



March 31, 2022

Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development
1 Ashburton Place, Room 2101
Boston, MA 02108

RE: Draft guidelines for Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA Communities

Thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on these draft guidelines.

We support the creation of the MBTA Communities law, and broadly support the draft guidelines put forward by the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Allowing more housing near transit by-right is essential to meeting several of the Commonwealth's and the City of Newton's goals, and will help us as we work to reform our local zoning in several ways to facilitate a revitalization of our Village Centers. In addition, the statute and these guidelines can help us with:

- Easing the housing crisis and adding affordable units via our inclusionary zoning law
- Providing economic stimulus to local businesses and the building industry
- Lowering housing development costs by adding certainty into the development process
- Reducing transportation emissions and traffic congestion
- Creating "15-minute neighborhoods" around transit hubs
- Bolstering enrollment in our public schools

The City Council is in the process of revising village center zoning and is looking at reducing or eliminating parking minimums while increasing housing near and over retail. These guidelines can help us move that process along.

Smaller communities may well need the technical assistance mentioned in DHCD's materials, and we support bolstering the resources dedicated to helping communities plan well. It is particularly important to increase housing without overbuilding parking (a substantial expense and deterrent to good design) and also to ensure residents can access transit and services on foot, safely—items not included in the guidance or the law.

Zone location should allow for connection to transit on foot and by bicycle—it may be that some locations are long and skinny, rather than being compact, in order to capitalize on a particularly good walking or biking corridor.

We think the 25–50-acre size is indeed reasonable—and it may be helpful for DHCD to revisit this after a few such zones are implemented, to see if communities with multiple transit stops should add further multi-family zones. The 15 units per acre minimum density is also reasonable.

We also believe the new zoning should encourage a high level of building energy performance for all new buildings. Under our special permit rules, Newton has achieved great success in leading developers to create high performance building envelopes, high efficiency electrification of all primary building HVAC systems and using clean energy. It is concerning to us that we may lose that ability under these rules, without explicit guidance to require higher standards in a by-right overlay district. In our experience, better quality building leads to long term affordability.

Lastly, we support communities being given the flexibility to enact zoning that encourages a variety of unit sizes to better meet different needs and affordability levels and adopting inclusionary zoning rules in line with other communities and 40B regulations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Newton City Council President Susan Albright, Vice President Rick Lipof, Councilors Andreae Downs, Deb Crossley, Alicia Bowman, Andrea Kelley, Brenda Noel, Bill Humphrey, and David Kalis