

Data on Newton Residential Buildings in the Newton Zoning Proposal of October 24 2022

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Introduction

At the Zoning and Planning Committee meeting of October 24 2022, there was a presentation and discussion of Village Centers Zoning. The slide presentation may be found at:

[2022-10-24 Village Center Rezoning Phase 3: District Mapping \[51 pages\]](#)

The District Mapping slides define 3 levels of zoning VC1, VC2, and VC3 from least dense to most dense. You may see the definitions presented on page 11 of the slide presentation:

[2022-10-24 Page 11: VC1 & VC2 & VC3 By Right Specification](#)

Unfortunately, this page does not tell the whole story. The “By Right” conditions on that page may be changed “By Special Permit”. This is not discussed anywhere in the presentation. Instead, one must examine carefully a special box placed on each zoning map:

[2022-10-24 By Right vs Special Permit](#)

Here are the **By Right** allowances from the Page 11 specification:

VC1	VC2	VC3
2.5 Stories	3.5 Stories	4.5 Stories
49 Feet tall, max	62 feet tall, max	75 feet tall, max
5000 SF, max, footprint	10000 SF, max, footprint	15000 SF, max, footprint
Residential	Residential, Mixed Use, Commercial	Residential, Mixed Use, Commercial

Here are the **By Special Permit** allowances from the box on each zoning map:

VC1	VC2	VC3
3.5 Stories	4.5 Stories	5.5 Stories
62 Feet tall, max	75 feet tall, max	88 feet tall, max
7500 SF, max, footprint	12500 SF, max, footprint	17500 SF, max, footprint
Residential, Mixed Use, Commercial	Residential, Mixed Use, Commercial	Residential, Mixed Use, Commercial

As you may see by comparison of the two tables, the Special Permit options *allow for larger, taller, more dense buildings and allow for mixed use and commercial buildings in all three zones.*

In this document, I will extract summary data about the Newton residential buildings that are located in the VC1, VC2, and VC3 zones in the 12 villages discussed on October 24 2022. I wish to make explicit the number of residential buildings that may be impacted by the proposed zoning changes.

The 12 zoning maps provided on October 24 2022 have been extracted into the document:
[2022-10-24 All Zoning Maps \[12 pages\]](#)

The 12 individual maps may be found at the following 12 links:

- [Newton Centre](#)
- [Auburndale](#)
- [West Newton](#)
- [Newtonville](#)
- [Nonantum](#)
- [Newton Corner](#)
- [Newton Lower Falls](#)
- [Waban](#)
- [Four Corners](#)
- [Newton Upper Falls](#)
- [Newton Highlands](#)
- [Thompsonville](#)

I have worked with these zoning maps in combination with [Google Maps](#) and with:
[The City of Newton Assessors Database and Map](#)

To examine any particular village center, it is necessary to drag Google Maps or the Assessors Map with the mouse to that village center and then to zoom in. It is especially helpful that the Assessors Map has the same street view capability as Google Maps so that one may see what any building looks like in either application. Google Maps may also be used to provide satellite views that complement the street views.

I began this study of Newton residential buildings in all villages centers with a much deeper data analysis of *every single building included in the Newton Corner zoning map*:

[2022-11-01 Data Analysis: Newton Corner Zoning Proposal of 2022-10-24 \[13 pages\]](#)

In this document, I will provide **summary data on the Newton residential buildings included in the zoning maps of all 12 village centers**. In my lists, I will arrange the village data *in order by the total number of residential buildings in a village* from the most to the least. I will also supply the raw data for each village so that:

- People in city government as well as those in the general public may study the situation in detail
- A resident may check if their address is included in a VC1, VC2, or VC3 zone

On November 23 2022, the Planning Dept released a 29 page document that refines some aspects of the October 24 2022 presentation and suggests additional changes that are under consideration. I have split this planning memo into two parts and I provide links to each part:

[2022-11-23 Village Center Zoning Memo Cover \[7 pages\]](#)

[2022-11-23 Village Center Overlay District \(VCOD\) Zoning Ordinance \[22 pages\]](#)

I will extract some information from the November 23 cover letter.

On page 3 of the cover letter, there is a **Zoning Summary**. I will extract and parse these statements.

The descriptions of VC3 and VC2 begin with distinct sentences but then end with the same prose.

The VC3 description begins with:

The VC3 District facilitates mixed-use development of moderate- and large-scale. This district serves as the core commercial zone of certain village centers, particularly those with access to mass transit.

The VC2 description begins with:

The VC2 District facilitates mixed-use and residential development of moderate scale. This district serves as the core of some village centers and as a transition district for other village centers.

The common conclusion to the VC3 and VC2 descriptions is:

Buildings are typically set close to the sidewalk to create a defined street wall that supports pedestrian activity and a sense of place. Ground story active uses address the needs of residents and employees in the immediate neighborhood, the larger Newton Community, and regional visitors.

The phrase “Ground story active uses address the needs of ...” emphasizes mixed-use in both VC3 and VC2.

The full VC1 description is:

The VC1 District facilitates small- to medium-scale multi-family buildings given its proximity to amenities, mixture of uses, and transit options found in Newton’s village centers. This district acts as a transition between the mixed-use cores of village centers and the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

The VC1 description emphasizes “multi-family buildings” and speaks of “proximity to amenities, mixture of uses, and transit options” but leaves *ambiguous* whether or not such a mixture of uses would be within the VC1 zone itself.

On page 4 of the cover letter, there is a large table of zoning specifications. Let me mention 3 items.

1. The footprint maximums in VC1 have been reduced to 4000 SF by right and 6000 SF by special permit.
2. The by right building heights were changed in VC3 to the more complex specification:
 - Mixed Use - 4.5
 - Residential - 2.5

At the ZAP meeting of November 28, it was explained that this constraint is intended to be *a disincentive to build a purely residential building in VC3*. In other words, this rule favors mixed use in VC3. There is no corresponding change for building heights in VC2. Thus, taller residential buildings are permitted in VC2 than in VC3.

3. The Usable Open Space requirement (for lots greater than 30000 SF) is set at 30% for VC1 and at 5% for VC2 and VC3. The explanation for 30% in VC1 is given as:

The open space requirement was also increased to 30% for lots with more than 30,000 sq. ft. in VC1 to ensure larger sites are still compatible with the residential nature of these areas, while also disincentivizing the merging of multiple lots.

Thus, rather than being an incentive for open space, the zoning document views it as a disincentive for merging of multiple lots. There is no attempt to set a Usable Open Space requirement for lots smaller than 30000 SF.

On page 5, the cover letter discusses proximity to residential districts for a VC3 zone:

Therefore, the draft zoning text includes a requirement that any building in the VC3 district must reduce the height of the building to 3.5 stories within 50 feet of an abutting residential district. Setbacks are also increased in all VCOD districts when abutting a residential district and screening requirements are included in the design standards for service and parking areas next to residential districts.

The catch in this wording is that an abutting VC1 or VC2 zone is no longer viewed as a “residential district” even if every building currently in that zone happens to be residential. None of the mitigations apply to VC1 or VC2.

On page 7, the cover letter discusses “potential additions and revisions” to the zoning proposals. Let me copy the six proposals.

1. Limit height increases to projects with additional affordable housing - early versions of the zoning standards included the ability to add an additional story by special permit. Upon further reflection and coordination with the Housing Partnership and Affordable Housing Trust, staff is looking to limit the ability to increase the height to projects that go beyond the inclusionary zoning affordability requirements.
2. Limit VC1 to just residential - VC1 was originally intended to allow some limited commercial uses by special permit, however based on some early feedback staff are considering limiting VC1 to residential uses only.
3. Incentivizing/requiring mixed use - one of the complexities of the MBTA Communities requirements is that the guidelines do not allow for the requirement of mixed use and there must be an ability to build only multifamily in order to comply. VC3 has been designed to strongly incentivize mixed-use along the core of village centers by allowing 4.5 stories for mixed use and 2.5 stories for residential. In some village centers VC2 is mapped along the main commercial core of the village center, such as Watertown Street in Nonantum. Staff is exploring including a similar incentive structure or just requiring mixed-use along specified streets.
4. Further reduce parking requirements - staff is exploring further reducing residential parking requirements based on proximity to transit and/or for affordable housing.
5. Incentivizing preservation of existing buildings - staff are exploring ways the zoning can further incentivize the preservation and reuse of existing buildings. In particular this could help preserve some of the larger homes in VC1 while allowing them to be adapted into additional units.
6. Sustainability requirements - staff are closely following updates to the state building code and will be working with the law department to determine what sustainability requirements can be included in the zoning.

Let me comment on these proposals.

To me, proposal 2, **limit VC1 to just residential**, is of the utmost importance.

One of the fundamental problems with the three zones proposed on October 24 is that **there is no zone that is guaranteed to be purely residential**. Some may point to the fact that VC1 is Residential by **right**. This begs the question. By **special permit**, a building in VC1 may be Residential, Mixed-Use, or Commercial. Some people at the October 24 meeting suggested that the use of a special permit to create a mixed-use or commercial building in VC1 would be infrequent. I think that this view is extraordinarily optimistic. Newton has often granted special permits. Further, the question of precedent is important. If one developer is able to build a mixed-use or commercial building in a VC1 area by special permit, this will set a precedent for future developers. If another developer presents a mixed-use or commercial building design for VC1 that is similar to a building that has already been permitted, it will be difficult for the city to say NO to such a request. This may create a snowball effect.

In the data that I will show below, there are 401 existing residential buildings in VC1, VC2, and VC3 and of these buildings 263 are in VC1. By limiting VC1 to purely residential, we will at least protect the residential character of these neighborhoods.

Regarding proposal 1, **limit height increases to projects with additional affordable housing:**

This proposal is very appropriate given the housing goals of the zoning project. If any other reasons are put forward for granting height increases by special permit, these reasons should be germane to the key goals of the zoning project.

Regarding proposal 3, **incentivizing/requiring mixed use:**

This proposal requires more elaboration. It seems to say that despite the intention of the MBTA Communities law to require the ability to build pure multi-family housing we should somehow incentivize multi-family housing that is built on top of a mixed use ground floor. To change *incentivize* to *require* would seem to be a clear violation of the MBTA Communities law.

The fact that there is a proposal above to limit pure multi-family housing in VC3 to 2.5 stories also seems to me to be opposed to the spirit of the MBTA Communities law. Perhaps this special height limitation should be dropped.

In all events, the eventual wording of any implementation of proposal 3 will demand careful scrutiny.

Regarding proposal 4, **further reduce parking requirements based on proximity to transit and/or for affordable housing:**

I oppose this because it seems misguided.

In the data that I will show below, I list all transit options for the 12 village centers. Only 3 village centers have decent transit via the Green Line: Newton Centre, Newton Highlands, Waban. It is well known that commuter rail has limited schedules and that the MBTA is reducing rather than increasing bus services. It makes no sense to reduce automobile parking based on problematic transit service.

Further, to reduce parking for buildings with affordable housing is to discriminate against the poorest.

Regarding proposal 5, **incentivizing preservation of existing buildings:**

In theory, this sounds nice. However, as was clear from the ZAP meeting of November 28, there is not yet firm wording in the proposed zoning that would accomplish this. Further, with so much emphasis on development by right, there is great incentive for a developer to tear down an existing property and build from scratch.

Regarding proposal 6, **sustainability requirements:**

Whatever sustainability requirements are legal and make good sense from an environmental perspective should be built into the zoning code. I am opposed to granting height increases by special permit base on sustainability enhancements. Doing this would be inconsistent with proposal 1.

The Residential Building Data in VC1, VC2, VC3

For the purpose of the data, I consider a **home** to be a traditional one, two, or three family residence with a height of 2.5 or 3 stories.

For the purpose of the data, I consider an **apartment building** to be a multi-family residence with multiple units and with no mixed use aspect. I include both rental units and condominium units.

The next set of pages consists of data about the number of homes and apartments that fall into the VC1, VC2, VC3 categories in each village center. There are several sections

Main Summary Tables

There are two summary tables:

Summary Data Table #1: Village Center Data: Total Residential Buildings and Public Transit Options

Summary Data Table #2: Total Residential Buildings by Zone VC1, VC2, VC3 and by Residence Type

Village Level Summary Tables

A table for each village center that shows the number of homes and apartments that fall into the VC1, VC2, VC3 categories in that village. The tables break down residence information into homes and apartments. Totals are given by rows and columns.

Detailed residential data for each village center

For each village, a list of the street addresses of the homes and apartments that fall into the VC1, VC2, VC3 categories. I also supply the raw data for each village so that:

- People in city government as well as those in the general public may study the situation in detail
- A resident may check if their address is included in a VC1, VC2, or VC3 zone

After the data sections, there are two concluding sections:

Discussion and Suggestions ... page 30

Appendix: Design Standards ... page 35

Main Summary Tables

Summary Data Table #1: Village Center Data: Total Residential Buildings and Public Transit Options

The **Total of Residential Buildings** in each village center that are included in the VC1, VC2, VC3 zones in the Zoning Proposal of October 24 2022

The **Public Transit Options** for each village center are also listed

Village Center	Total of Residential ...	Public Transit Options
Newtonville	110	Commuter Rail, Bus: 59, 553, 554, 556
Newton Corner	85	Bus: 52, 57, 553, 554, 556, 558, Express Bus: 501, 504
Nonantum	39	Bus: 59, 558
Thompsonville	38	None
West Newton	32	Commuter Rail, Bus: 553, 554, Express Bus: 505
Waban	28	Green Line
Auburndale	16	Commuter Rail, Bus: 558, Express Bus: 505
Newton Centre	15	Green Line, Bus: 52
Newton Highlands	14	Green Line, Bus: 59
Four Corners	12	Bus: 59
Newton Lower Falls	9	None
Newton Upper Falls	3	Bus: 59
Cumulative Total	401	

Note: There are 8 Green Line stops in Newton

D Line: Chestnut Hill, Newton Centre, Newton Highlands, Eliot, Waban, Woodland, Riverside

B Line: Boston College

Only 3 Green Line stops are at the above village centers: Newton Centre, Newton Highlands, Waban

Riverside will be the site of a separate large scale development project

Eliot and Woodland are not at all village centers

Close to Chestnut Hill, there is little development opportunity except in the nearby Chestnut Hill Mall

Close to Boston College, there is a tiny commercial area

Note: The only bus routes that currently go express to Boston are 501, 504, 505

The routes 553, 554, 556, 558 now terminate at Newton Corner and therefore are no longer express bus routes

Summary Data Table #2: Total Residential Buildings by Zone VC1, VC2, VC3 and by Residence Type

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	26	37	8	71
Homes	237	75	18	330
Totals	263	112	26	401

In terms of the **impact of the zoning proposal** of October 24 2022 **on existing residential buildings**, the 12 village centers clearly fall into three categories.

There are 2 village centers that will have **massive impact** on existing residential buildings:

- Newtonville 110 residential buildings
- Newton Corner 85 residential buildings

There are 195 existing residential buildings in these 2 villages.

This means that 48.6% of the impact on existing residential buildings is concentrated in 2 of the 12 village centers.

There are 4 village centers that will have **significant impact** on existing residential buildings:

- Nonantum 39 residential buildings
- Thompsonville 38 residential buildings
- West Newton 32 residential buildings
- Waban 28 residential buildings

There are 137 existing residential buildings in these 4 villages.

This means that 34.2% of the impact on existing residential buildings is concentrated in 4 of the 12 village centers.

There are 6 village centers that will have **modest impact** on existing residential buildings:

- Auburndale 16 residential buildings
- Newton Centre 15 residential buildings
- Newton Highlands 14 residential buildings
- Four Corners 12 residential buildings
- Newton Lower Falls 9 residential buildings
- Newton Lower Falls 3 residential buildings

There are 69 existing residential buildings in these 6 villages.

This means that in total 6 of the 12 village centers face only 17.2% of the impact on existing residential buildings.

The data shows that **the zoning maps of October 24 2022 have a widely different impact on the existing residential buildings near the various village centers.**

What is the rationale for such dramatic imbalances of impact?

The VC1, VC2, VC3 zones as currently drawn seriously impact the existing residential buildings in Newtonville, Newton Corner, Nonantum, Thompsonville, West Newton, and Waban while the other 6 village centers will face little impact.

Village Level Summary Tables

Newtonville

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	4	6	1	11
Homes	89	8	2	99
Totals	93	14	3	110

Newton Corner

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	3	6	2	11
Homes	28	40	6	74
Totals	31	46	8	85

Nonantum

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	0	2	0	2
Homes	27	10	0	37
Totals	27	12	0	39

Thompsonville

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	5	5	2	12
Homes	12	9	5	26
Totals	17	14	7	38

West Newton

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	1	1	0	2
Homes	30	0	0	30
Totals	31	1	0	32

Waban

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	5	1	0	6
Homes	21	1	0	22
Totals	26	2	0	28

Auburndale

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	0	2	1	3
Homes	9	1	3	13
Totals	9	3	4	16

Newton Centre

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	1	0	2	3
Homes	12	0	0	12
Totals	13	0	2	15

Newton Highlands

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	3	0	0	3
Homes	7	2	2	11
Totals	10	2	2	14

Four Corners

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	3	5	0	8
Homes	0	4	0	4
Totals	0	9	0	12

Newton Lower Falls

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	0	9	0	9
Homes	0	0	0	0
Totals	0	9	0	9

Newton Upper Falls

	VC1	VC2	VC3	Totals
Apartments	1	0	0	1
Homes	2	0	0	2
Totals	3	0	0	3

Detailed residential data for each village center

Newtonville Residential Data

Newtonville VC3

Apartments: 1
28 Austin St [Mixed Use]

Homes: 2
66-68 Austin St
162 Lowell Av

Homes with business uses:
46-48 Austin St

Newtonville VC2

Apartments: 6
100 Madison Av
80-82 Madison Av
110-112 Washington Park: former Claflin School
25-31 Highland Av
935 Washington St
230 Walnut St

Homes: 8
103 Madison Av
101 Madison Av
105 Washington Park
17 Washington Ter
21 Washington Ter
227 Walnut St
221 Walnut St
723 Washington St

Homes with business uses:
731 Washington St
727 Washington St
717 Washington St

Newtonville VC1

Apartments: 4
1-6 Walnut Ter
25-31 Highland Av
96-108 Washington Park
86-94 Washington Park

Homes: 89
171 Lowell Av
167 Lowell Av
161 Lowell Av
157 Lowell Av
142 Lowell Av
40 Foster St
34 Foster St
30 Foster St
24-26 Foster St
20 Foster St
+
14-16 Foster St
209 Walnut St
203-205 Walnut St
197 Walnut St
200 Walnut St
15 Beach St
7 Beach St
12-14 Beach St
8 Beach St
2 Beach St
+
84 Court St
76 Court St
66 Court St
62 Court St
58 Court St
54 Court St
50 Court St
46 Court St
42 Court St
36-38 Court St
+
34 Court St
28 Court St
26 Court St
22 Court St
70-72 Austin St
76 Austin St
216 Lowell Av
222 Lowell Av
227 Lowell Av
77 Highland Av
+
69 Highland Av
63 Highland Av
59-61 Highland Av
55 Highland Av
43 Highland Av
33-35 Highland Av

10 Highland Park
14 Highland Park
16 Highland Park
17 Highland Park
+
11-15 Highland Park
9 Highland Park
2 Highland Ter
4 Highland Ter
6 Highland Ter
80 Highland Av
72-28 Highland Av
66 Highland Av
58-60 Highland Av
50 Highland Av
+
40 Highland Av
34 Highland Av
30 Highland Av
47 Walnut Pl
37 Walnut Pl
25 Walnut Pl
38 Walnut Pl
32 Walnut Pl
28 Walnut Pl
26 Walnut Pl
+
22 Walnut Pl
355 Walnut St
363 Walnut St
440 Newtonville Av
432 Newtonville Av
424 Newtonville Av
95-97 Madison Av
91-93 Madison Av
89 Madison Av
83-85 Madison Av
+
79-81 Madison Av
94-96 Madison Av
88 Madison Av
76-78 Madison Av
97 Washington Park
91 Washington Park
85-87 Washington Park
79 Washington Park
5 Park Pl

Newton Corner Residential Data

Newton Corner VC3

Apartments: 2
34 Channing St
337 Washington St

Homes: 6
65 Jefferson St
30-32 Channing St
21-23 Peabody St
25-27 Peabody St
42 Thornton St
44 Thornton St

Newton Corner VC2

Apartments: 6
457 Washington St
457 Centre St
9-17 Baldwin St
34 Park St
40-46 Park St
169 Washington St

Homes: 40
439 Washington St
445 Washington St
449 Washington St
33-35 Nonantum Pl
12-14 Richardson St
16-20 Richardson St
24 Richardson St
26-28 Richardson St
32 Richardson St
38 Richardson St
+
40-42 Richardson St
125 Vernon St
117 Vernon St
109 Vernon St
47 Park St
41 Park St
9-11 Elmwood St
15-17 Elmwood St
23-25 Elmwood St
29-31 Elmwood St
+
22-24 Elmwood St
4 Eldredge St

8 Eldredge St
9 Eldredge St
4-6 Baldwin St
12 Baldwin St
19 Baldwin St
315-317 Tremont St
321 Tremont St
327 Tremont St
+
54 Park St
28 Park St
22 Park St
12-14 Park St
184 Washington St
178-180 Washington St
172 Washington St
65-67 St James Cir
59-61 St James Cir
56 St James Cir

Newton Corner VC1

Apartments: 3
5-9 Wesley St
483-497 Centre St
176-182 Church St

Homes: 28
195 Church St
199 Church St
205-207 Church St
211 Church St
217 Church St
223 Church St
188 Church St
194 Church St
200 Church St
200R Church St {separate rear building}
+
206 Church St
218 Church St
222 Church St
226 Church St
234 Church St
148 Church St
150 Church St
488 Centre St
500 Centre St
25-27 Hibbard Rd
+
19-21 Hibbard Rd

15-17 Hibbard Rd
9-11 Hibbard Rd
160-162 Washington St
164-166 Washington St
159 Washington St
179 Hunnewell Av
169 Hunnewell Av

Nonantum Residential Data

No VC3

Nonantum VC2

Apartments: 2

150 Adams St

14 Cottage Ct

Homes: 10

417 Watertown St

421 Watertown St

296 Watertown St

354 Watertown St

430-432 Watertown St

454-458 Watertown St

5-7 Cook St

10-12 West St

9 West St

143 Adams St

Nonantum VC1

Apartments: 0

Homes: 27

108 Adams St

137 Bridge St

139 Bridge St

141 Bridge St

143 Bridge St

107-109 Dalby St

106-108 Dalby St

110-112 Dalby St

99 Faxon St

101-103 Faxon St

+

98-100 Faxon St

12 Cook St

9 Cook St

144-146 Chapel St

148-150 Chapel St

145 Chapel St

14 West St

18 West St

20 West St

24 West St

+

13-15 West St

19 West St

21 West St
151 Adams St
153-155 Adams St
16-18 Adams Ct
18-20 Hawthorn St

Thompsonville Residential Data

Thompsonville VC3

Apartments: 2
405 Langley Rd
410-412 Langley Fd

Homes: 5
416 Langley Rd
418 Langley Rd
17 Jackson St
15 Jackson St
13 Jackson St

Thompsonville VC2

Apartments: 5
402 Langley Rd
400 Langley Rd
398 Langley Rd
396 Langley Rd
392 Langley Rd

Homes: 9
37 Jackson St
39-41 Jackson St
403 Langley Rd
399 Langley Rd
393 Langley Rd
18 John St
14 John St
10 John St
11 John St

Thompsonville VC1

Apartments: 5
43-49 Jackson St
51 Jackson St
53 Jackson St
383 Langley Rd
21-23 John St

Homes: 12
57 Jackson St
96 John St
86 John St
78 John St
66 John St
38-40 John St

34 John St
26 John St
22-24 John St
27 John St
+
33 John St
41 John St

West Newton Residential Data

West Newton VC3

Apartments: 0
Homes: 0

West Newton VC2

Apartments: 1
429 Cherry St

Homes: 0

West Newton VC1

Apartments: 1
424-432 Cherry St

Homes: 30
8 Webster St
14 Webster St
18 Webster St
24-26 Webster St
30 Webster St
36 Webster St
38-40 Webster St
56 Webster St
58 Webster St
60 Webster St
+
62 Webster St
64 Webster St
66 Webster St
84-86 Webster St
90 Webster St
94-96 Webster St
98 Webster St
104 Webster St
110-112 Webster St
120 Webster St
+
126-128 Webster St
138-140 Webster St
144 Webster St
152 Webster St
90 Elm St
89 Elm St
83 Border St
79 Border St
21 Harvey Pl

17 Harvey Pl

Waban Residential Data

No VC3

Waban VC2

*Note: The Waban T stop parking lot is zoned VC2
There are no buildings on this parking lot*

Apartments: 1
20 Kinmonth Rd

Homes: 1
1615 Beacon St owned by Suzuki School of Music

Waban VC1

Apartments: 5
59 Wyman St
67 Wyman St
75 Wyman St
The following two properties are owned by the Newton Housing Authority
68-70 Wyman St
52-54 Wyman St

Homes: 21
1672 Beacon St
1686 Beacon St
1692 Beacon St
1700 Beacon St
8 Manitoba Rd
14 Manitoba Rd
20 Manitoba Rd
28 Manitoba Rd
53 Waban Av
45 Waban Av
+
39 Waban Av
29 Waban Av
21 Kinmonth Rd
24 Kinmonth Rd
40 Windsor Rd
197 Pine Ridge Rd
192 Pine Ridge Rd
458 Woodward St
452 Woodward St
448 Woodward St
+
444 Woodward St

Auburndale Residential Data

Auburndale VC3

Apartments: 1
286 Melrose St

Homes: 3
284 Melrose St
280-282 Melrose St
278 Melrose St

Auburndale VC2

Apartments: 2
264-266 Melrose St
268 Melrose St

Homes: 1
27-29 Melrose Av

Auburndale VC1

Apartments: 0

Homes: 9
267 Melrose St
261 Melrose St
2134 Commonwealth Av
2138-2140 Commonwealth Av
2142-2144 Commonwealth Av
2148-2150 Commonwealth Av
2158-2160 Commonwealth Av
27 Ash St
23 Ash St

Newton Centre Residential Data

Newton Centre VC3

Apartments: 2
21-27-31 Herrick Rd
195 Sumner St

Homes: 0

Newton Centre VC2

Apartments: 0

Homes: 0

Homes with business uses: 3

17-19 Pleasant St
21 Pleasant St
23 Pleasant St

Newton Centre VC1

Apartments: 1
206 Summer St

Homes: 12
25 Pleasant St
31 Pleasant St
35 Pleasant St
18-20 Ripley Terrace
25-27 Ripley Terrace
731 Beacon St
723 Beacon St
711 Beacon St
200-204 Summer St
196-198 Summer St
+
192-194 Summer St
190 Summer St

Homes with business uses: 2

1345 Centre St: Greek Language School & Folk Dances
1349 Centre St: Mathnasium

Newton Highlands Residential Data

Newton Highlands VC3

Apartments: 0

Homes: 2

49 Floral St

72 Floral St

Newton Highlands VC2

Apartments: 0

Homes: 2

1629 Centre St

1623-1625 Centre St

Newton Highlands VC1

Apartments: 3

42-48 Floral St

72 Lincoln St

82 Lincoln St

Homes: 7

344 Lake Av

43-45 Floral St

1619 Centre St

1615 Centre St

1611 Centre St

1145 Walnut St

1141 Walnut St

Four Corners Residential Data

No VC3

Four Corners VC2

Apartments: 5

1147 Beacon St

1123 Beacon St

1115 Beacon St

1111 Beacon St

1087 Beacon St

Homes: 4

1143 Beacon St

1139 Beacon St

1137 Beacon St

1133 Beacon St

Four Corners VC1

Apartments: 3

1188 Beacon St

1192 Beacon St

77 Beaconwood Rd

Homes: 0

Newton Lower Falls Residential Data

No VC3

Newton Lower Falls VC2

Apartments: 9

2300 Washington St *Assisted Living*

2323 Washington St

New Falls Apartment Complex: 7 Buildings

2311 Washington St

2301 Washington St

2291 Washington St

2281 Washington St

2271 Washington St

2261 Washington St

2251 Washington St

Homes: 0

No VC1

Newton Upper Falls Residential Data

No VC3

Newton Upper Falls VC2

Apartments: 0

Homes: 0

Newton Upper Falls VC1

Apartments: 1

1204-1210 Chestnut St

Homes: 2

18 Indiana Ter

66 Linden St

Discussion and Suggestions

1. Comments on VC1

My serious concern with the current proposed village center zoning goes beyond merely liking traditional homes as architecture.

I think that by picking many homes and apartments in the vicinity of village centers to rezone, it is highly likely that some of the most affordable homes in the city will be sacrificed for larger, taller, more dense apartments, mixed use buildings, and commercial buildings. It seems most strange that in the name of affordable housing many instances of existing affordable housing may be destroyed.

Before the meeting of October 24 2022, I wrote a document with my impressions of where village centers zoning was headed based on existing ZAP documents:

[2022-10-19 Implications of Village Centers Zoning \[15 pages\]](#)

This document predicted many of the impacts on residential housing that did come to pass in the slide presentation of October 24.

Let me repeat what I said above:

One of the fundamental problems with the three zones proposed on October 24 is that **there is no zone that is guaranteed to be purely residential**. Some may point to the fact that VC1 is Residential by **right**. This begs the question. By **special permit**, a building in VC1 may be Residential, Mixed-Use, or Commercial. Some people at the October 24 meeting suggested that the use of a special permit to create a mixed-use or commercial building in VC1 would be infrequent. I think that this view is extraordinarily optimistic. Newton has often granted special permits. Further, the question of precedent is important. If one developer is able to build a mixed-use or commercial building in a VC1 area by special permit, this will set a precedent for future developers. If another developer presents a mixed-use or commercial building design for VC1 that is similar to a building that has already been permitted, it will be difficult for the city to say NO to such a request. This may create a snowball effect.

I believe that:

VC1 should be Residential under all circumstances. A Mixed-Use or Commercial building should not be permitted in VC1.

This will guarantee that even though a VC1 area may evolve to have denser housing that will allow more people to live in Newton, a VC1 area will not evolve into becoming a business like district.

2. A residential zone that allows for more options than VC1, namely, MRX

I wish to recommend a more bold solution than VC1.

Replace, VC1 with a zone MRX that may be used anywhere in Newton (not just in village centers) and that will encourage denser housing in a more subtle fashion.

My vision for **MRX** is that it is a *purely residential category* that will fit nicely into existing residential neighborhoods and will not have the baggage of multi-use or commercial buildings. I have read articles from zoning experts that describe cities that have so many multi-use buildings that the ground floor retail spaces remain unrented and become a blight on the city. I do not want this for Newton.

Here is my wish list for what should be allowed by right in the **MRX** zoning category:

- Maximum height: 3 stories
- Traditional 1-family, 2-family, 3-family houses
- Duplex, 4-plex, 6-plex buildings
- Apartment buildings with maximum 12 units

I would allow in **MRX** by special permit:

- Maximum height: 4 stories, with 7 foot set back on the 4th floor
- Apartment buildings with maximum 16 units

Consistent with the proposals of the November 23 document, limit height increases to projects with additional affordable housing.

Since an MRX building will be purely residential and will have a height consistent with most residential areas, an MRX building should be able to fit right into a traditional neighborhood with few issues.

By the way, since MRX does not have “VC” in its name, it may be used anywhere in Newton when appropriate.

Note: I have tried to understand the new concept of maximum footprint but since the concept is new there is no such field in the assessors database. Hence it is hard to make comparisons with existing buildings.

For the MRX zone, I would suggest that the *maximum footprint should depend on the number of units*. Thus, there would be a maximum footprint for 1-3 units, 4-6 units, 7-9 units, and 10-12 units. If a special permit is granted to allow 16 units, the same footprint as 10-12 units should be used since the building will rise vertically.

Personal note: I live in Newton Corner where there are a number of buildings that would fit the MRX paradigm. I have always found such buildings to be acceptable in my residential neighborhood context.

3. Using MRX to implement ribbons of zoning throughout Newton

I next wish to describe how the **MRX** concept may be used to define *ribbons of zoning* that may spread housing development more fairly throughout the city.

Proposal: Guarantee that density and diversity will be spread throughout the city of Newton by setting the zoning for all residential houses that front on major through streets in Newton to permit **MRX** buildings regardless of the current characteristics of the existing housing.

The notion of a “major through street” deserves debate but here is a first pass at a list:

Watertown St, California St, Crafts St, Washington St, Tremont St, Commonwealth Ave, Beacon St, Waverley Ave, Grant Ave, Langley Rd, Centre St, Parker St, Walnut St, Lowell Ave, Waltham St, Chestnut St, Lexington St, Needham St, Dedham St, Brookline St.

Personal Note: I live on Tremont St so I am suggesting rezoning my own street as **MRX**.

Comments on the ribbon of zoning proposal

One of the problems with Village Centers Zoning is that so much is being forced into a small area surrounding an existing village center. Since the existing village centers now cover relatively small areas, it is necessary to go far out radially to accomplish the goals of significantly increasing housing and adding more commercial options. The alternative is to build quite tall.

What I imagine in my proposal above is a **ribbon of MRX zoning along each major through street that extends into the neighborhoods perhaps 1/10 of a mile or perhaps 1/4 of a mile on either side of the through street**. The width of the ribbon should depend on how much potential housing the city wishes to enable.

The ribbon of zoning would permit MRX buildings and would thereby increase housing density in a way that still fits into the neighborhoods. There would be no multi-use or commercial buildings that disturb the neighborhood ambiance. I do not wish to recommend a type of zoning that will create a strip-mall effect along the major through streets of Newton.

The ideas of **MRX zoning** and **ribbons of MRX zoning along major through streets** provide a way for the city to *get beyond the serious limitations* of the Village Centers Zoning proposal of October 24 and especially to avoid the potential major impact of that proposal on existing residential housing near the village centers.

Note: If the Village Centers Zoning proposal is passed in its current form and no other provisions are made to allow by right development in other parts of Newton then developers will become laser focused on the lots and buildings that fall into the VC zones of the 12 villages. This intensity of focus may encourage developers to buy land in the VC zones for rapid development. This will put the 401 existing residences in the VC zones at risk.

4. Comments on VC3

There is little explanation from the Planning Dept or Utile as to why specific buildings or categories of buildings are included in VC2 or VC3.

I learned a lot when I did my analysis of *every single building included in the Newton Corner zoning map*:

[2022-11-01 Data Analysis: Newton Corner Zoning Proposal of 2022-10-24 \[13 pages\]](#)

In Newton Corner, the two VC3 zones include 6 homes and 2 apartment buildings. This means that these 8 buildings are approved to go from residential status to maximum mixed-use or commercial development status at the stroke of a pen. It is not acceptable that because the planners may have wanted to draw some straight lines on the zoning map that these 8 buildings were captured.

Of the 8 buildings included in VC3 in Newton Corner, 7 buildings are north of Washington St and along one of streets Peabody St, Channing St, and Thornton St. There are no adjacent buffer zones of VC2 or VC1 to the north. The VC3 district as drawn abuts a residential neighborhood. Why are these 7 buildings extracted from their neighboring residential district and placed into the VC3 district?

The 8th building included in VC3 in Newton Corner is 65 Jefferson St. This is a residential home that is just east of a parking lot that is behind a commercial complex that fronts on Centre St. Here the red VC3 boundary line zigs east and then north to intentionally include this one house on Jefferson St. All other homes east of this house are not included in any zone. To me, there is no good reason to separate 65 Jefferson St from its neighbors and include it in the VC3 zone.

Given what I have seen by analysis of the Newton Corner zoning map, I would argue that:

No existing residential building should be included in any VC3 district in Newton unless the strongest possible justification is documented in writing by the planners.

This documentation should explain why the inclusion of a particular residential building in VC3 is essential and why there is no other way.

There is one other *anomaly* with VC3 in Newton Corner at the “Richardson St triangle”. This triangle is located next to the eastbound exit ramp of the turnpike and is bounded by Centre Av, Centre St, and Richardson St. This triangle has a small commercial complex that fronts on Centre St and a small parking lot just to the west. It seems possible that this triangle might support VC2 level development but VC3 level seems excessive.

5. Comments on VC2

Examining the 12 village center zoning maps, the VC2 zones fall into two categories:

- The VC2 zone is based on an existing commercial zone that might have further development
- The VC2 zone is created primarily from an area with residential buildings, possibly with a few public buildings (churches, schools) and possibly with a small number of existing commercial buildings

The first category for a VC2 zone makes sense with little further explanation required.

The second category for a VC2 zone deserves explanation and justification from the planners. I would argue:

If a VC2 zone is created primarily from an area with residential buildings then there should be an explanation for why the lots chosen will lead to mixed-use or commercial development that will make sense from an economic standpoint and from the viewpoint of value added to the village center. Further, the zone should include no extraneous residential buildings. Such residential buildings should either be in a VC1 zone or not be rezoned at all.

Let me again use Newton Corner as an example since I know that area best.

On the Newton Corner zoning map, there are 6 VC2 zones. One VC2 zone sort of falls into the first category and the other 5 fall into the second category.

The VC2 zone that sort of falls into the first category is along Nonantum Place quite close to the westbound exit ramp of the turnpike. This zone is adjacent to the large RMR building and consists of two 2 story commercial buildings and one home. I am fine with making the two 2 story commercial buildings into a VC2 zone but I think it makes no sense to add the one home. Leave the residential neighborhood as it is.

Let me now critique the 5 VC2 zones that are created primarily from an area with residential buildings.

There is a VC2 zone just west of the Sunrise Senior Living complex on Washington. This zone has 1 apartment building and 3 homes and is effectively the start of the residential neighborhood proceeding north and west. There is no economic value to making these 4 buildings mixed use. These buildings should be not be rezoned.

There is a VC2 zone on the south side of Richardson St opposite the commercial area of the Richardson St triangle. This VC2 zone is the one that makes some economic sense.

There is a very large VC2 zone bounded by Vernon St, Park St, and Centre St, and by the portion of the VC3 zone along Centre St eastbound. I can imagine a mixed use or commercial zone wrapping around Centre St to Park St up to the Presbyterian Church. I see no good reason to rezone as VC2 the buildings interior to this commercial edge along Centre St and Park St. The interior buildings should be at most VC1.

By the way, the VC2 zone above currently includes the Underwood elementary school. This is the only instance of a Newton public school being included in a VC zone in the city. The Underwood school should be removed from this VC2 zone and should not be placed in any zone. Frankly, if village center zoning works in Newton Corner to increase residential housing, Underwood school will be absolutely essential.

There is a large VC2 zone on the east side of Park St that wraps around on the north to Washington St and on the south to Tremont St at Hibbard Rd. Currently this area is 100% residential. This proposed VC2 zone is absolutely one that needs to be justified from an economic standpoint and from the viewpoint of value added to the village center and the existing neighborhood. In my view, this zone should probably be VC1 if anything.

The final VC2 proposed zone is along Washington St close to the eastbound turnpike entrance ramp. This zone includes 1 apartment building and 3 homes on the short cul-de-sac St James Circle. To me this zone makes no sense at all. You are not going to have a viable mixed use or commercial project within a few feet of the eastbound turnpike entrance ramp. There is no place to park and there is little foot traffic there. This block should not be rezoned at all. Further once this VC2 zone goes, there is also no reason to zone the 3 adjacent homes on Hunnewell Av as VC1.

In one sense, the VC2 situation in Newton Corner is not typical of the rest of Newton. From the data, Newton Corner has 46 residences included in VC2. The next highest number of residences included in VC2 zones is 14 and this occurs in 2 villages, Newtonville and Thompsonville. Thus, there are numerical grounds for understanding why VC2 in Newton Corner seems so problematic.

6. Comments on the Comments

The later comments all assume that VC1 is declared purely residential or is replaced by MRX which will serve the same purpose and also provide allowances for moderately sized low height apartment buildings.

If the Village Center Zoning Proposal continues to insist on allowing mixed use or commercial in VC1 by special permit, I would recommend that the City Council reject the Village Center Zoning Proposal.

7. Finale

It is my hope that the detailed residential data in this document will help those examining the 12 zoning maps to better understand and critique what is being proposed in their areas of interest.

Appendix: Design Standards

On pages 5 and 6 of the November 23 cover letter, there is a discussion of **Design Standards**. I will list some of the ones that in my view may be problematic:

- Ground story fenestration - at least 70% of the ground story facing the front lot line in the VC2 and VC3 districts must be transparent.
- Facade articulation - the maximum continuous length of facade in all districts is 100 ft. After that there must be some sort of recess or other change in plane in the facade.
- Building entrances - principal entrances for lobbies and active uses are required.
- Ground story active uses - mixed-use buildings are required to provide active uses for the entire width of the building along the front elevation. Active uses are listed in the draft zoning in Attachment A and include retail, restaurant, brewery/distillery/winery, personal service, live/work, and lobby and common areas, amongst others.

The detailed list of **Ground Story Active Uses** is found on pages 9-10 of the [VCOD](#) ordinance document. Most uses are quoted above. Those uses not quoted are: place of amusement, day care center, public art / gallery / arts studio, community use.

To me, the requirement of 70% transparent ground floor glazing seems excessive. This may make sense for retail establishments with things to sell. Some restaurants and beverage venues may wish to have an open look that lets people on the street look in but others may want a more private, subdued ambiance for their customers. Other businesses that wish to set up in ground floor spaces may also want privacy over openness. The fact that those who are setting up ground floor business might want a choice of transparency seems to be ignored in the Design Standards.

Also, there are some obvious ground floor uses that are omitted: bank, medical office, dental office, legal office, tax preparation office, consultant office, pet store, animal hospital. Others may come up with additional ground floor options. I think that to make a limited list of businesses that will be permitted on the ground floor in mixed use scenarios is shortsighted.