

August Newsletter

From City Councilor Marc Laredo



Dear Friends,

I hope that everyone is enjoying the last part of the summer and starting to get ready for fall. I want to update you on the City Council's rezoning work, share my impressions of our new school Superintendent, and provide information about upcoming municipal elections.

We Need to Set Specific, Measurable Targets and Goals for Future Development

The Mayor's Office and the City Council are engaged in two separate and distinct development efforts:

- 1. Meeting our legal obligation under the MBTA Communities Act.***

Under this state law passed in 2021, Newton must rezone a portion of the city to allow for the construction of at least 8,330 housing units by right. I am pleased that we are on track to submit our MBTA Communities Act Plan to the state by the year-end deadline.

2. **Rezoning our Village Centers.** The Village Center rezoning discussion began prior to the passage of the MBTA Communities law and involves efforts to rezone additional areas of the city outside of the MBTA Communities zones. Given the large changes that are coming due to the required MBTA Communities rezoning, I think it is particularly important to understand and be clear about the other changes being proposed in our Village Centers.

In order to effectively plan for the impact on our city's infrastructure and services, as well as accurately measure our success, it's crucial that we set specific **targets** and **goals** when discussing rezoning the Village Centers. While phrases like "creating vibrant village centers" and "building more affordable housing" are big picture visions that I agree with, they do not provide enough detail for us to ensure we're making the best decisions for our community.

Creating a new zoning code means setting forth specific goals for the next five, ten, and twenty years and doing the necessary planning to achieve those goals. To start, we need to answer some basic questions, such as the following:

- What is the ideal population size for our city in the coming years?
- How many additional housing units do we want to build?
- What percentage of these additional units should be affordable for low-income individuals and families?

Once we agree on these goals, we can turn to implementation. To consider changes to the zoning code, we need to determine:

- How many housing units are likely to be built in the MBTA Communities zones?
- How many housing units are likely to be built in the Village Center rezoned areas?
- How many additional housing units are likely to be built outside of the rezoned areas (areas such as Riverside, Northland, along Washington Street, along California Street, and similar locations)?
- What are our plans for providing additional classrooms and/or schools, parking facilities, and other infrastructure or city services for the significant population increases (so we avoid situations like having two middle schools (Oak Hill and Brown) directly across the street from one another)?

Only then can we properly analyze the proposed zoning code and determine whether the necessary planning has been completed. To date, that important work has not been done. See the Planning Department's memorandum (pages 4-5):

[Click Here for the Planning Department's Memorandum](#)

Fortunately, two of my colleagues-Councilors Pam Wright and John Oliver-have done some of the necessary analysis. Using public information from the city's assessing department, they created a database to measure what could be built under the proposed zoning code (and how those numbers might change if certain zoning rules are changed, such as the maximum height of buildings and the threshold for when a special permit is required). Their analysis should enable the Mayor's Planning Department to complete its own analysis addressing the impact on city services and steps to meet the additional city needs. Here are the (approximate) numbers:

- Approved or in the pipeline: 3,000 units (including major projects such as Riverside, Northland, and Riverdale).
- MBTA zones: 10,000 units.
- Village Center zones: 8,000 units.

To be clear – this is not necessarily how many additional units will be built. But assuming that only half of the potential units get built over the next twenty years, and taking into account the number of housing units already in place in rezoned areas, this still means 4,000 new units in the MBTA zones; 3,000 new units in the Village Center zones; and 3,000 new units already approved or in the pipeline elsewhere in the city. In a city of 33,000 housing units, that is a significant amount of additional development.

Admittedly, planning is complex and providing estimates is difficult. But that does not mean that we should not do the work. That is why I joined a number of my colleagues in submitting a memorandum to the Mayor asking for her help in doing the appropriate analysis and requesting that we pause our rezoning efforts in the Village Centers until this work is done. Here is a copy of the memorandum (pages 61-62 of the Zoning and Planning agenda for August 15, 2023):

Please join me in urging the Administration and my colleagues on the City Council to make sure that we do this vital work so we can plan properly for the future.

New School Superintendent

I recently had the opportunity to meet with our new school superintendent, Anna Nolin, at a gathering at Temple Emanuel (one of the many sessions she is holding throughout the city). We are very lucky to have her as our new superintendent! She is a true leader – willing to address tough challenges, dynamic, and a great listener. I am confident she will make our excellent public schools even better.

Municipal Elections

I am pleased to report that I will again be a candidate for re-election in November as one of your Ward 7 Councilors-at-Large and that I will run unopposed. Thank you to everyone who signed my nomination papers to help get me back on the ballot! I look forward to continuing to work with the rest of the Ward 7 delegation: Councilor-at-Large Becky Grossman, Ward Councilor Lisle Baker, and Amy Davenport, our new School Committee member (she is running unopposed). Thank you to retiring School Committee member Kathy Shields for her service to Ward 7 and the entire Newton community.

There will be two preliminary elections on September 12 for open seats on the City Council, one for Ward Councilor for Ward 2 and the other for Ward Councilor for Ward 6, because there are three candidates for each of those seats. *Only residents in Ward 2 can vote in the Ward 2 race, and only residents in Ward 6 can vote in the Ward 6 race.* There are two ways to vote: early at City Hall on Tuesday, September 5 (8:30 am-5:00 pm) or Wednesday,

September 6 (9:00 am-8:00 pm) or at your regular polling place on September 12 (7:00 am-8:00 pm).

[Click Here to Find Your Polling Place](#)

I hope that all **Ward 6** residents will vote for **Lisa Gordon** in the preliminary election. Lisa grew up in Newton and returned here to raise her family. She has been a leader in community affairs in Newton for many years and currently works as the Executive Director of the Acton Food Pantry. I am confident that Lisa will serve the residents of Ward 6 well and be a strong and collaborative voice on the City Council.

[Click Here to Find Lisa's Info](#)

There are additional contested races elsewhere in the city in November, and I will share my thoughts on them as we move into the fall.

Thank you and, as always, I welcome your thoughts, questions, comments, and criticisms!

Marc

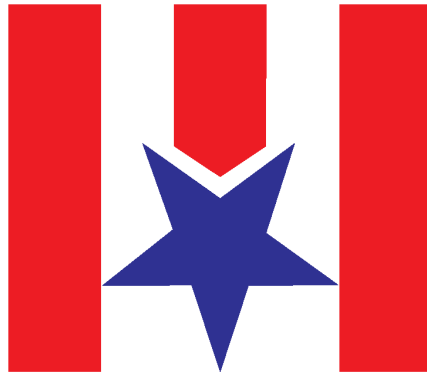
Committee to Elect Marc Laredo

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MARC LAREDO

Councilor-at-Large
Ward 7

