

CITY OF NEWTON

Planning and Development Board



2/4/2021

The Honorable City Council President, Susan Albright
City of Newton
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02459

RE: Garage Ordinance (Docket #448-20)

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

Dear Honorable Council President Albright:

Barney Heath
Director
Planning & Development

The Planning and Development Board has been discussing the proposed revisions to the Garage Ordinance more or less in tandem with the Zoning and Planning Committee’s review schedule. The Board is currently working with the January 15, 2021 version of the proposed garage ordinance (Docket #448-20). Given the tight time schedule for considering this measure, the Board feels comfortable that this version of the ordinance will achieve its intended goals (preventing streetscapes from being dominated by garages, improving the safety of the City’s public ways for pedestrians and all modes of travel, and being consonant with Newton’s climate action goals). The Board therefore decided to discuss and vote on that document at its regularly-scheduled meeting on February 1, 2021. Because the Board anticipated that further changes might emerge during the Zoning and Planning Committee’s next discussion of Docket #448-20, it has also included three commentaries to accompany the Board’s recommendation on the proposed Garage Ordinance.

Members

- Peter Doeringer, Chair
- Kelley Brown, Member
- Sudha Maheshwari, Member
- Jennifer Molinsky, Member
- Sonia Parisca, Vice Chair
- Chris Steele, Member
- Barney Heath, *ex officio*
- Kevin McCormick, Alternate
- James Robertson, Alternate

At its meeting on February 1, 2021, the Board approved the following motion by a vote of 6 in favor, none opposed, and Director Heath abstaining:

The Planning and Development Board recommends approval of the amendment to Chapter 30, City of Newton Zoning Ordinances by repealing Ordinance No. A-78 and amending the regulation of garages in residential zoning districts as set forth in the revisions to Chapter 30, Section 3.4 (Docket #448-20) that was attached to the January 15, 2021 memorandum from Director Heath and members of the Planning Department to Councilor Deborah Crossley, Chair, and members of the Zoning and Planning Committee.

1000 Commonwealth Ave.
Newton, MA 02459
T 617-796-1120
F 617-796-1142
www.newtonma.gov

In addition, the Board asks that the Zoning and Planning Committee and the Newton City Council consider the following additional points during their further discussions of Docket #448-20:

Special Permits

The Board recognizes that Special Permits are not part of its remit. Nevertheless, the proposed Garage Ordinance references circumstances where Special Permits may be granted, which is within the Board’s purview. The Board thinks that there is often merit to including guidelines or conditions in Special Permit zoning provisions to describe the desired objectives and outcomes of the specific special permitting process. The Special Permit arrangements in Sec. 3.4.4.H.1 of the proposed garage ordinance, which mirrors the language of the current zoning ordinance, seems unduly open-ended and the Board encourages the consideration of additional guidance language.

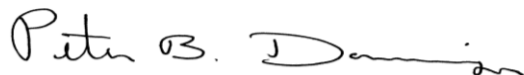
Accessory Dwelling Units

Detached garages are a potential source of second floor accessory dwelling units that would add to the stock of housing and provide a source income to residential owners. Garages are considered Accessory Buildings (sec. 3.4.4.B.1) and are therefore subject to accessory building design standards (secs. 3.4.3.A.3 and 3.4.3.A.4.). The Board wishes to encourage accessory dwelling units. It therefore would welcome a further discussion of whether the proposed application of these standards to garages is inhibiting the creation of accessory dwelling units and, if so, whether these standards should be relaxed to allow more accessory dwelling units.

Corner Lots

The proposed Garage Ordinance mainly uses the “primary” front lot line as the reference point for regulating front and side facing garages, even where there are “multiple lot lines abutting streets or private ways”. However, corner lots always front on two streets and the Board thinks that streetscapes on the “secondary” front lot lines of corner lots are as important as those on the “primary” front lot lines. It is unclear in the proposed language of the Garage Ordinance whether garages that face the “secondary” front lot line in one way or another are subject to the same standards as those facing the “primary” front lot line. The Board would appreciate further discussion and clarification of this question and whether it would be useful to specifically address corner lots in the ordinance, particularly since multiple garages on corner lots may become more common in the future.

Best Regards,



Peter B. Doeringer, Chair

CC: City Council