addition, in advance of returning to ZAP on November 18 to present draft prioritizations for the future of village center zoning based on the engagement and analysis, the Committee Chair has recommended holding a continued Committee discussion for the upcoming, November 8 meeting.

**Follow-up from October 25 Questions**

In preparation for this upcoming discussion, staff would like to provide answers to clarifying questions from the October 25 meeting below:

*Q: Was the On-the-Spot-Surveying data separated out?*

A: No. During the On-the-Spot-Surveying, staff, or interns, directed participants to the online interactive forum (Polis) for completion. Not all people engaged during the On-the-Spot-Surveying completed Polis, and others may have later attended a focus group or completed a Vision Kit. We did not track this.

*Q: Does the data breakdown if the comment is specific to a village center?*

A: Yes, [Community Feedback Compilation](#) (Excel spreadsheet) marks the village center when a comment was village center specific. The cell is left blank when no village center was mentioned. This can be found in the Community Input tab, column F. The table here shows the data for all comments:

Auburndale	Chestnut Hill	Eliot (T Stop)	Four Corners	Lower Falls	Newton Centre	Newton Corner	Newton Highlands	Newtonville	Nonantum	Oak Hill	Oak Hill park	Upper Falls	Waban	West Newton	Brookline Village	Moody Street	Blank
34	4	6	35	7	160	87	178	244	103	1	4	51	122	108	1	1	945

*Q: What other analysis will be undertaken to help form the basis for proposed village center zoning?*

A: The data gathered during this phase of engagement has been, and will continue to be, reviewed alongside the quantitative data Utile presented at the September 13, 2021 meeting when crafting new zoning language. Some examples of this data include demographics, market research, transit ridership,

and mix of jobs. It is anticipated that there may be other analytical undertakings sought as proposed zoning is presented..

*Q: I am still concerned about the 70% vs. 30% split on certain issues, how are we to interpret this as we develop zoning around these issues?*

A: This percentage breakdown is based on the groupings created from the [Polis Report](#). First to clarify, the results were closer to an 80% vs. 20% split, with the exact results being 78% vs. 22%. There were certain clear preferences embedded in stark policy statements that may provide guidance for the Committee. Additionally, there were also many Polis statements where there was general consensus across these two groups, which could also help inform as staff develop draft zoning.

*Q: In the presentation given on September 13, 2021, staff showed that the BJ's Wholesale Club was located on Moody Street in Waltham. Is this correct, or is it an error?*

A: The data source used to calculate businesses and the number of employees within these businesses is known as Data Axle. While this data is typically precise in terms of spatial location, errors may occur and that is the issue here. Though the data point is correct, it was located spatially incorrectly.

### **Next Steps**

Staff look forward to the upcoming Committee discussion and will be on hand to take additional questions and comments as they arise.