

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HOUSING &
LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Maura T. Healey, Governor ◆ Kimberley Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor ◆ Edward M. Augustus, Jr., Secretary

Sent via email to:
rfuller@newtonma.gov

November 15, 2023
Mayor Ruthanne Fuller
City of Newton
1000 Commonwealth Ave.
Newton Centre, MA 02459

RE: Village Center Overlay District

Dear Mayor Fuller:

In anticipation of action by the Newton City Council on the Village Center Overlay District (VCOD), I wanted to offer some information that may be helpful for consideration by you and your colleagues.

I understand that the VCOD as proposed on the City's website as version 3.1 represents years of planning and consideration by the residents and businesses in Newton to not only meet the minimum requirements prescribed in the MBTA Communities Compliance Guidelines (Guidelines), but also address the City's current and anticipated housing needs. Without taking a position on any specific aspect of the VCOD proposal, I want to point out some of the advantages of adopting zoning that will achieve these dual goals.

The most critical zoning for Newton to adopt is that which complies with the MBTA Communities Act. This is State law. Furthermore,

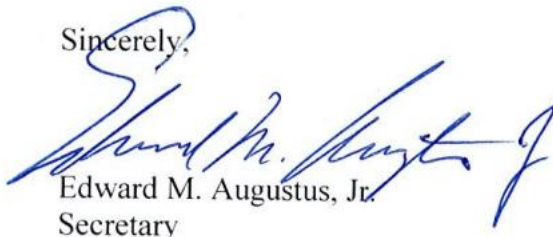
- As I'm sure you're aware, Newton must adopt zoning that meets at least the minimum requirements established in the Compliance Guidelines in order to receive MassWorks and Housing Choice grants, as well as the new HousingWorks infrastructure program which is funded at \$25 million per year in our capital plan. **By statute, noncompliant communities are ineligible for these grant programs.** This funding offers substantial benefits to Massachusetts communities, and Newton has benefited in the past – for example, in 2022 Newton received a \$2 million MassWorks grant to fund improvements at the Oak Street intersection, and Newton also received over \$500,000 in Housing Choice grants in the last several years which in part helped to fund a feasibility study for the Newton Armory redevelopment project.
- **Municipalities that are compliant** with MBTA Communities will have a **competitive advantage** in all the capital programs offered by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) capital grant programs that are a part of the Community One Stop for Growth consolidated grant programs:
 - MassWorks , EOED
 - HousingWorks, EOHLC
 - Housing Choice grants, EOHLC
 - Community Planning Grants, EOHLC

- Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, EOED
 - Urban Agenda, EOED
 - Rural and Small Town Development Fund, EOED
 - Brownfields Redevelopment Fund, MassDevelopment
 - Site Readiness Program, MassDevelopment
 - Underutilized Properties Program, MassDevelopment
 - Collaborative Workspace Program, MassDevelopment
 - Real Estate Services Technical Assistance, MassDevelopment
 - Commonwealth Places Programs, MassDevelopment
- While scoring criteria for the next fiscal year are still being finalized, **municipalities that exceed the minimum requirements for land area and zoning capacity for multi-family units will receive special consideration** in the EOHLIC capital grant programs guidelines including MassWorks and Housing Choice grants as well as the new HousingWorks infrastructure program.
 - As described in the Guidelines, the following grants that are not part of the Community One-Stop for Growth consolidated grant process will also take non-compliance into consideration:
 - Land Use Planning Grants, EOEEA,
 - Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) Grants, EOEEA, and
 - Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Planning and Project Grants, EOEEA

I also understand that the City Council is considering in particular the zoning near its three commuter rail stations and that Auburndale may not be included. The VCOD zoning reinforces historic development patterns that accompanied the evolution of commuter rail and streetcars throughout the city. Supporting more housing options is one of the important lenses, perhaps the most important, that the Healey-Driscoll Administration considers when making transportation investments.

In closing, I hope that the City Council carefully considers its vote on the VCOD and does not lose sight of the well thought out plan to remove zoning barriers that will ease the process to build more multi-family housing near transit and near existing village centers.

Sincerely,



Edward M. Augustus, Jr.
Secretary

cc: Congressman Jake Auchincloss
State Senator Cynthia Stone Creem
State Representative John J. Lawn, Jr.
State Representative Kay Khan
State Representative Ruth B. Balsler

