



CITY OF NEWBURYPORT
OFFICE OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Newburyport City Council

FROM: Andrew R. Port, Director of Planning & Development

CC: Sean R. Reardon, Mayor

RE: Zoning Advisory Group (ZAG) for Storey Ave & “MBTA Communities” Rezoning Work

DATE: March 11, 2024

Thank you to all Councilors who attended the February 20, 2024 Planning & Development (P&D) / Committee of the Whole (COTW) presentation and discussion regarding the above two rezoning efforts, which have some areas of overlap. Although not all members were able to attend, I will be reaching out again in the hopes that continued “iterative” discussion(s) will facilitate the drafting of new zoning regulations which have broader consensus amongst the Council, and the larger Newburyport community. I also appreciate the P&D Chair’s willingness to set aside time at each upcoming P&D meeting so that we can use these roughly biweekly meetings as a format to provide further updates, while answering questions, and identifying concerns and/or preferences you may have along the way. The Planning Board is also expected to discuss these areas at the end of their regular biweekly meetings, thus adding another forum for key stakeholder input, including public comment at the discretion of the Chair(s). Additionally, I am working with the Administration and Council President to schedule a more general Public Information Session for the larger community. This forum may be held on Wednesday March 27, 2024 or another appropriate date TBD.

The primary purpose of this communication is to summarize the ZAG membership and meeting format to be used during the coming weeks and months. While I understand there may be different perspectives on who should “take the lead” on zoning work of this nature, please know that the ZAG brought together here as a resource to the Department is in no way intended to supplant the Council’s direct role in adopting zoning regulations throughout the City. Rather, given our receipt of a state grant to assist with these efforts, and the department’s expertise in such matters generally, it is our goal to assist with this timely work, in cooperation with all key stakeholders, and to prepare one or more zoning changes which are thoroughly informed by the Council itself.

Membership and composition of the ZAG is as follows:

Mayor/Administration
Sean Reardon, Mayor
Andrew Levine, Chief of Staff

City Council

Ed Cameron
Heather Shand
Afroz Khan
James McCauley
Heath Granas

Planning Board

Rick Taintor
Alden Clark
Jamie Pennington

Affordable Housing Trust

Andrew Shapiro
Karen Weiner
Madeline Nash

Office of Planning & Development

Andrew Port
Jennifer Blanchet
Katelyn Sullivan

Greater Newburyport Housing Choice Coalition

Judy Tymon

Newburyport Residents

Beth Trach
Chris Carney

I am currently confirming the list of upcoming ZAG meeting dates and locations, which will be posted to the City Calendar accordingly. We will meet roughly every two weeks, and aside from any alternate or backup meeting times, I anticipate the majority of such meetings taking place at 4:00 pm on Thursday evenings, with each meeting lasting roughly 1.5 hours. Biweekly meetings will allow for timely updates and integration with parallel discussions taking place in the more formal Council/P&D/COTW setting.

During the next few weeks our primary focus will be on the mapping exercise required to confirm suitable “MBTA compliant” district areas. Several sketch map variations, and a tabulation of buildout capacity for new multifamily units in each scenario (*outside the existing baseline 40R District*) will allow us to hone in on the preferred location of “MBTA compliant” districts. This, in turn, will help to clarify how compliance with “MBTA Communities” would fit within any larger “village center” rezoning for the Storey Ave/Low Street area, consistent with both the 2017 Master Plan and the Planning Assistance Grant we received from the state. In either case, the City Council retains final jurisdiction over the adoption of appropriate zoning, and the “deliverables” we are working on (*analysis, visualization, draft maps and zoning text*) will be useful towards that end, including any submissions required for state review under “MBTA Communities.”

Thank you, and I look forward to discussing these zoning updates further with you in the weeks and months ahead.