

Memorandum



To: Councilor Deborah Crossley, Chair, Zoning and Planning Committee,
From: Councilor Pam Wright
Subject: Zoning Redesign - Article 3: Residential Districts
Date: March 11, 2020
Cc: City Council, Barney Heath, Planning Director, Jennifer Caira, Planning Deputy Director

I have read the February 28, 2020, Planning Department memorandum on Newton's proposed zoning ordinances for residential districts. As we continue our review of Article 3, Residential districts I would like further discussions on the following seven items. Included are a few slides providing additional information.

One, a table documenting the changes from our current zoning and proposed zoning. Page 2 has a sample. This would come from the planning department and has been requested many times from different councilors. I know it's comparing apples to oranges but comparisons can still be made. Having the information in one chart will be helpful for all to get their heads around the proposed changes. This table could be completed for all the districts from SR1 to BU5 to MU4 and everything in between. Also, showing what each district will be changing to will be helpful too. For example, SR1 to R1, SR2 and SR3 to R2 and so forth.

Two, I would like further discussion and the reasoning behind why 2 unit buildings are 50% larger than 3 unit buildings. See page 3. Many of the present 2 family homes in Newton were built between 1900-1930 and are typically 2200 to 3000 sf. Allowing 2 unit buildings to be 6000 sf by right seems very large.

Three, more discussion on courtyard clusters. Courtyard clusters are allowed everywhere in the city. The density appears to greatly increase starting at R2. One suggestion would add a cap to the number of buildings per acre. I would like further discussions on the subdivision of lots. Two examples are in the attached document pages 4 and 5. 473 Waltham St in R3 is currently listed for \$2.4m for the 2 lots. Doing the math and assuming a perfectly shaped lot, 473 Waltham could possibly be redeveloped to 14 - 3600 sf 2 families with 28 units or 16 - 3000 sf 3 families with 48 units. Now it's an L-shaped lot and my rough calculations do not include hardscape so my calculations need to be confirmed by the Planning Dept but they are in the ballpark. A similar build out could potentially happen everywhere in the city.

Four, I still don't see in the documentation how this proposed context based zoning will save the cape neighborhoods. Councilor Ryan's 1100 sf cape could be replaced by a 3500 sf home "by right". I would like to understand what is preventing the teardowns of these homes. See page 6.

Five, I have a concern with the removal of parking requirements for all 1 and 2 unit buildings and allowing on-street parking counted towards the parking requirement. Does this eliminate the overnight winter parking ban? I would like further discussion. See page 7.

Six, I have a concern with an appointed body, the planning board, approving all special permits except for lots with greater than 20 units or 20,000 sf of floor space. I would like further discussion. See page 8.

Seven, not included in the slides. Newton is large with many different lot sizes. The present 7 zoning districts: SRs and MRs have a sliding FAR scale applied dependent on lot area so basically, we have 132 zoning districts. I know many people dislike FAR but it helps control house size on the very different lot sizes. The proposed zoning is reducing the 132 zoning districts into 4. I would like further discussion.

I included at the end of the slides many of the ZAP councilors' homes and what is the maximum home size that can be built now and in the proposed zoning. I also included an exercise of someone building courtyard cluster homes near them. See pages 9-13. One may argue that a builder couldn't get owners to sell their property to amass the minimum land area. But we now have a developer buying property at two to three times assessed value for his projects. I believe that would motivate many people to sell.