

March Newsletter

From City Councilor Marc Laredo



Dear Friends,

I hope you are enjoying the beginning of spring! Two significant issues that will be before the City Council in the next few months are: (a) the city's budget and (b) compliance with the MBTA Communities Act. Here are some things to consider:

Building next year's budget will be challenging

This will be a difficult budget season, and building the budget will require a series of challenging but necessary tradeoffs. Given our fiscal constraints, we must carefully review our existing programs for cost savings and determine which programs to continue to fund and which to reduce. We may examine raising fees for city services, such as reviewing special permits for large developments (to cover the actual costs the city incurs in reviewing these projects) and explore better uses of technology to deliver services to our residents more efficiently. We must consider how to best use all the funds at our disposal, including our free cash and overlay reserves, and examine the rate at which we are addressing our unfunded pension liability.

Despite the tight budget, we have needs that require further investment, and we need to fund those investments even when that requires additional tradeoffs from other programs. For example, I am committed to funding the critically needed Horace-Mann Elementary School project. Having approved the Countryside and Franklin Elementary Schools' work with the debt

exclusion overrides, we must now fund the Horace-Mann Elementary School improvements so that the work can get done as planned and on the same timeline as initially proposed.

Compliance with the MBTA Communities Act will require significant changes to our zoning code

The City Council is engaged in a multi-year effort to review, and possibly overhaul, our entire zoning code. For the last year, that effort has focused on our “Village Centers” and the areas immediately around them. We also are under a deadline to submit a plan to the state to comply with the its “Housing Choice” or “MBTA Communities” law by the end of December. Under the Housing Choice law that was enacted in 2021, communities such as Newton which are served by the MBTA are required to create zones around transit stations for additional housing. In Newton, those zones must total at least fifty acres (with a minimum of fifteen units an acre) and have the capacity to accommodate at least 8,330 units of housing which developers can construct *by right*.

On Wednesday, March 29, the City Council’s Zoning and Planning Committee will have an initial discussion with the city’s Planning Department regarding how Newton should comply with the new law.

**Click the button to see the Planning Department’s
memo**

Planning Department Memo

The Planning Department’s memo demonstrates that:

1. the current draft version of the proposed Village Center zoning code will not come close to bringing us into compliance, and
2. to comply, significant increases in permitted density both in village centers and elsewhere in the city will be needed.

Newton faces difficult choices in the next few months regarding how to meet the state's requirements, and the City Council will engage in challenging discussions about zoning changes as we move towards the year-end state deadline. I urge you to pay close attention to this ongoing work, and I will update you as we proceed.

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

Marc

Committee to Elect Marc Laredo

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