

NEWSLETTERS

Newton could sabotage Auburndale station fix

By [Alan Wirzbicki](#) Globe Staff, Updated November 28, 2023, 3:00 a.m.

*This is an excerpt from **Are we there yet?**, a Globe Opinion newsletter about the future of transportation in the region. Sign up to [get it in your inbox a day early](#).*



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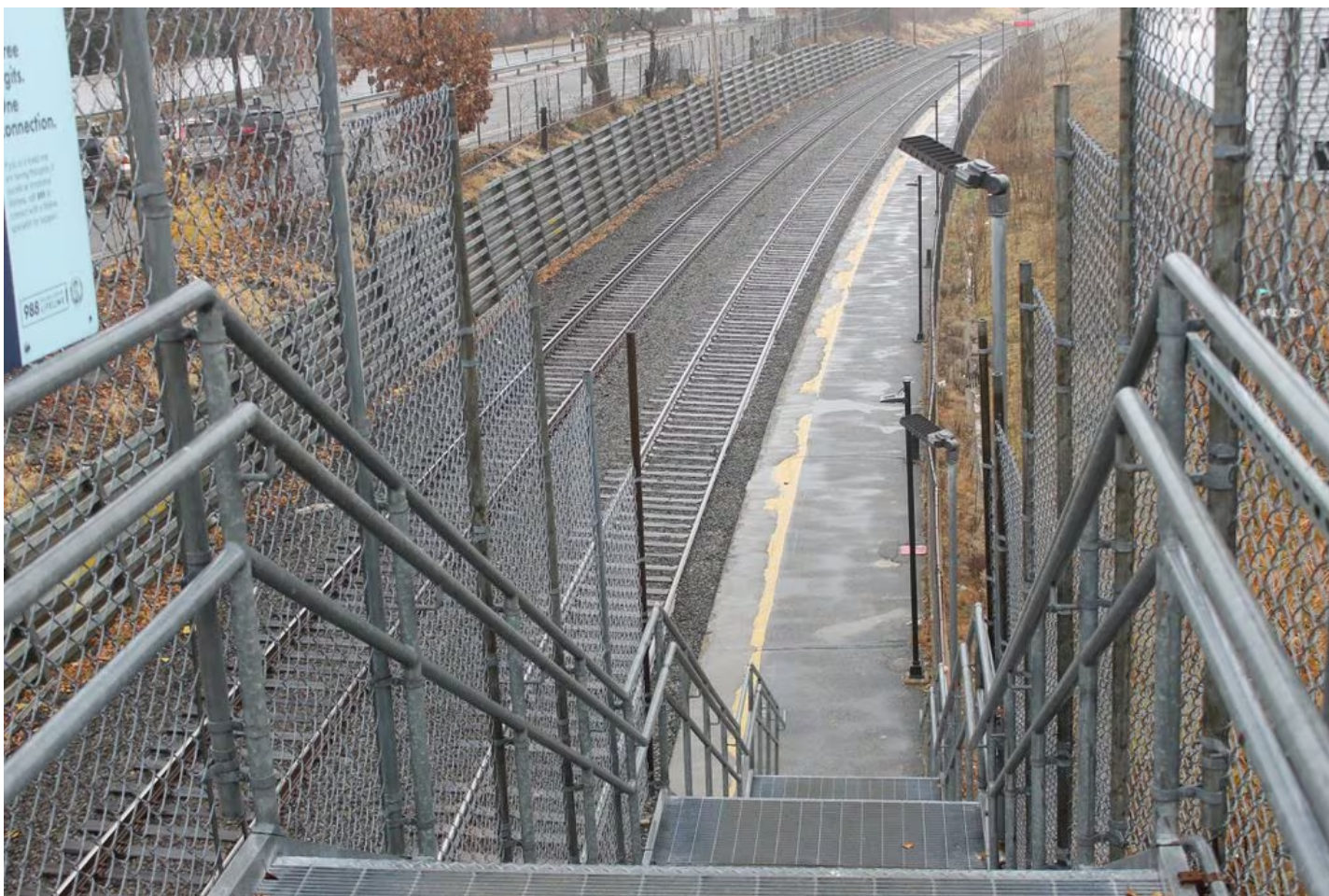
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Is Newton about to ruin its chances to replace the train station in Auburndale?

That would certainly be a shame because all three MBTA Worcester Line stations in the city are woefully outdated. The way they were originally [constructed in the 1960s](#), with a passenger platform on only one side of the track, limits the number of trains that can stop there.

The city has spent two decades prodding the state and federal governments for the [\\$170 million or more needed](#) to upgrade the Auburndale, West Newton, and Newtonville stations. And those efforts were starting to bear fruit, with the state agreeing to [fund design for new stations](#).




The single platform at the Auburndale Station limits the number of trains that can stop there. HEATHER HOPP-BRUCE

But now backers worry that the City Council could sabotage those efforts if it leaves the area surrounding the Auburndale Station out of Newton's state-mandated rezoning plan.

The backstory: Newton, like other communities in Greater Boston, is required to rezone a certain amount of land to allow for more multifamily housing near transit stations. The requirement stems from a 2021 housing law, the MBTA Communities Act, which is intended to spur more housing production and ease the state's shortage.

In a pleasant surprise, many suburbs subject to the law have actually [exceeded its requirements](#), rezoning [more than was strictly necessary](#) to comply. It looked like Newton would, too; the council had been working on a plan that would rezone around all the city's transit stations and several other village centers, too.

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Then came Election Day, when voters threw out pro-density city councilors.

Now the council is [considering a scaled-back approach](#) that would still comply with the law but not include rezoning of several neighborhoods, including the Auburndale area. A decision could be made as soon as Wednesday. (Areas around the other two stations would be rezoned even under the less ambitious plan.)

Clearly, passing a less ambitious plan is within the city's rights. But withholding transportation grants is within the state's and federal government's rights. And in a none-too-subtle letter to Newton Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, Governor Maura Healey's point man on housing issues made clear that places willing to accommodate housing growth would get preferential treatment.

"I ...understand that the City Council is considering in particular the zoning near its three commuter rail stations and that Auburndale may not be included," wrote Secretary of the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities Edward Augustus. "Supporting more housing options is one of the important lenses, perhaps the most important, that the Healey-Driscoll Administration considers when making transportation investments."

If not exactly a threat, that sounds like a firm suggestion that if Newton doesn't rezone around the Auburndale Station, it risks losing its shot at state money to rebuild it.

It'll be interesting to see whether the Healey administration really plays hardball here. If Newton doesn't include Auburndale in its rezoning, the city won't be violating the letter of the new housing law. But it certainly will be thumbing its nose at a governor who has made housing a priority — and giving the Healey administration a good reason to spend its transportation dollars elsewhere.



Rebuilding the crumbling commuter rail stations in Newton would cost more than \$170 million. HEATHER HOPP-BRUCE

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