

January Newsletter

From City Councilor Marc Laredo

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! I hope 2022 is a good year for you, your family, and our community.

I am grateful for the continued opportunity to serve this extraordinary city as one of your City Councilors. This term, I will continue as a member of the Land Use and Public Facilities Committees. I will also assume a new role as the chair of the Real Property Reuse Committee, the committee charged with overseeing the sale or reuse of city buildings and land.

Before the City Council this year, there will be several important issues, including ones we cannot even anticipate. While COVID-related matters (including providing our schools with whatever resources they need) remain our number one priority, other key issues to highlight include:

Zoning

As we turn our attention to our village centers, I am hopeful that we start working on the actual language of the zoning code itself. This should involve clear, concrete discussions and then, if needed, appropriate changes to the rules regarding:

- Building Hights;
- Setbacks from the street and from adjacent properties;
- Parking minimums;
- Required open space;
- Signage;
- Mandated environmental standards; and
- Allowed commercial uses (such as whether to permit home delivery companies to use village center

commercial spaces as distribution hubs), among other standards.

Infrastructure

Streets, sidewalks, school buildings, senior center, recreational facilities, and athletic fields. While we have made progress in these areas, we have significant work ahead of us:

- Perhaps the single biggest complaint that I hear from our residents is about the condition of our streets and sidewalks. We must continue to fund this work – something that affects every single resident of the city as we walk, run, bike, and drive through our community.
- We are continuing our work on our school buildings, focusing on the new Lincoln-Eliot School. Our last three significant projects – Angier, Zervas, and Cabot – have been very successful, and I expect to continue to achieve this standard of excellence.
- One significant issue that we will be tackling is what to do with the Underwood and Ward Elementary Schools. Both buildings are very old and need significant repair or total replacement. Coupled with the fact that these two schools currently have low enrollments, this will involve the difficult decision as to whether to keep both schools open.
- The work at the Senior Center in Newtonville continues. Although I am pleased that we are moving forward with this important project and agree with the decision to keep it at its current location, I will be carefully scrutinizing the design work to ensure that the new building fits in well with the Newtonville village.
- Our recreational facilities and athletic fields need significant attention. I support a complete reconstruction of the Gath Pool so that it can be used throughout the year and not just in the summer months. While I know that we have other indoor swimming facilities in the city, it is not the same as having a city-owned pool available year-round (and

the pool at Newton North High School serves our students first). Likewise, I look forward to efforts to improve Crystal Lake, our other public swimming facility. Finally, we must get to work fixing our athletic fields. While we have significant private support for this work (kudos to The Friends of Newton Tennis, Inc. for its \$15,000 donation to the fund to repair and maintain the city's 67 tennis courts and the substantial contributions from our youth soccer, baseball, and other leagues), this ultimately is a city responsibility.

Environment

Newton has been a leader in addressing climate change, but there is much more to do:

- We should require new construction or substantial renovations to meet strict environmental standards, including examining whether they should be all-electric.
- Our stormwater system needs substantial work and while we have started to address it, much more needs to be done.
- Developers should be required to meet stringent environmental standards on projects.
- We need to preserve and enhance our open space and tree canopy, which are critical to our well-being.

Little things that can make a difference.

- I am not a fan of utility poles. I think they are unsightly and adversely affect our tree canopy (either because utility companies have to trim trees to accommodate them or they take up space that a tree could fill). For years, I have been part of a working group, including city officials and representatives of

our utilities, that has been trying to reduce the number of “double poles” in the city (a double pole is when a utility company adds a replacement pole to an existing utility pole without removing the original pole). Thanks to a coordinated effort, we have seen a significant drop in the number of these poles throughout the city. I also am working on efforts to “underground” our utilities. Whenever we have a large construction project, I have insisted that the utility lines be placed underground both within the project and from the street to the project. I also am working to develop standards to assess the feasibility of undergrounding utilities whenever we do a large street project.

- When developers seek special permits for their projects, we often require them to make so-called mitigation payments to the city for specific public improvements in the immediate vicinity of their project. I am working to develop a more uniform approach to these payments - one that is fairer and more predictable, both for the city and the developers.
- Part of the work of a City Councilor is helping residents solve problems, whether in their neighborhoods or with the city hall. This is a particularly satisfying part of the job, and I look forward to continuing this important constituent work along with my Ward 7 colleagues.

As always, I welcome your thoughts, questions, comments, and criticisms!

Thanks,

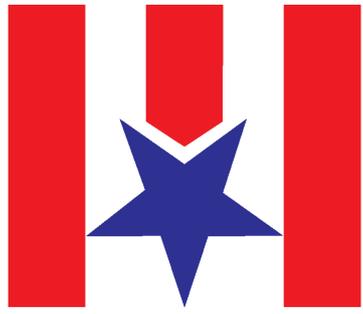
Marc

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