

Waban Area Council

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wabanareacouncil@newtonma.gov

February 12, 2018

Mr. Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development
Newton City Hall
Room 202, 2nd Floor
1000 Commonwealth Ave.
Newton, MA 02459

Dear Mr. Heath:

In spirit of community engagement, we the elected members of the Waban Area Council submit the attached comments on the current draft of the Newton Pattern Book. We appreciate the amount of work that has been accomplished and presented in the Pattern Book. The hired consultants, Sasaki Associates, have given the city of Newton a tentative framework to begin the discussion of defining the built environment of Newton in metrics that have comparative value.

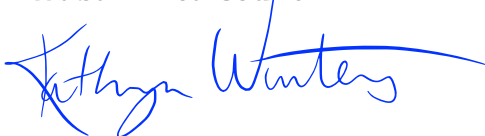
The attachment hereto is a list of individual comments collected from both members of the area council and members of the public as part of our February 8th meeting. We understand that a revised version of the Pattern Book will be coming out soon, and we welcome the opportunity to assist in gathering further comment.

Members of the Waban Area Council share one major concern about the draft Pattern Book: **it lacks explicit aspirational content**. It provides no opportunity for the public to weigh in on future directions and preferred patterns for development in Newton's neighborhoods. Indeed, with only a few months budgeted between the acceptance of the draft Pattern Book and the target date for the proposal of a revised zoning ordinance, we wonder if meaningful discussions of Newton's future can happen at all. Sufficient time must be allowed for discussion of our shared aspirations before the Pattern Book is finalized and a new context-based zoning ordinance is developed.

Finally, we offer our assistance to the Planning Department in engaging the Waban community (by hosting forums or charrettes) in the ongoing Zoning Reform process. Please let us know how we can help.

Sincerely,

Waban Area Council



By: Kathryn Winters, President

cc: Hon. Mayor Ruthanne Fuller
City Councilor Deb Crossley
City Councilor John Rice
City Councilor Andreae Downs

Attachment - Broader Comments on NPB and the NPB Process:

- Aspirational Patterns - The Pattern Book process section states that throughout the process “members of the Newton community will have a chance to provide input on which observed patterns best represent the community and should be carried forward as models for new development.” The PB goes on to state that “the pattern book will also showcase aspirational development patterns carefully selected and curated by the planning team for the consideration of the community. Patterns best representing the desired character of Newton’s neighborhoods and village centers will be included in the final pattern book, which will ultimately inform the redesigned zoning ordinance.” p. 274.
 - Has any of that happened?
 - Will the community have a chance to view such aspirational patterns and provide feedback before the zoning ordinance is drafted? How does this fit with the Mayor’s announced timeline of having a redesigned ordinance by Fall 2018?
 - Similarly, p. 254 – Under Building Type Inventory, it says that “also collected among these pages are selected aspirational building and character patterns that may not be present in Newton currently.... These aspirational typologies are for the consideration of the Newton community as potential tools for meeting the goals of strategic growth, accessibility, and the preservation of the city’s unique character.” **Where are they?**
- Housing Stock- There is a need for better characterization of our housing stock. No metrics of the inherent value of the predominance of our original historic housing stock. Homes that were built at the height of craftsmanship (1930’s) that in today’s housing market would be cost prohibitive to replicate. Homes with slate roofs, windows with wood fenestrations and detailing. Original farmhouses are daily reminders of our origins as a community. The presence of our original housing stock defines our Waban community and reflects our vibrant history.
- Tree Loss - When many of the land parcels in Newton and Waban have been redeveloped, the first loss to the community at large is the cutting down of well-established trees. This is a significant loss on many environmental levels (loss of habitat and air quality, as well as site specific – storm water & soil retention). AS an example, in Waban the loss of trees in the Quinobequin area has resulted in more prevalent flooding.
- Residential Open Space -*Residential choice of housing option*. Today’s housing market supports large builds with little surrounding open space. Tomorrow’s market may in fact support the preference for small house living with larger surrounding residential open space. Many in our community intentionally chose this housing option and wish to continue living in this type of environ.

- Lot Size differences. There is high variability of lot sizes within the community. Abutting parcels can vary as much as 50% in overall total land area. This data is not reflected in the NPB.
- Community Engagement - A recommendation for robust notification of the Newton community at large either through a workbook format (Grand Rapids, MI example) or surveying the community at large to improve community knowledge and participation in the process of Zoning Reform (Redesign). Several councilors have attended numerous events around the Zoning Redesign process with public attendance no greater than 100 people at any one event (0.2% of our voting citizenry).
- Better Citizen Notification - Ask that the city of Newton take on the responsibility of notifying its residents of the ongoing Zoning Reform, as it has significant implications for the property owners within our community. Two potential informational conduits could be notification through a resident's property tax or water bill.
- Online Maps - Improve the interactive quality of online maps so that viewer is able to interpret the map content while zooming in on a specific region of the map.
- Reference methodologies. Per the request of a Planning & Development Board member at the meeting last year, add an Appendix that would explicitly explain how data was generated. It would add clarity to the final data points.
- CBA Comparison Table - For each CBA, the pattern book presents (i) total acres, (ii) intersections per square mile, (iii) permeable surfaces, and (iv) average tax revenue per acre. It would be helpful to also have one chart presenting those numbers for each CBA, along with the average for all of Newton.
- The appendices are blank - no glossary of terms or materials on the community engagement process.
- Open Space - There should be a distinction between public open space and private open space.
- Map Titles - The citywide maps should be titled for better interpretation of their content.
- P. 46 - the text needs to correlate with the map on p. 47 (green ≠ maroon).
- P. 54 - Correct correlation of text with Map on P55 (shades of green).
- Thompsonville - CBA #12 "Rt. 9 East" includes the village of Thompsonville, but there is no mention at all of Thompsonville.

Attachment - Comments/Corrections specific to Waban CBA:

- Boundaries – We have reviewed the revised boundaries for the Waban CBA. The Zervas campus should be included in the Waban area.
- *MBTA stations – Adjacent Density.* The PB states (p. 176): “Waban is unique in that it encompasses two MBTA stations and relatively little accompanying density adjacent to them.” That statement is not accurate with respect to the Woodland T stop, and arguably misleading with respect to the Waban T stop.
 - The Woodland T stop is surrounded by – Woodland Station Apartments (180 units), Golda Meir senior living facility (199 units), Newton Wellesley Hospital, 2 large medical office buildings, and several other medium-large commercial buildings.
 - The Waban T stop is surrounded by 15 privately-owned apartments (55-75 Wyman), 20 apartments owned by the Newton Housing Authority (52-54 and 68-70 Wyman), a mixed-use commercial building with 8 apartments (77-81 Wyman), a post office, several retail and commercial buildings, a nursing home, two churches (one of which houses a full-time day-care facility), and an elementary school.

This density is comparable to other stops along the D-line in Newton, and both stops have more adjacent density than the Eliot T stop in Newton Highlands.

- p. 176. There are two 10-unit multi-family buildings on the south side of Wyman St. just before the T, at 68-70 Wyman St. and 52-54 Wyman St. Both are owned by the Newton Housing Authority. Those parcels are characterized in the Pattern Book as “civic/public use” rather than as multi-family residences. The residents of those apartment buildings are part of our community and those buildings are better characterized as multi-family residences both on the chart on p. 176 and the map on p.177.
- p. 176 & 177. The parcels which made up the former St. Philip Neri property along Karen Rd. and Beacon St. (formerly 1521 Beacon St.) are marked as commercial. But the two Karen Rd. lots have been built up as large single-family homes. The Beacon St. lot is under construction as an 8-unit multi-family townhouse development.
- p. 180 – the first word of the first paragraph should be “Waban” not “Newton.”
- p. 180 – Under **Village Center**, it says “with the exception of a single historic property, the village center is entirely single story and commercial/retail in use.” But both the Strong building and the Peck property are two stories. There are other multi-story commercial buildings on Wyman St. including a mixed-use building with 8 apartment units.
- p. 180 – Under **Campus** it should note the Angier public school campus (and Zervas if that is added back to the CBA.)

- p. 180 – Under **Neighborhood** It says “[w]ith the exception of a small cluster of smaller single family units and a large multifamily housing development in the northwest corner of the CBA...the entire Waban CBA consists of an intermingled mix of medium- and large-scale traditional residential pattern subsets.” This is not accurate. (1) The northwest corner of the Waban CBA also contains a 199-unit senior living facility, (2) There are several multi-family parcels on Wyman St., including a 15-unit privately-owned apartment complex at 59-75 Wyman St. , two Newton Housing Authority buildings, and a mixed-use building with 8 units at 77-81 Wyman (2) an 8-unit townhouse development is under construction at 1521 Beacon St., and (3) The area being added back to the Waban CBA (east of Chestnut, south of T tracks, north of Rt. 9) contains many small-scale single family units (see p. 221 for the characterization of that neighborhood, previously included in the Upper Falls CBA) as well as several multi-family units on Chestnut St.
- Corrections – “east” instead of “west”:
 - P. 174 – First paragraph says “hospital to in the **east**” it should say “**west.**”
 - P. 176 – “Newton Wellesley Hospital on the **eastern** edge” should say “**western.**”
 - P. 176 – “concentrated in the **northeasternmost** corner of the CBA” should say “**northwesternmost.**”
- Aqueduct trails - Include acknowledgment that walkability in Waban is enhanced by the utilization of the Aqueducts trails by many residents throughout our village. Add some demarcation of their existence or note the daily utilization by residents.
- Teardowns - Add some acknowledgment of the prevalence of teardowns in the Waban CBA as development pressure has small and medium-sized homes being replaced by large homes. Ward 5 is second to Ward 8 in teardowns.