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Barney S. Heath
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 10, 2022

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: **#38-22 Discussion and review relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance regarding village centers**
ZONING & PLANNING COMMITTEE requesting review, discussion and possible ordinance amendments relative to Chapter 30 zoning ordinances pertaining to Mixed Use, business districts and village districts relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance. (formerly #88-20)

MEETING: June 13, 2022

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

Village Center Zoning Proposals

At the June 1 ZAP meeting, Chair Crossley facilitated a workshop at ZAP focusing on better understanding the thoughts, concerns, and remaining questions that Committee members have regarding the framework and proposed policies in the draft zoning proposals for Village Centers. Planning staff and consultants from Utile were on hand to answer any questions.

The goal of this meeting was to understand which of the 12 proposals (attachment A) have Committee consensus and which have remaining questions or areas of concern. Knowing this will allow Planning staff to begin the work to both draft ordinance ready zoning language and mapping the actual proposed districts, while simultaneously engaging the community around these proposals.

Outcomes of the June 1 ZAP Meeting

Four of the 12 proposals were discussed. The following is a brief summary of what councilors shared about those proposals.

Reducing parking requirements in Village Centers (Proposal 1)

- The majority of Councilors, on and off the Committee, overwhelmingly supported lowering parking minimums in Village Centers, with unanimous support for looking deeper into the data to consider lowering those requirements further for residential buildings.
- Some members voiced support for eliminating all parking minimums in favor of letting the market decide how much parking is needed.
- Some members were not in favor of exempting ground floor retail uses from parking minimums.

Increase floor-to-floor heights for office and ground floor retail uses, and reduce for residential uses to match industry standards (Proposal 2)

- There was general support amongst the Committee for the proposal. Several Councilors proposed an amendment to keep the allowed residential floor-to-floor height at 12' maximum. By a nonbinding straw vote, 4 ZAP members voted in favor, 2 voted no, 1 member abstained.
- Utile explained that these proposals were maximums, and that the additional cost for building higher floors is significant, making it in the developer's best interest to only build as high as necessary.
- With the Committee's support, Utile and staff, will further refine the proposed standards so they incentivize the types of uses wanted in village centers.

Create design requirements for half stories (Proposal 3)

- The Committee supported the design standards for half stories with 6 councilors voting in favor and 1 abstaining by a nonbinding straw vote.
- Some members felt that the minimum setback on the top floor could be reduced from the proposed 10' setback, with Utile recommending 6' or 7'. Developers could always create a larger setback if desired.
- With the Committee's support, Utile and staff, will further refine the proposed standards so that they appropriately facilitate and incentivize a variety of rooflines (flat and pitched).

Eliminate lot area per unit minimums (Proposal 4)

- By a nonbinding straw vote the Committee supported the proposal with 5 councilors voting in favor and 2 abstaining.
- Case studies previously shared with ZAP highlighted how this regulation often leads to larger and more expensive units.
- Utile explained how the proposed standards (overall height/stories and building footprint) act as better tools to regulate density and allow for a variety of unit sizes for Newton's diverse population (ex. downsizing seniors and growing families).

Upcoming ZAP Meeting

At the June 13 ZAP meeting, the Chair will organize the remaining proposals with the intention to review in Committee and hold straw votes. Again, Planning staff and Utile will be on hand to answer any questions.

Upcoming Engagement Opportunities

The second phase of engagement for the focus of village centers will take place in the late summer / early fall and will involve an installation at the Newton Free Library, on-the-spot surveying at community events, and community outreach by the Zoning Redesign '[Community Engagement Network.](#)' Stay looped in on the opportunities to give your feedback on the proposals that ZAP deliberates upon, including an installation at the Newton Free Library. Sign up for our newsletter at [this link](#) to stay updated on this!

June 15 at 10am - Phase I Engagement Work to be Featured by The Boston Foundation

Newton Planning Department Will Speak on Panel at The Boston Foundation's event "Representation in the Housing Process: Best Practices for Improving Racial Equity". This virtual event is for the release of a report by Boston University prepared for the Massachusetts Coalition for Racial Equity in Housing. A panel discussion will follow a presentation on the report on how community engagement can be more equitable in housing processes; panelists will include Newton planning staff. [Learn more about the event and register here.](#)

Attachment A: Village Center Zoning Proposal Packet