

Implications of Village Centers Zoning Revisited

Richard Rasala

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This document represents my first impressions of the Village Center Presentation of October 24 2022.

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

The Newton Corner Zoning Map below is taken from page 31 of this slide presentation.

This document is a follow up to the two documents:

[2022-10-20 Cover Letter: Implications of Village Centers Zoning \[3 pages\]](#)

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

In my opinion, the attachment of the VC2 and VC1 areas in the south and east portions of the Newton Corner Zoning Map is *entirely gratuitous*.

Newton Corner has already been forced to contribute so much to Newton development via the large buildings outlined in the main VC3 area.

There is no justification to develop even more of Newton Corner. Let me discuss what the Newton Corner Zoning Map shows.

The VC2 and VC1 areas shown in the south contain **primarily private homes** with the following *exceptions*:

VC2 area south:

- * 1 apartment building at Richardson and Centre
- * just south, the Eaton & Mac Kay Funeral Home

5 VC1 areas south:

- * Arabic Baptist Church
- * Eliot Church UCC
- * 3 apartment buildings around Church and Centre

The VC2 and VC1 areas shown towards the east also contain **primarily private homes** with the following *exceptions*:

3 VC2 areas east:

- * Underwood School
- * Presbyterian Church
- * 1 apartment building on Park
- * 1 apartment building on Washington

Almost all of the *exceptions* listed are already apartment buildings or are churches and public buildings.

The number of private homes included in the VC2 and VC1 areas is 71. This is enormous.

I think that the number of private homes that are being rezoned for tall buildings (4 or 5 stories by special permit) and for semi-commercial use (aka mixed-use) **is quite excessive.** I think that those who were tasked with doing the zoning for Newton Corner felt pressure to insert VC2 and VC1 areas whether or not doing that made sense with the Newton Corner context on the ground.

There is a simple solution to this problem. I request that:

All VC2 and VC1 areas be dropped from the Newton Corner Zoning Map.

Keep in Newton Corner only the central VC3 area (the hotel, office building, and other large buildings near the pike).

Aside: The point of zoning the land of the YMCA as VC3 escapes me since the Y will be around for a long time.

Some people of the Planning Dept and ZAP seem to want to have certain things both ways.

- * The use of half stories to obscure the real height
 - 2.5 stories will in reality be 3 stories
 - 3.5 stories will in reality be 4 stories
 - 4.5 stories will in reality be 5 stories
 - 5.5 stories will in reality be 6 stories

* In Newton, a special permit request usually leads to approval.

The city appears to wish to advertise the triplet of heights for (VC1, VC2, VC3) as (2.5, 3.5, 4.5) stories.

However, in reality, (VC1, VC2, VC3) will correspond to the triplet of heights (4, 5, 6) stories if these heights are allowed by special permit.

* At the meeting, questions were asked about whether VC1 would permit commercial (mixed-use) buildings.

The answer was often NO.

However, later, the answer was modified to YES by special permit.

This means that the answer is in reality YES.

I do not think that this intentional fuzziness inspires confidence in the citizens of Newton. It inspires cynicism.

Therefore, here are some further things I would wish for.

Set the (VC1, VC2, VC3) heights to (3, 4, 5) stories with no special permit exceptions.

Given that most villages center residents think that a reasonable height maximum is 3-4 stories, make the use of VC3 extremely hard for Planning or ZAP to assign. In fact, it may be best to:

*** Assign VC3 only to the central area on the Newton Corner map that encloses the hotel, office building, and other massive buildings and assign VC3 to NO other village center location in the city.**

*** Assign to all other village centers only VC1 or a combination of VC1 and VC2. This will guarantee a height limit of 4 stories.**

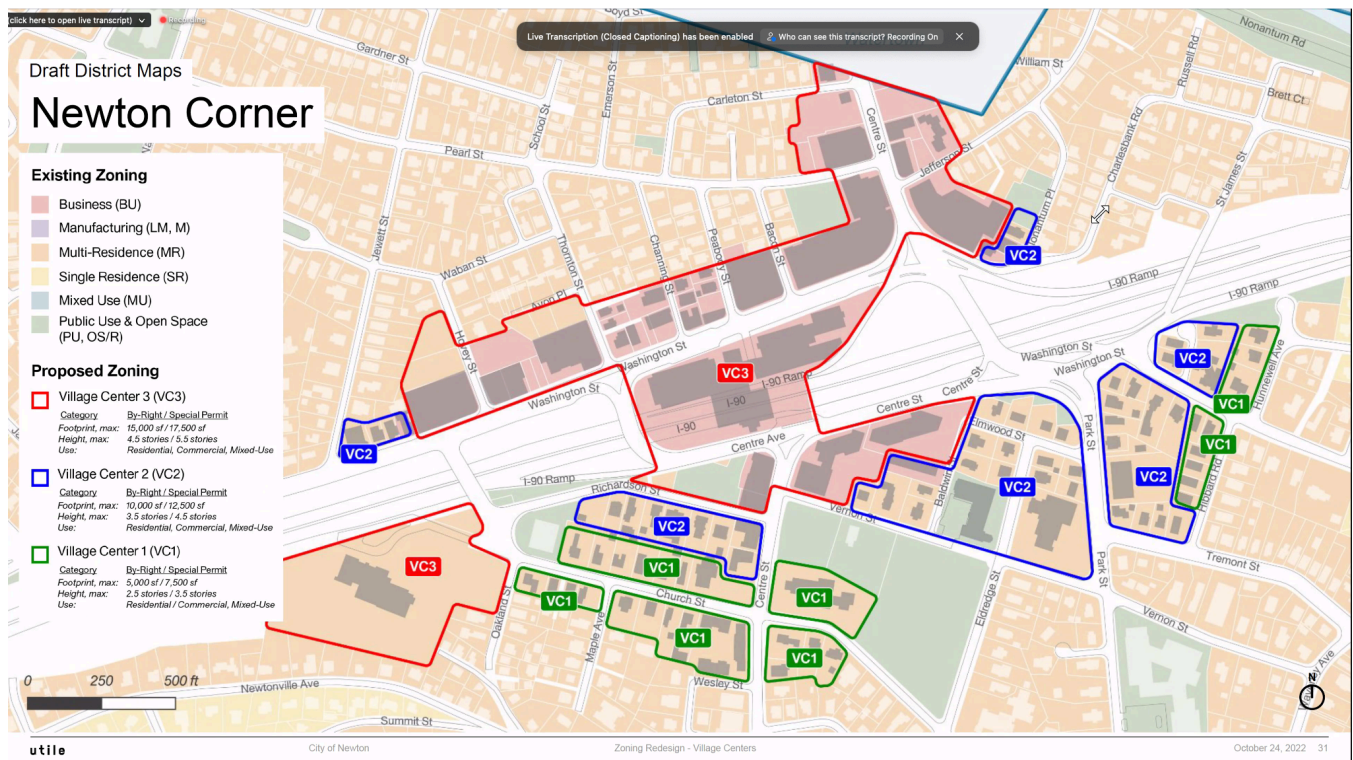
Also:

Make VC1 purely residential. Eliminate the option of mixed-use buildings (even by special permit) in VC1.

I believe that if the Planning Dept and ZAP pivot to adopt these suggestions, there will be a huge sigh of relief in Newton and the planners will gain credibility and stronger support.

By the way, the elimination of the assorted possible special permits in the Village Centers process, will make the process cleaner. A developer can work within the stated constraints but they will not be able to pressure the city to grant special favors.

Best, Richard Rasala, Newton Corner resident



Final note:

This document is posted at:

[2022-10-25 Implications of Village Centers Zoning Revisited \[4 pages\]](#)