



Voters for a Vibrant Newton PAC 2023 City Council Questionnaire

Thank you for completing the 2023 Voters for a Vibrant Newton PAC candidate questionnaire. To submit your answers, email a PDF of your answers by **August 8th**. Responses to this questionnaire will inform our endorsement decisions and will be posted online. Please limit each answer to 150 words.

Candidate Name Alicia Bowman

Candidate for City Council Ward 6 At-Large

1. **What do you see as the key elements of a vibrant village center?**

A vibrant village center is a place people want to be. It needs to have a variety of restaurant options, stores, important services, and spaces that are comfortable to hang out in on your own or meet up with family and friends. But mostly a vibrant village center is about people which is why a key element of a vibrant village center is housing in and very close to the center.

2. **What do you think of the current proposal for Village Center Zoning Redesign? (Please specify strengths and shortcomings.)**

I am a fan of the Village Center Zoning Redesign for many reasons. It will help address important city-wide goals of increasing housing including more affordable and accessible housing, supporting Newton businesses, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Housing in close-proximity of stores, restaurants and the MBTA will be welcomed by many seniors looking to downsize and young people looking to move/move home to Newton. Modern buildings will be more accessible to all and support a greater variety of businesses who today are limited in where they can locate given state building codes and configuration of the spaces available. More housing

means more affordable housing given Newton has a strong inclusionary zoning policy that will apply to new housing in village centers. We can expect projects here to have 17.5% of units at 65% below market rents/sale. More people living in the village means there are more people to support local businesses and reduced use of vehicles as more things are close at hand. The development of 15-minute neighborhoods is one of the most effective climate strategies communities like Newton can adopt. The zoning is designed to encourage the redevelopment of smaller parcels which will help to keep our villages unique. The consultants working with the Planning Department have done a thorough analysis of the various components of current zoning and proposed zoning for economic viability. Pairing this with the innovative public engagement process and the extensive discussions in City Council, I am comfortable that the new zoning will help Newton reach its goals.

That said, I do have some changes I am currently advocating for, including ensuring that we don't downzone any commercial or residential properties from their current use. I also believe the MRT zoning needs some additional work to ensure it delivers the much-needed smaller units in a way that integrates into the residential neighborhoods where it is placed.

3. What steps would you take to encourage more varied and locally owned businesses in Newton?

I have spoken with business owners in Newton. Many have shared their frustration at the quality of the buildings for lease in Newton. Some cannot expand or move from their current space because their spaces do not meet state building code for accessibility and bathroom access. Businesses frequently must go through special permit processes when there is a change in use given parking requirements or other. Most of these are usually approved, but for small businesses this wait is long. I have been told many prospective new businesses chose to locate in nearby communities with a simpler approval process. Many businesses also express frustration that they cannot find enough people to work, especially in service jobs, as people must live so far from Newton. My suggestion for all these issues is to change zoning. New village center zoning will enable more housing of all types to be built, remove parking minimums thus reduce special permits, and encourage the construction of some newer buildings that will meet the needs of today's businesses. I also support the Director of Economic Development efforts to modify the allowed uses across the city. Lastly, I support

zoning that will move certain businesses (such as banks) off the ground floor thus freeing up more ground floor spaces for local businesses.

4. **What are your ideas for increasing economic and racial diversity in Newton?**

We need to build more housing. The housing shortage in Newton means every year our city gets less diverse: racially, economically, and age-wise, including a continued decline in the student population. We also need to make it easier to live car-free or car-lite, as many households the cost of owning a vehicle is burdensome, with the average vehicle cost in Massachusetts exceeding \$10,000 a year. I also support programs like Empath which is working with some of our lowest-income families to improve their economic opportunities. It is also time for Newton to create a staff position dedicated to advancing DEI initiatives in the city.

5. **What actions would you support on the City Council to make Newton more sustainable?**

As a councilor, I have worked to increase sustainability including reduced parking and greener building practices (electrification, solar panels, passive house). I supported full-electrification of new and substantially renovated buildings. Newton will be one of ten communities to trial this, starting January 2024. I also supported adopting the specialized stretch code, increasing building sustainability. I support Newton's zoning redesign to enable more multi-family housing in our walkable, transit-available neighborhoods. I support safer streets that encourage walking, biking and transit for more of their trips. Transportation is a large percentage of our GHG emissions and the impact of these emissions and other pollutants on the region is great. I successfully advocated for the creation of Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and have been appointed as the Council representative. I have been advocating with local, state and federal officials to support the rebuilding of the MBTA, as dependable transit is key to greening transportation. As for increasing green space, I fought hard for the approval of a project that will rehabilitate a section of Commonwealth Avenue, that will include park space, trees and a multi-use path replacing two lanes of paved roadway. I continue to push for reduced pavement and increased tree plantings and rain gardens as part of our roads program as important climate mitigation and reduced phosphorus run-off.

6. Please add anything you have not mentioned that you would like us to know about your experience, vision for Newton, etc. (150 words maximum)

I am proud of what I have accomplished in the short time I have been a City Councilor. I am a strong voice on the Land Use committee for sustainability, affordable housing, accessibility, and transportation. I have successfully advocated for important projects including the creation of our first Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and two state projects that will significantly improve safety on a section of Commonwealth Avenue and the length of Hammond Pond Parkway. To better inform my work on the Council, I attend the monthly meetings for both the Commission on Disability and Fair Housing Committee. I think that it is critical to support the actions of these very important committees. I am also the City Council appointee to the Affordable Housing Trust, the School Transportation Working Group and the Climate Action Accountability Group. My vision for Newton is a more livable, sustainable and equitable community.