

September 8, 2022

Councilor Deb Crossley (Chair) and fellow ZAP Councilors
Zoning and Planning Committee
City of Newton

Dear Chair Crossley and fellow ZAP Councilors:

As the elected members of two Newton Area Councils (Newtonville and Waban), we wish to voice our concerns regarding the Community Engagement process for the proposed village center zoning framework and we ask your committee to address these concerns, so that we can better fulfill our role in city governance of informing the community and providing guidance to the City Council and Mayor. As Neighborhood Area Councils (NACs), we have an important role in local governance. We are to provide an **advisory role on planning and zoning actions**, as defined in the City Charter.¹

We are the only community group promulgated through the City Charter and authorized through our respective board orders. We act as intermediaries between the city, city council and residents. We accomplish this duty by giving complete and accurate information of proposed city actions or changes within city governance to residents, so that they can make informed assessments and can provide relevant feedback to city governance in a timely manner. We host forums for residents to engage with their elected council members and city officials. We take these responsibilities seriously, as our collective catchment areas represent over 13,800 residents, with one of our Councils representing one of the largest village centers in Newton.

Our primary concern is that the current zoning engagement process bypasses valid community engagement and does not provide residents with the requisite information needed to reach informed opinions on the proposed zoning changes. While a few of us joined the Community Engagement Network, as individual representatives of each of our area councils, it was not to disqualify the valuable input Area Councils would provide as local governmental entities, regarding our respective village centers or to dismiss our position within the city government's

¹Sec. 9-8 - Neighborhood Area Council Powers and Functions

A neighborhood area council may exercise any powers and perform any functions within the neighborhood service area expressly authorized by the city council, which may include but not be limited to:

*(i) advisory or delegated substantive authority or both, with respect to such programs as a **community action program, urban renewal, relocation, public housing, planning and zoning actions and other physical development programs**, crime prevention and juvenile delinquency programs, health services, code inspection, recreation, education, and workforce training; provided, however, that nothing contained herein shall be construed to authorize the city council to delegate to any neighborhood area council any substantive authority with regard to zoning*

framework. Even at this eleventh hour, we ask that area councils be solicited and our advice considered with regard to the zoning redesign specifics within each of our village centers.

A secondary concern is the length of time stipulated for the community engagement process. Six weeks is insufficient time for our Area Councils to carefully digest and disseminate the information provided by the Planning Department. While the Planning Department indicates that they are working to make this information accessible to the public, our area councils believe it is critical that we are given complete information before we initiate our community outreach. We are of the opinion that it is our responsibility to report on the proposed zoning framework memo, and the changes that will come through its implementation, so that it is completely understood by residents, prior to a city council vote. The lack of definition in the zoning framework ill-prepares us to complete this task and rather we are asked to blindly move forward, without knowing how and where the zoning framework will be implemented within our respective village centers.

As duly elected officials, we ask that respectful consideration be given to our role in city governance and our voiced concerns. As Area Councils, we wish to actively participate in the zoning engagement process and ask to be included rather than bypassed in the consideration of these significant shifts to our zoning policies that will have momentous effects on our villages for decades to come.

Signed on behalf of our Area Council Officers and members,

Jennifer Bentley
President
Newtonville Area Council

Rena Getz
President
Waban Area Council