

# ***Newton Zoning Redesign and the MBTA Communities Law – Current Proposal to City Council Zoning & Planning Committee (ZAP)***

## ***Making the Case for Older Adults***

*23 May 2023 presentation for Council on Aging  
Alice Ingerson, Lisa Monahan & Jen Molinsky*



Council on Aging



*Please send questions or comments for any of the presenters  
c/o Alice Ingerson to [usablehistory@gmail.com](mailto:usablehistory@gmail.com)*



# What is zoning?

Zoning regulates how land can be used, especially ...  
the amount of land required per home.

## Key Terms

- **By-right:** what can be built on a lot without special, case-by-case permission
- **Special permit:** a permit that allows specific exceptions under specific circumstances  
The zoning ordinance spells out both the exceptions and the circumstances. In many communities, a Planning Board can grant special permits. In Newton, only the City Council itself may grant such permits
- **Multi-family housing:** a building that houses 3 or more separate households
- **Single-residence zoning** or **Single-family district:** allows only buildings that each house 1 household  
*(Who can count as “a household”?)*
- **Lot coverage:** maximum % of lot that can be covered by buildings (ground floor)
  - **Floor-area ratio (FAR):** square feet of building (all floors) / square feet of lot
- **Frontage:** minimum width of a lot along the street
- **Setbacks:** minimum distance between a building and the front, side or back edges of its lot  
(and therefore from buildings on abutting lots)

# ***Why is zoning for multi-family housing important to older adults?***

*(especially older adults who are not wealthy...)*

## **Addressing Affordability & Accessibility Requires Zoning That Allows More Housing Options...**

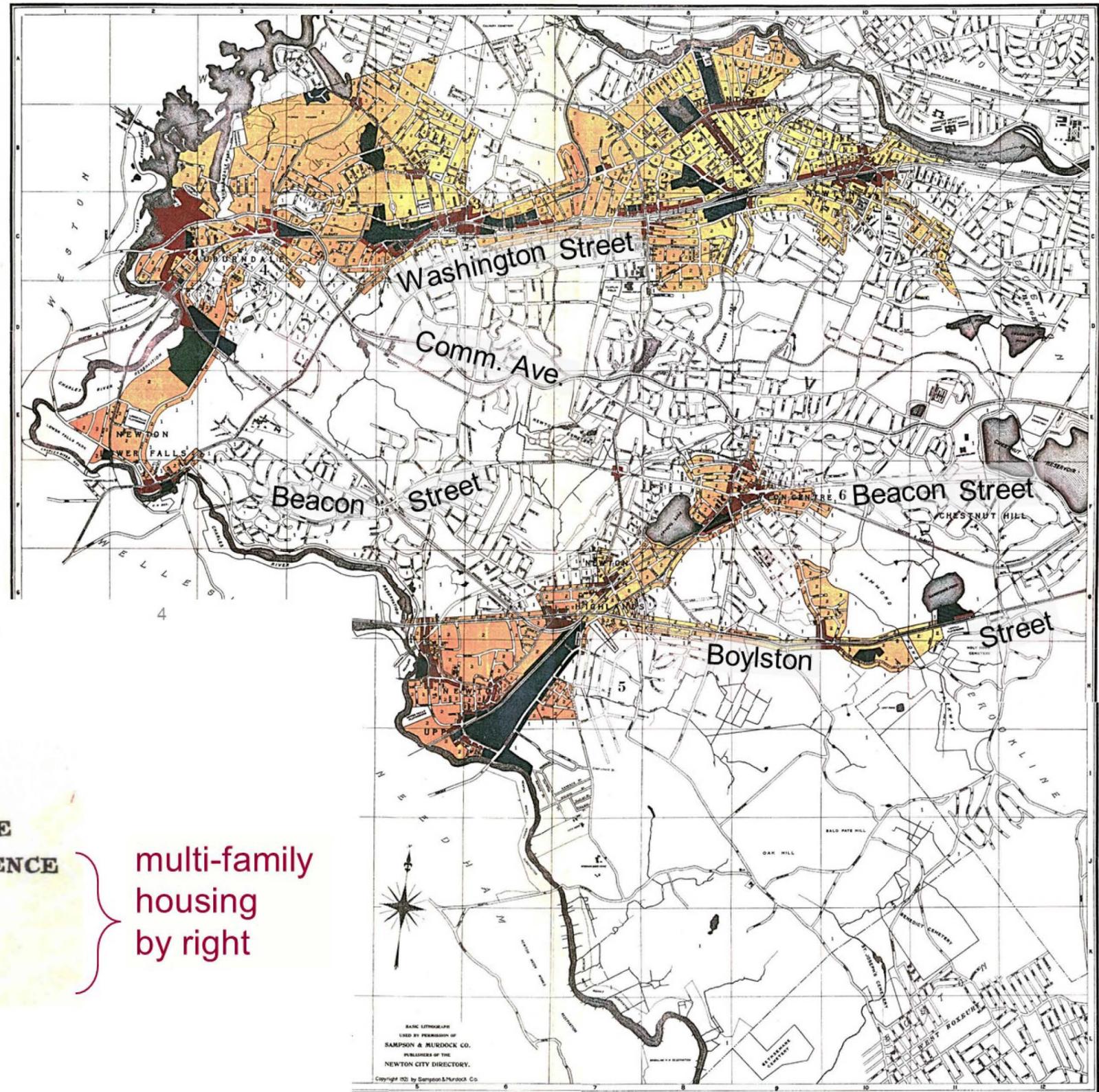
- **Accessory dwelling units (ADUs)** for older adults themselves, care-givers, rental income...
- Accessible, lower-cost, elevator-served **apartments and condominiums** ...
- **Flexible single-family homes** that can accommodate multiple generations as needs change ...  
*(Who can count as a “single family”?)*
- **Co-housing and intentional communities**...
- More **service-enriched housing**, including for middle incomes...
- New models at higher levels of care: **dementia-friendly housing**, “green house” model nursing homes...

# Where does Newton's zoning allow multi-family housing, and why?

1921 Newton zoning (proposed)

DISTRICTS	
1	SINGLE RESIDENCE
2	GENERAL RESIDENCE
	BUSINESS
	COMMERCIAL
	INDUSTRIAL

multi-family housing by right

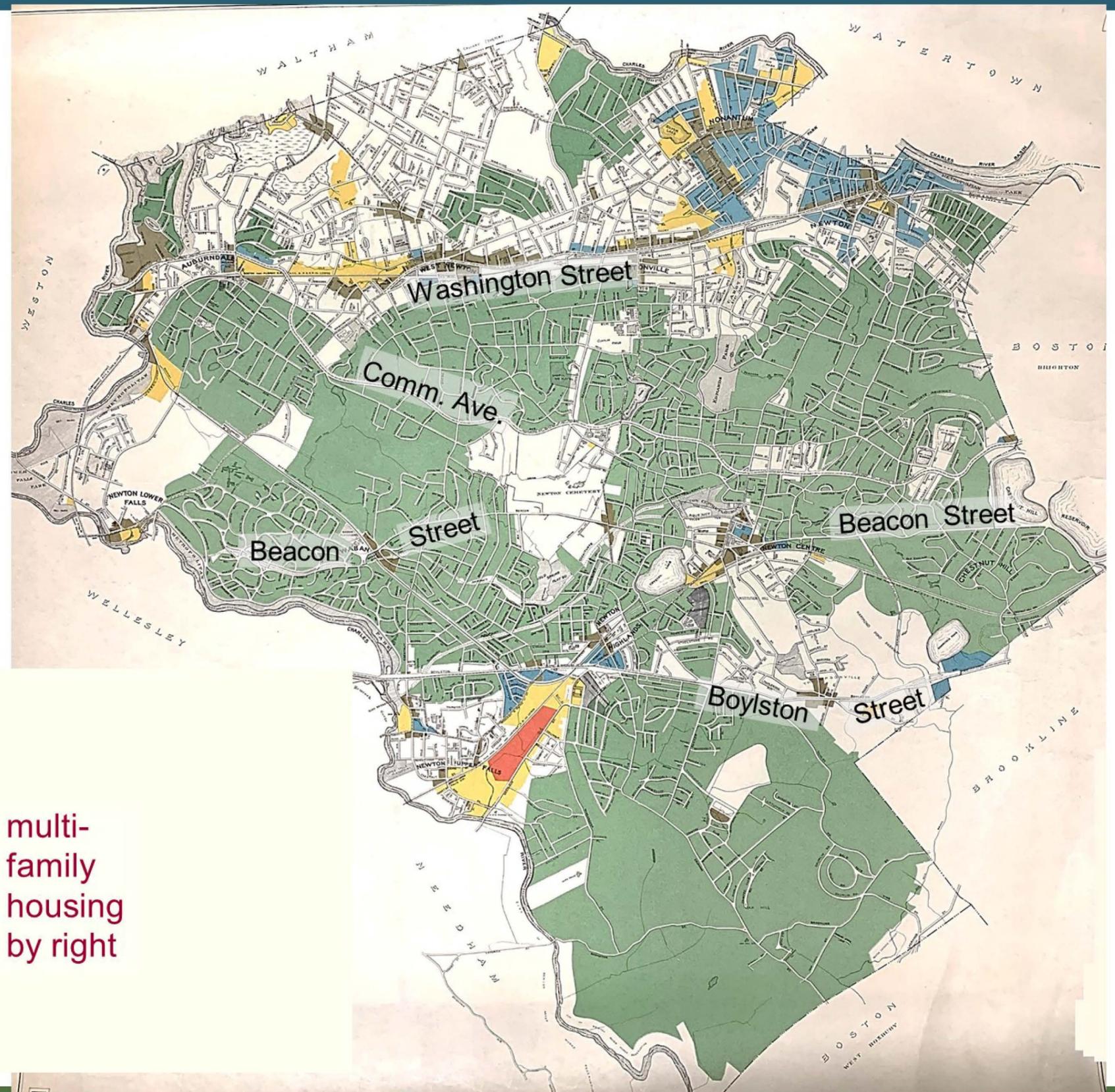


# Where does Newton's zoning allow multi-family housing, and why?

1938 Newton zoning (adopted)

SINGLE RESIDENCE	
PRIVATE RESIDENCE	
GENERAL RESIDENCE & APARTMENT	
BUSINESS	
MANUFACTURING	
UNRESTRICTED	

multi-family housing by right

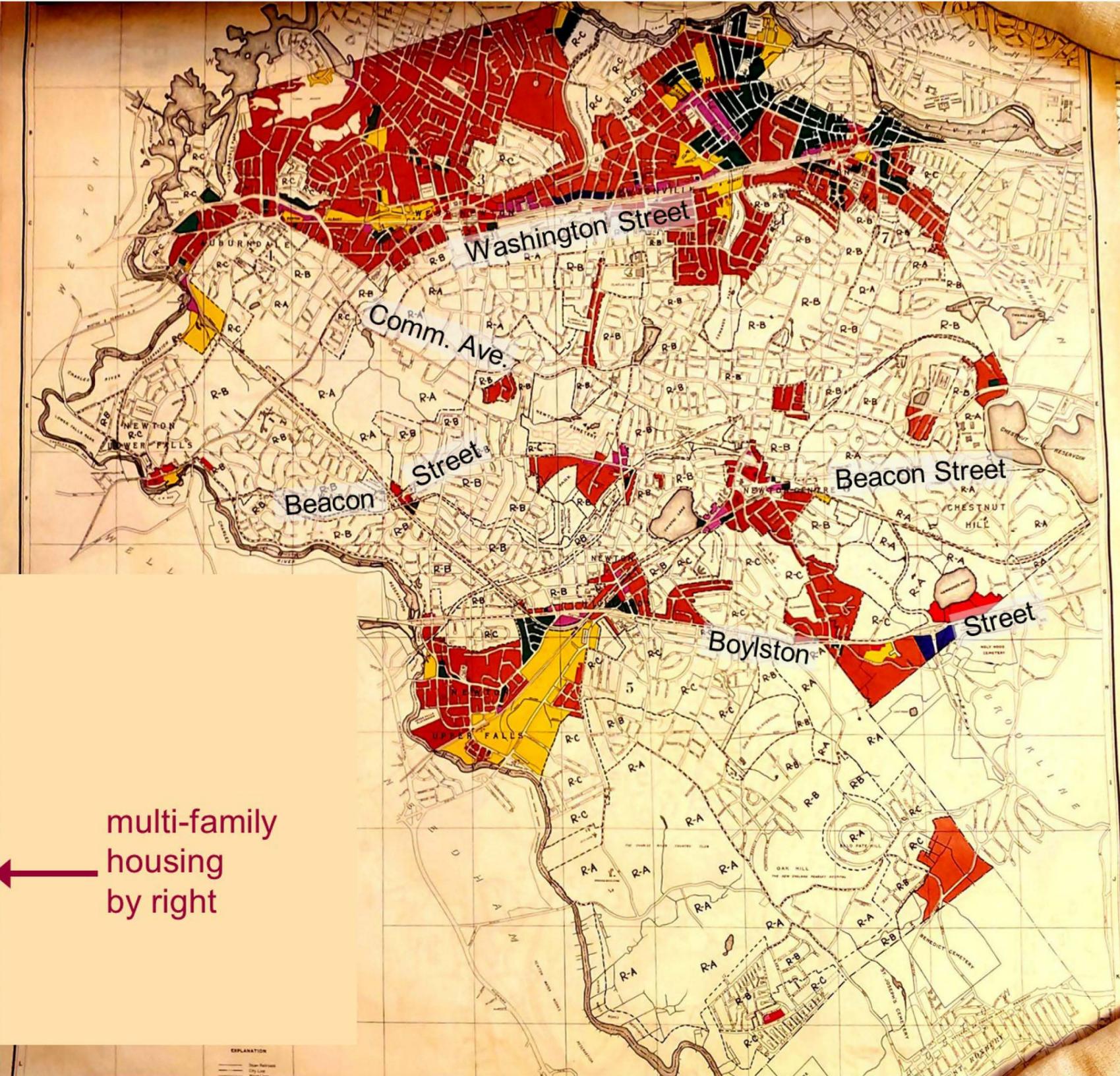


# Where does Newton's zoning allow multi-family housing, and why?

1953 Newton zoning (adopted)

SINGLE RESIDENCE A	R-A
SINGLE RESIDENCE B	R-B
SINGLE RESIDENCE C	R-C
PRIVATE RESIDENCE	Red
RESIDENCE D DIST.	Green
RESIDENCE E DIST.	Blue
BUSINESS A DIST.	Red
BUSINESS B DIST.	Purple
MANUFACTURING	Yellow

multi-family housing by right

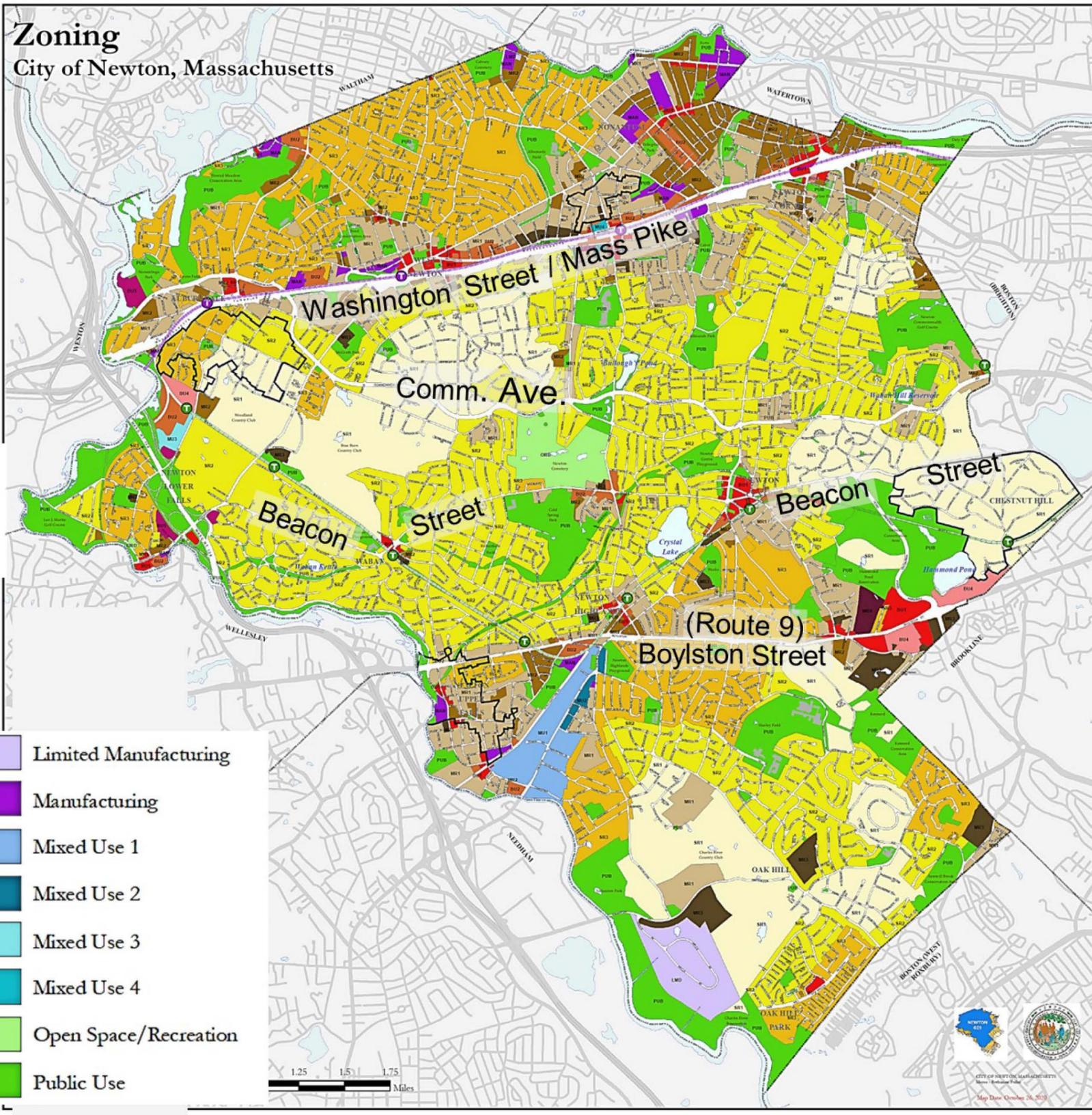


# Where does Newton's zoning allow multi-family housing, and why?

2020 Newton zoning (since 1970s?)

multi-family housing *nowhere* by right -- special permit required even in "multi-residence" districts

- Single Residence 1
  - Single Residence 2
  - Single Residence 3
  - Multi-Residence 1
  - Multi-Residence 2
  - Multi-Residence 3
  - Multi-Residence 4
  - Multi-Residence 5
  - Business 1
  - Business 2
  - Business 3
  - Business 4
  - Business 5
- 
- Limited Manufacturing
  - Manufacturing
  - Mixed Use 1
  - Mixed Use 2
  - Mixed Use 3
  - Mixed Use 4
  - Open Space/Recreation
  - Public Use



# Where should Newton's zoning allow multi-family housing, and why?

## 2023 village center & MBTA zoning (proposed)

multi-family housing by right in:

Village Center 3 (VC3)

Village Center 2 (VC2)

Village Center 1 (VC1)

Multi-Residence Transit (MRT)

Mixed-Use Required

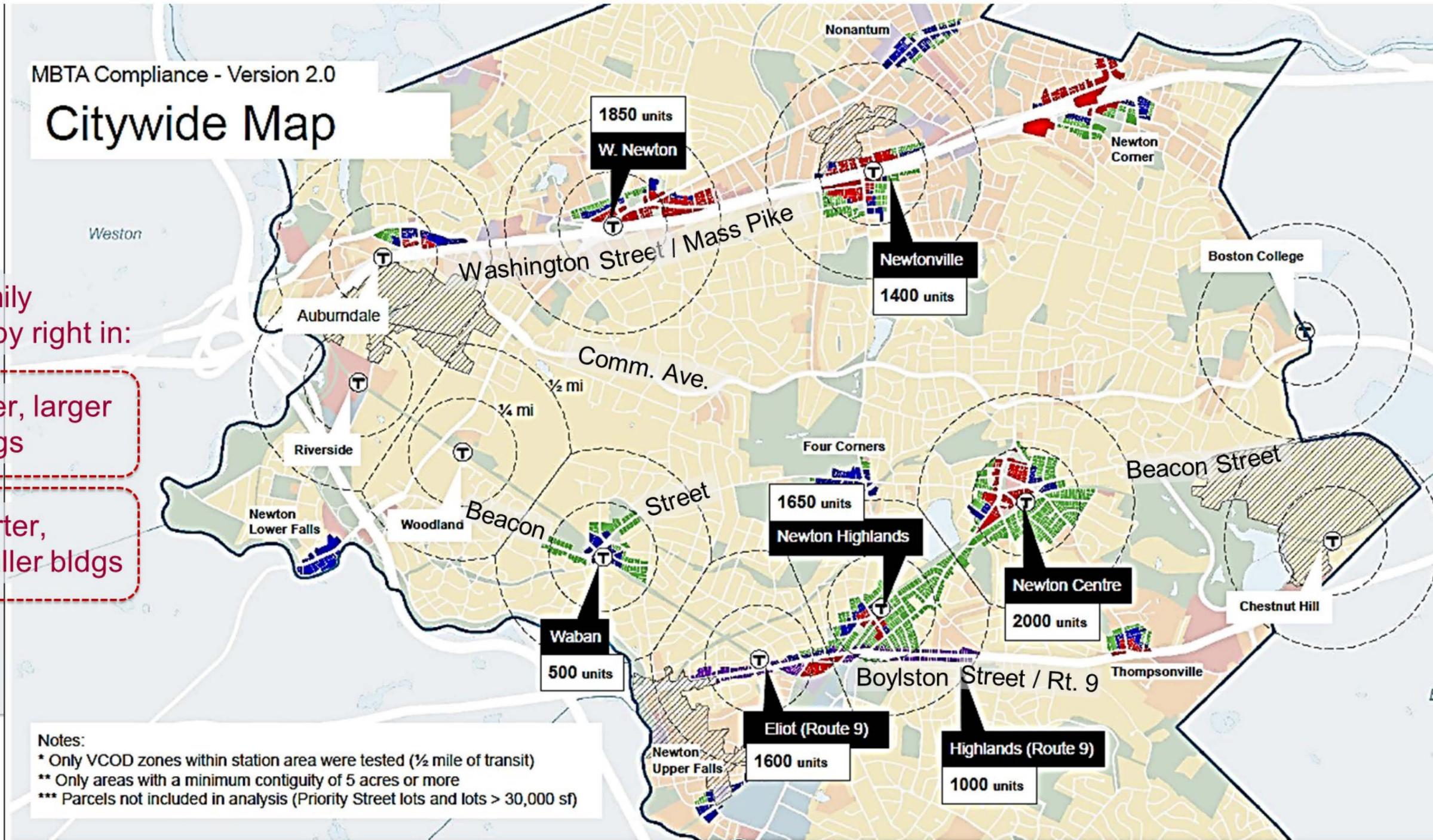
Historic District

taller, larger bldgs

shorter, smaller bldgs

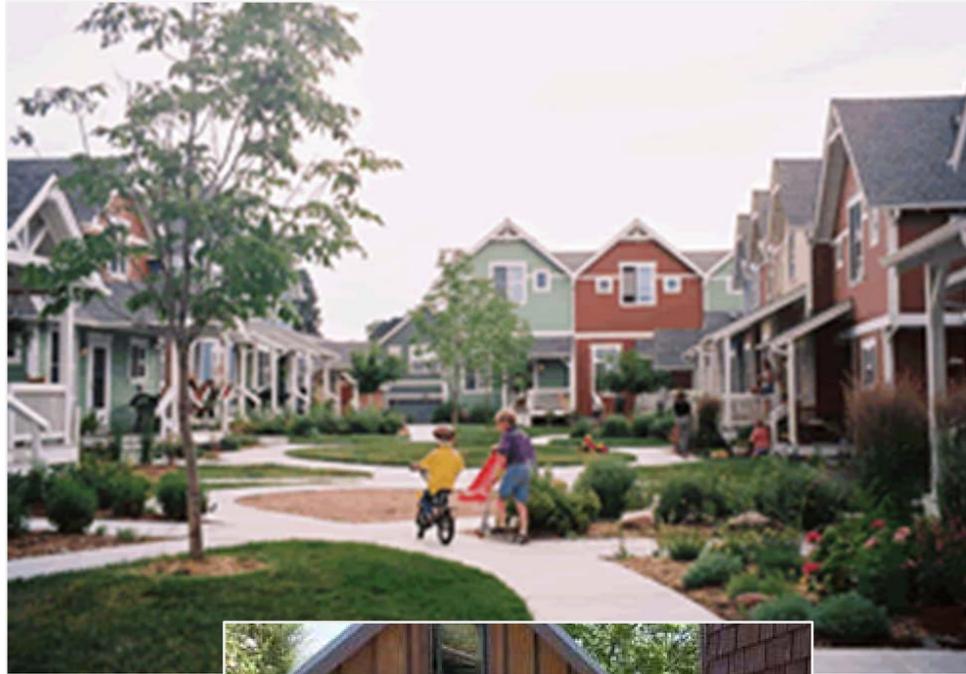
MBTA Compliance - Version 2.0

## Citywide Map

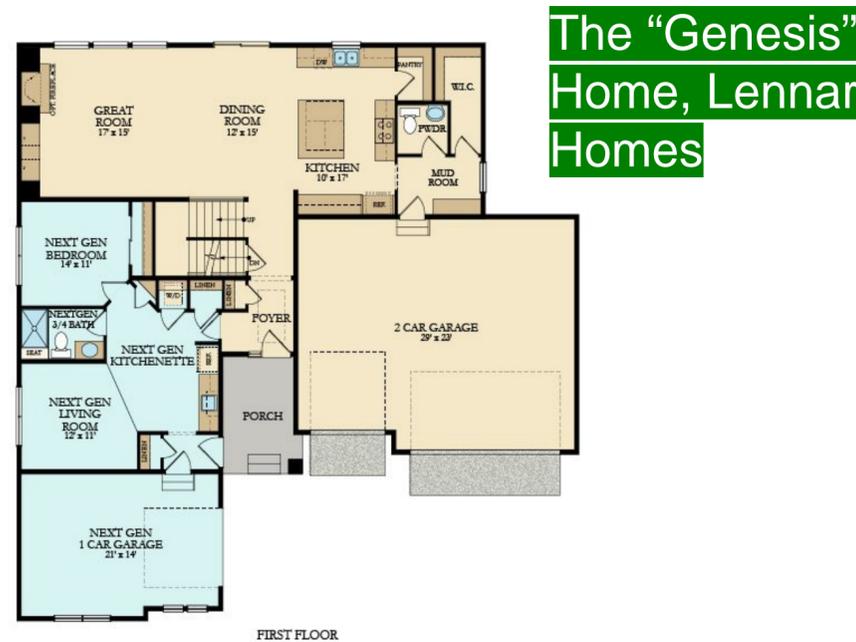


Notes:  
 \* Only VCOD zones within station area were tested (1/2 mile of transit)  
 \*\* Only areas with a minimum contiguity of 5 acres or more  
 \*\*\* Parcels not included in analysis (Priority Street lots and lots > 30,000 sf)

# *Zoning for Accessible, Manageable, Affordable Housing Where Older Adults Already Live*



# More Examples



Accessory dwelling units  
[www.iurb.berkeley.edu](http://www.iurb.berkeley.edu)

# Zoning for all-residential and mixed-use apartment buildings: VC1, VC2, VC3

Greatest opportunities for elevator-served/accessible new housing, close to and within villages



- Larger apartment buildings offer elevators
- and often, ground-floor restaurants and retail amenities close to transit.



# Homes with multiple units and small apartment buildings - MRT zones

More places for neighbors close to and within villages

## ADUs = accessory dwelling units



Attached: house with 1-bedroom, accessible ADU



Detached: 1-bedroom, accessible ADU

- Creating options for more housing just outside of village centers, allowing more units on a lot by-right, giving homeowners more options for aging in place.
- Small apartment buildings with elevators should be allowed in MRT zones.

3-4 unit home, renovate for 1st floor accessible unit



Lisa Monahan



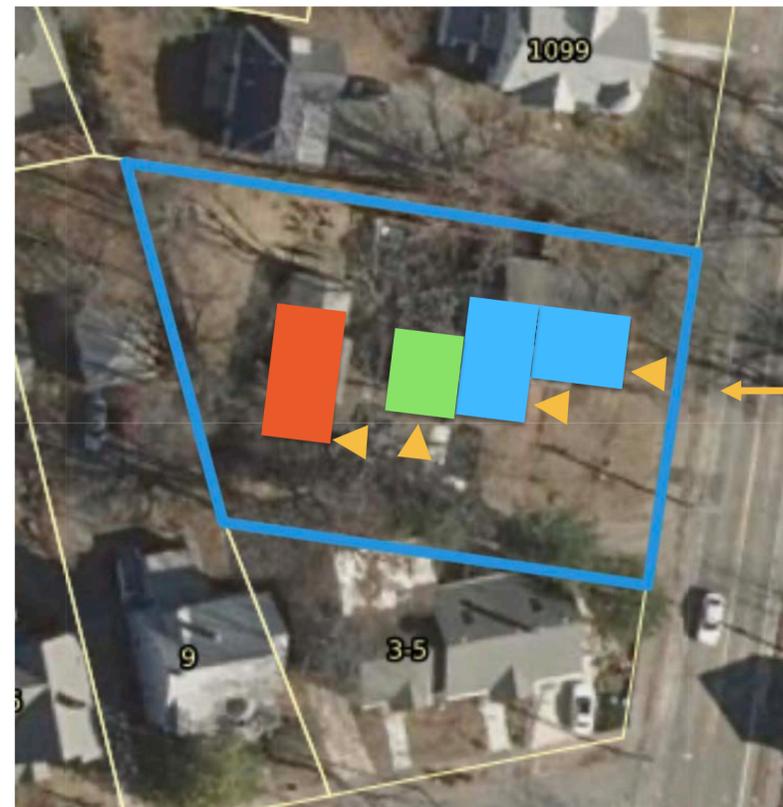
Small apartment building - currently not proposed in MRT

# What could it mean to rezone a single-family lot in MRT to multi-family?

- Allowing more units to be developed on the lot by right (without a special permit) ...
- gives homeowners more flexibility and options to age in place, and...
- over the long run, would increase property values.



Single-family, 4 br. home with detached garage



Three-family home with detached ADU

## An example in Newton Highlands

- Renovate existing home with small addition, make ground floor accessible
- Create three 800 - 1,000 sq ft units in place of single-family home
- Renovate garage as separate unit or ADU

# Older adults also benefit from vibrant village centers, with ...

People-focused places and thriving business districts

Proposed zoning would require mixed use projects in specific areas of village centers, to maintain vitality & easy access to businesses and services for nearby residents.

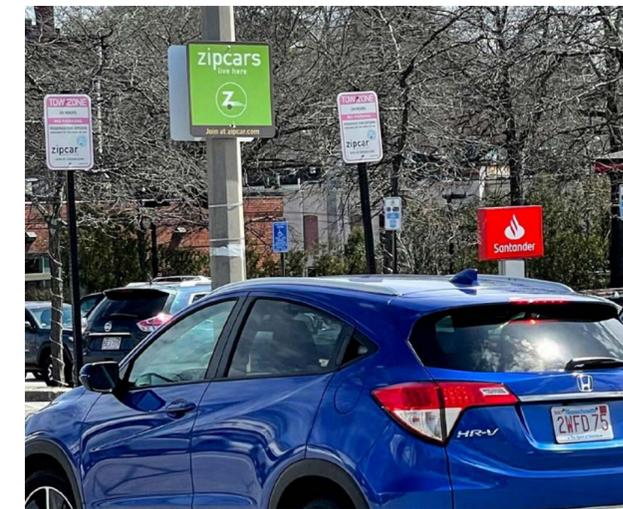
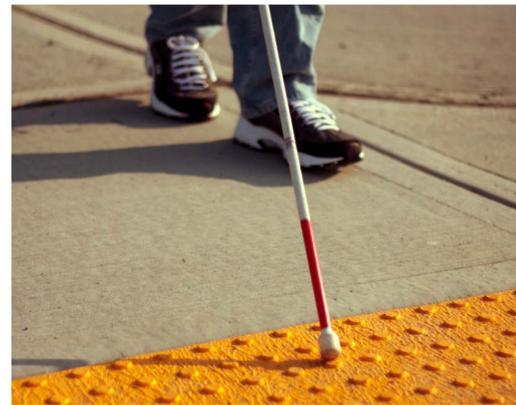


Lisa Monahan

# Older adults also benefit from vibrant village centers, with ...

accessible and safe routes for all and climate-forward amenities

- Design Standards and Guidelines zoning will require and encourage climate-forward amenities such as electric vehicle charging & bike storage.
- Concentration of more housing near villages and transit will prioritize accessibility improvements, such as in Newtonville for example)



# For Further, Future Discussion ... Service-Enriched Housing

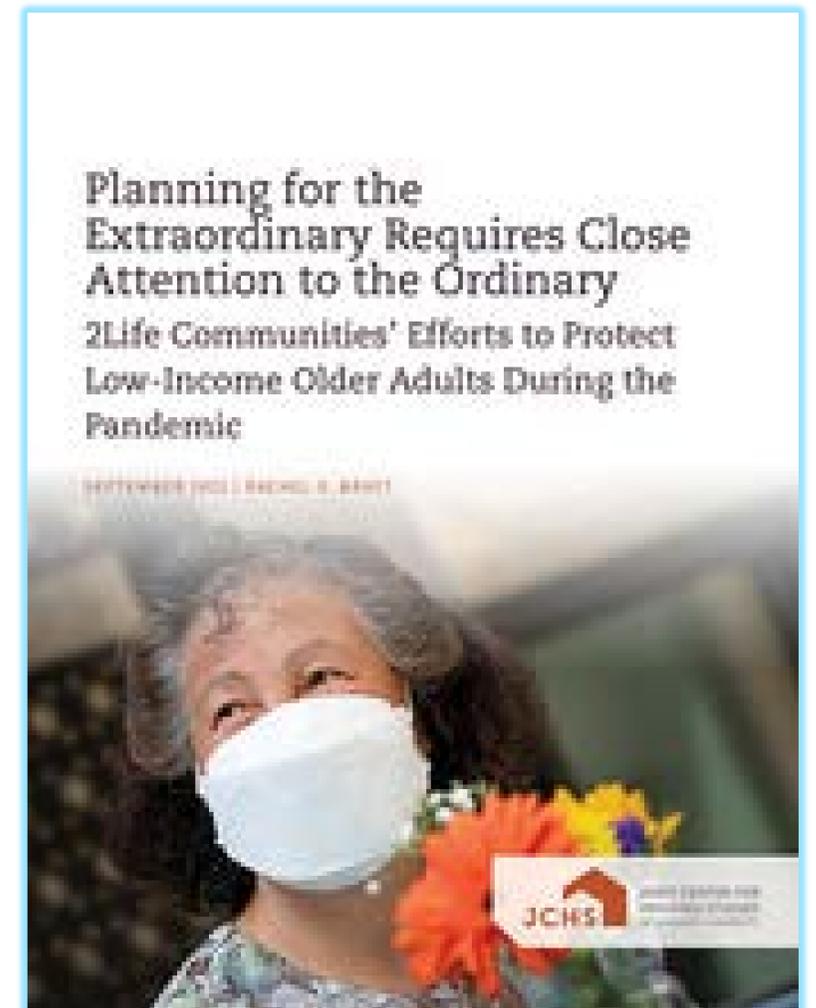


Photo source: 2Life Communities

# For Further, Future Discussion ... Options for Higher Levels of Care



Apartments for Life  
Humanitas Bergweg,  
The Netherlands



Dementia-Friendly  
Housing  
Hogeweyk, the  
Netherlands



Greenhouse homes  
[thegreenhouseproject.org](http://thegreenhouseproject.org)

