



Proposed Zoning Plan & Impacts on Housing

Housing that is attainable and affordable is a priority for the people of Newton. I support zoning for additional housing that complies with the Commonwealth's requirement that Newton upzone for higher density to accommodate an additional 8,330 units located near public transportation nodes. Those 8,330 units alone would increase total housing units in Newton by approximately 25%.

The administration and its majority on the City Council support a plan that conflates the mandated upzoning requirement with a self-designated "Village Center Overlay District" (VCOD) upzoning plan to allow for higher-density redevelopment of most – but not all – of Newton's village centers and nearby residential neighborhoods. The VCOD would encourage the demolition of historic village center buildings to be replaced by taller apartment buildings with street-level commercial spaces. Existing local independent businesses and residential renters will be forced out and unable to return due to the expensive rents in the commercial spaces and apartments in the new buildings.

In adjacent residential neighborhoods, a new zoning category "MRT" would allow 4-6 units where a single-family or two-family house now stands. The MBTA required upzoning and the VCOD non-mandated upzoning allow no on-site parking spaces for any of the new apartments, meaning many more cars competing for parking in residential neighborhoods, and more traffic on Newton's roads. No additional subsidized affordable units are required beyond Newton's current Inclusionary Zoning requirement – in either the VCOD or the MBTA upzoned areas.

Not only are these combined plans an invitation to property investment companies to buy up Newton homes and commercial properties, but the resulting redevelopment will push rents and housing prices higher and will push lower-income and fixed-income residents out. City employees such as public safety officers and educators will find Newton increasingly expensive, perpetuating the trend of those who work in Newton being unable to afford to live in Newton.

This conflated VCOD upzoning plan will allow for up to 15,000 additional housing units – approximately a 46% increase in population (and vehicles) – with no analysis or planning having been done on the impacts of this transformational growth on infrastructure, schools, playgrounds, parks and playing fields, city services, traffic, parking, taxes, and city finances. This is in addition to the larger developments that have already been approved such as Riverside and Northland. A majority of our local elected and appointed leaders seem to accept the refuted notion that building lots of expensive new apartments will lead to housing prices falling – despite that approach having never worked in any desirable housing market.

There's a clear difference between me and the two incumbent City Councilor opponents against whom I am running. Both support upzoning far in excess of what the Commonwealth requires – while willfully glossing over the negative impacts on their constituents. In contrast, I support the stance of the nine current City Councilors who have called for a pause in any upzoning beyond the 8,330 units required by the Commonwealth, until Newton can assess and adjust to the fiscal and other impacts of that 25% increase in households.

In contrast to my opponents, I support:

1. New housing in village centers that will not **displace** local small-business owners. The owners of Trio in Newtonville are now asking for an amendment to their special permit to loosen restrictions on renting commercial spaces to chains because independents can't afford the rents
2. Building heights in the village centers that do not create a **"canyon effect"**
3. A plan that **assures** affordable housing and creates opportunities for home ownership that are the key to creating financial security for families
4. A phased-in approach to zoning changes to adjust to the **actual** impacts from prior phases on infrastructure, schools, services, finances and taxes
5. Being **realistic** about the use of public transportation due to the T's poor service and commuter rail accessibility problems. Currently only 13% of the working population in Newton use public transportation, because they need cars for many of their trips, and the MBTA is **unreliable**
6. Allowing more "by-right" construction but with **tighter** controls for preservation of trees, green space and sufficient frontage, setbacks and screening

The current majority on the City Council – including both of my incumbent opponents – intends to pass the conflated VCOD upzoning plan shortly after the November 7th election. In the new City Council term that begins in January, this majority intends to upzone all major streets and single-family and two-family neighborhoods in Newton. If elected, I promise to align with those city councilors who will vote against any upzoning in excess of the Commonwealth's requirement, and work instead to create pathways to home ownership and to protect our most vulnerable residents from upzoning-induced displacement.

