

Cultivating Newton's Vibrant Village Centers

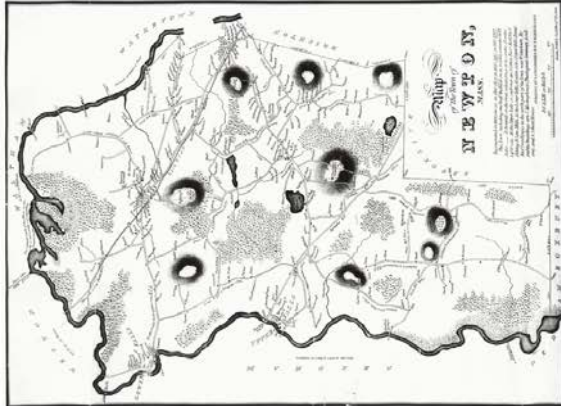
***Planning our Future
is up to All of Us***



Presentation by Kathy Pillsbury and Lisa Monahan
Waban Area Council Meeting 6/9/22

- Thanks for having us today
- Kathy Pillsbury, Consultant and researcher with an MBA. Interested in climate and sustainability
- Lisa Monahan, architect-planner, interest housing and advocating for property owners.
- We have been following Zoning Redesign closely for the past couple of years,
- Especially excited about village center discussion.

**Planning has been an ongoing activity in
Newton for 300+ years.**



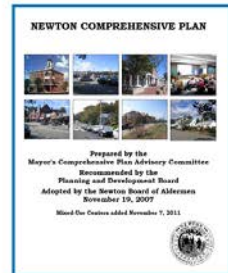
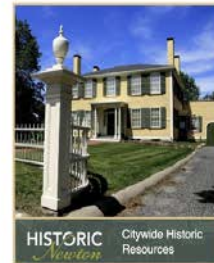
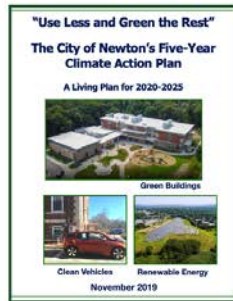
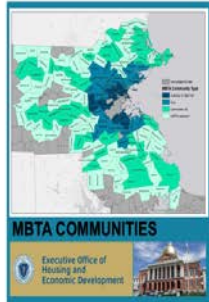
Newton 1831



Newton 1875

- Newton became a city in 1688, 300+ years ago.
- Planning our city is a never-ending, work in progress.
- On the left you can see some of the roads laid out and people's homes or farms.
- On the right there is more development as the railroad came through.

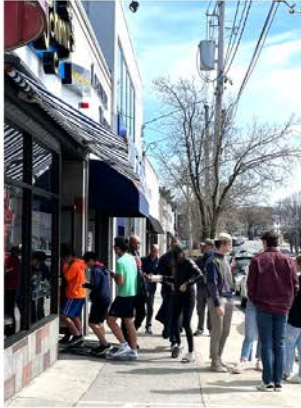
Village Center Planning Context



- Coordinating efforts with ongoing planning and initiatives:
 - Comprehensive Plan
 - Climate Action Plan
 - Village Centers Community Engagement
 - Washington St. Vision Plan
 - Historic Resources Planning
 - Northland Design Guidelines
 - MBTA Communities
 - Housing and Economic Plan

What makes a Vibrant Village Center?

A thriving business district



- *What makes a thriving village center?*
- A thriving business district
- Small businesses need to have the right environment to do well.
- Places for people to feel comfortable to come to shop, eat and stay for a while.
- Needs to be easy to access and appealing.

What makes a Vibrant Village Center?

People-focused places, active public spaces



- Based on last year's community engagement, it's clear that almost everyone agrees, it's important to have places in villages for gathering, sitting, meeting with friends.
- It helps build the community of the village.
- With places to linger, people are more likely to stay in the village and go into the stores or restaurants.

*What makes a Vibrant Village Center?
Accessible and safe routes for all*



- For a village to thrive it helps to make it feel safe and easy for walking — to cross the street, to go from one store to another.
- These images show some of the physical things that could be added to help make a VC safer for all.
- It should be safe for people walking, biking and in cars.
- And should be accessible to everyone.
- People who can walk into a village tend to be better customers — going there more frequently and staying and doing more things there.

What makes a Vibrant Village Center?

Climate-forward features



- The environment is something that I am particularly interested in.
- These are example of features that make the built environment in a village better for the climate
- EV chargers, bike share, car share, rainwater garden to help with flooding, white roofs (to reduce the heat island effect and solar panels (the photo is of Zervas) and of course access to transit.

What makes a Vital Village Center?

More places for neighbors close to and within villages

1 BR, accessible
ADU addition



3-unit home



5-unit home



Townhouses



3 5-unit homes

- More places for neighbors close to and within villages making it easier for more people to walk into a village
- These are some images of small to medium size buildings close to village centers in Newton now.
- All are multi-family, the first two were single-family homes. Now one has an ADU where the garage used to be, and the other was converted to multi-family.
- The bottom three were originally built as multi-family homes.
- Examples like these can be found all over the city.

What makes a Vibrant Village Center?

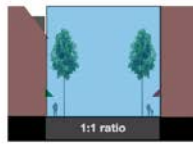
More places for neighbors close to and within villages



- These images depict some of the newer multi-unit, mixed-use projects that have been built or are in the pipe-line in the city.
- These are located close to village centers,
- They offer smaller unit sizes, get the city much needed inclusionary zoning affordable units.
- 2 of these are mixed use with retail and/or food service on the ground floor.

- Locations: Newton Highlands, Newtonville, Nonantum, West Newton

Human Scale Analysis – a range of opinions

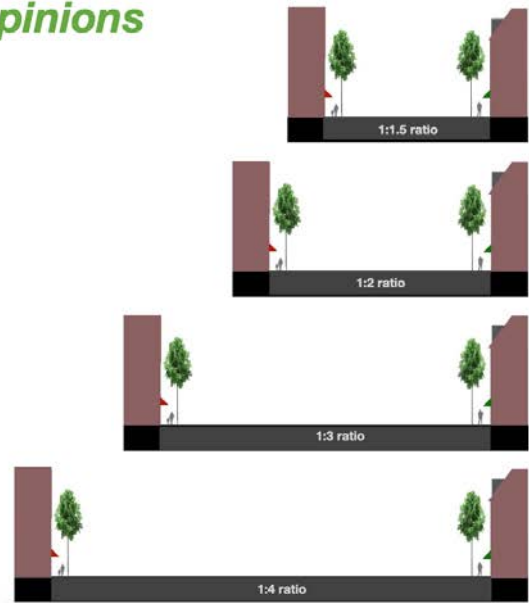


Lincoln St.
Newton Highlands

Height to Width Ratios for Street Enclosure (according to different experts)

Alexander et al.	1:1 ideal	Lynch and Hack	1:4 minimum 1:2 - 1:3 ideal
Hedman	1:1 - 1:2 ideal	Duany and Plater-Zyberk	1:6 minimum
A. Jacobs	1:2 minimum 1:1 ideal		

Source: Pedestrian and Transit-Friendly Design by Reid Ewing



- Human Scale Analysis – This idea has been raised before in discussion about Village Center design.
- Human scale development relates to a person's experience at the street level.
- As you can see from the chart above there is a slight range in the recommendations – generally between 1 to 1 and 1 to 2
- The small pictures at the top show Lincoln St. in Newton Highlands which has about a 1:1 ratio.
- The images on the right illustrate different ratios
- Note: This chart is from the same research shown in a previous presentation on human scale development.

Human Scale Analysis – *by the numbers*

Building Height Calculator	
Number of Stories	Height (16' ground floor, 12' upper stories)
1	16'
2	28'
3	40'
4	52'
5	64'

	Width of the Road	Ratio 1:1 Building to Road
Lincoln St. Newton Highlands	48'	3 Stories
Walnut St. Newton Highlands	67'	4 - 5 Stories
Walnut St. Newtonville	65'	4 - 5 Stories
Washington St. (Next to Mass Pike)	> 80'	5 - 6 Stories

- These charts show how these ratios might work out on some streets in Newton.
- Ground floor is taller to allow for restaurants or retail.
- Lincoln St. is narrowest so 3 stories, maybe 4 could work there.
- Walnut St. in both Newton Highlands and Newtonville is wider at about 56' – 67' so taller buildings of 4 – 5 stories could work.
- While Washington St. with the Pike on one side could have taller buildings.

Comparison of Lincoln St. & Walnut St. Newton Highlands

Which street would you
prefer to walk down?

A. A street with many storefronts with windows, doors, and places to step in and out of the rain...?

B. A street with parking lots to the front or side of buildings?

A



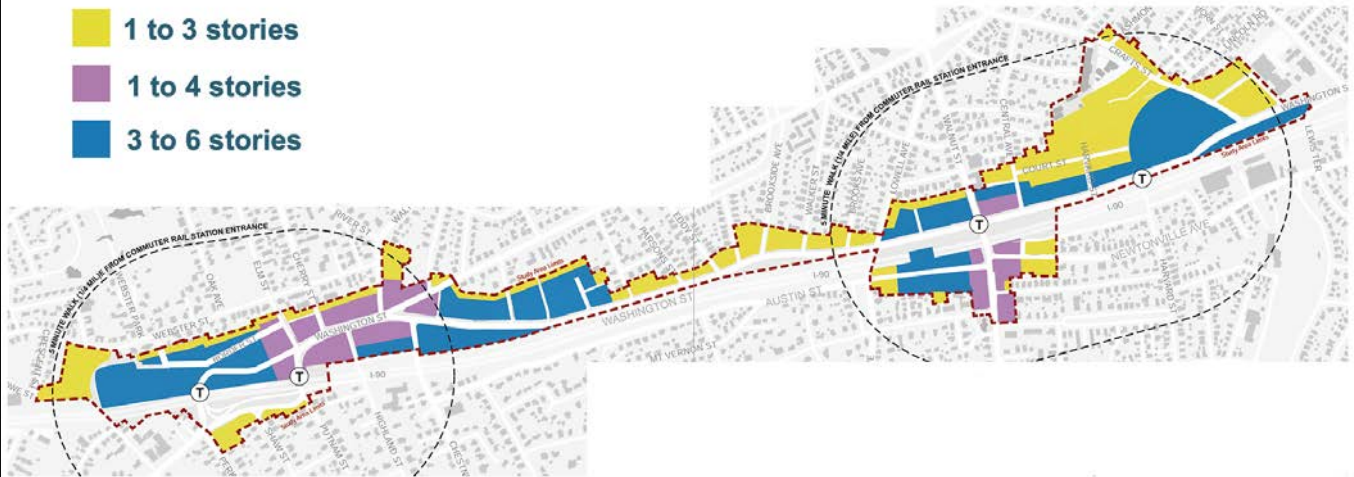
B



- People often comment they like the feel of walking through Newton Highlands.
- Looking for a comfortable feeling of enclosure – an outside room.
- Two interesting experiences in Newton Highlands illustrate the value of a sense of enclosure.
- It not only feels good for people, it's good for business.
- 2 sided retail streets are more successful than single-sided retail streets.

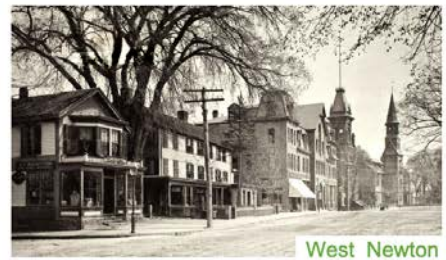
Washington Street Vision Plan Height Map

- 1 to 3 stories
- 1 to 4 stories
- 3 to 6 stories



- As noted earlier, the Washington Vision plan studied a lot of issues that we are discussing today.
- In this plan, 2 village centers were looked at and height recommendations were made -- Newtonville and West Newton
- These were approved in April 2019 by the City Council
- This shows along Walnut St. in Newtonville up to 4 stories
- On Washington St. in West Newton the plan calls for areas with 1-4 and 3-6 stories.

Newton's Village Centers historically have had 3 - 4 story buildings



- Images of some of our historic Village centers.
- You can see we had 3 and 4 story buildings routinely built in the villages with both commercial and residential.

Historic New England Village Centers - 3 to 4 stories tall



- Some snapshots of historic New England village centers
- Variety of building heights - 3 to 4 stories, mixed use
- Narrow width store fronts, active store fronts, places for people to hang out
- Not overrun by cars

Newtonville



- Thought we'd run through some village centers.
- Starting with Newtonville.
- On the map, the yellow dots indicate the location of the buildings shown.
- The red lines show the commercial areas of the village.

- Businesses have remarked that business is better since Austin St. and Trio were completed.
- Mostly single-story retail on Walnut St. - but there is lots of housing around - from new projects to multi-family



- In a previous presentation, only the one-story main street of Wellesley was shown.
- This did not show the full picture of what supports that main street.
- The one on the top right was recently completed.

Waltham



- The main street has housing plus there is both new construction and renovated older buildings that are now housing.
- This allows a lot more people to live within walking distance of Moody St. and has helped the revival of that street.

Greenwich, CT



- These are all near the main street.
- On the bottom right, that is actually new construction with 9 units.

Room to Grow: Finding Better Uses for These Kinds of Lots



- I often hear it said that Newton is “all built out”. Where could there be more homes?
- As I have been driving around the city in the past 2 years, newly looking at things from a zoning and housing perspective, I’ve seen many possibilities.
- There are large parking lots under used parking lots including ones in Waban, West Newton, and Newton Highlands. Or ones behind the malls in Chestnut Hill or the CVS parking lot on Rt. 9.
- There are also places with single-story buildings where instead there could be buildings with more stories that include a combination of retail and housing.

People Who Live Near Transit Really Do Use It More Often

Census Data: Means of Transportation to Work



- Then I also hear — Even though people say there should be transit oriented development here, transit is not that good and people don't use it that much.
- So why should we look at building more homes close to transit?
- I came across the map based on census data that shows the percent of people that take transit to work.
- The darker the color the more people take transit.
- So, you can see across the middle of Newton that near the green line people take transit more as well as along the express bus route and the commuter rail stops
- While the numbers changed during the pandemic, the pattern of who uses transit most likely stayed the same. The closer you live to the transit, the more likely you are to use it.

Which is More Sustainable?

Individual Homes
(Far from Boston)



**Separate &
Inefficient**

Multi-Family Homes
(In Newton)



**Connected &
Efficient**

- This visually shows how multi-family homes here in Newton have less impact on the environment than new home built farther from Boston.
- People often say they are concerned about a tree or a few trees that are taken down when there is a multi-family development going up in Newton.
- But, when development has to happen farther from Boston, hundreds of trees get cut down and what was once open space is paved over.

- The development on the left is in Uxbridge, an hour from Boston.
- The building on the right is under construction in Waban.

Multi-Family Homes in Newton Less Driving = Lower Carbon Emissions



**Long Commutes
Car Dependent
(Distant Suburbs)**

**Access to Public Transit
Fewer Cars
(Newton)**

- :
- When you live further away you need a car for almost everything like driving on the Pike as pictured here or picking kids up from school, going shopping, seeing friends...
- Living in Newton, you have access to transit.
- There are more options for walking and biking and even if you do drive, the distances are a lot shorter.

Which is More Sustainable?

**24 Families in
One Building
in Newton**



**24 Families in
24 Individual Buildings in Millis?**



**More Construction, More Destruction
More Cars, More Driving
More Energy, More Carbon!**

- Here's another way to look at it:
- Both the multi-family building like this new one in Waban and the 24 individual buildings like the example from Millis are homes for 24 families.
- Clearly, 24 new buildings causes more destruction as trees get cut down and open space is paved over.
- More construction materials are used causing a lot of carbon emissions.
- More energy is used to heat and cool 24 buildings.

Cultivating Newton's Vibrant Village Centers

***It's up to all of us to
make new village plans
that work for
the 21st century.***

***Thank you.
We welcome your questions,
feedback, and comments.***



- Thank you for the opportunity to present, we truly appreciate it.
- We would love to take your questions and comments.
- Waban is one of the most interesting villages, with beautiful historic structures, a train station, grocery store, schools, athletic facilities, single and multi-family housing all close to the stores and restaurants in the village.