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CITY HALL ZONING

City Council passes scaled-down Village Center rezoning plan

👤 Bryan McGonigle ⌚ 9 hours ago 👤 4 mins



It is done. For now.

Newton's City Council approved the Village Center Overlay District proposal—or, at least, a chopped up, scaled down version of it—Monday night after months of

The plan passed with 21 yes votes, 2 no votes and one member absent.

Weekend deal

When the meeting started, the Council had interesting news. Council President Susan Albright and Councilor Leonard Gentile had met over the weekend and worked out a deal. He would scrap a bunch of his amendments if he could resubmit his other amendments as a package to be voted on together.

The amendments in the package removed some lots from the plan, particularly in West Newton.

Taken with last week's move that took several whole villages out of the plan, Monday's amendment package brought the total number of potential units in the plan to around 8,700 units. That number was more than 9,400 when the process started.

While many objected to some parts of Gentile's amendments Monday—especially one that down-zones the block that Santander Bank from the plan's busiest category even though it runs along Washington Street and is near an MBTA stop, for example—the Council voted for it with 22 in favor. There was one absent vote, and Councilor Alison Leary was the sole vote against it.

"I thought the process was really good and I actually thought the plan was really good. And then we had an election," Councilor Josh Krintzman said. "And the election made it clear that a lot of voters didn't like the plan, didn't like the direction it was headed and thought it was too much too fast."

'Possible rather than perfect'

Krintzman said the election results were why he supported removing some of the village centers from the plan last week. And taking out villages, Krintzman added, gives the city to treat the village center rezoning as a pilot program to see how it does in the villages in which it's implemented before expanding it citywide.

Councilor Andreae Downs echoed that desire to get a vote done.

"There are pieces of it that I wish weren't here," Downs said. "However, I think if we're going to get a package out this is the one we'll land on. So I will be voting for it in recognition that we're possible rather than the perfect."

The ordinance will be officially go into effect in 20 days, so the vote made the Dec. 31 deadline for MBTA Communities Act compliance.