



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 15th**. Responses to this questionnaire will inform our endorsement decisions and will be posted online. Please limit each answer to 150 words.

Candidate Name Deb Crossley
Candidate for Councilor at large, from ward 5

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

A village center becomes “vibrant” when people want to engage in the place. It must be attractive and welcoming. To foster that, we must allow for and incentivize a mix of complimentary uses that can be largely self-sustaining. Getting “feet on the street” – supports a local economy, which in turn supplies the goods, services and activities that people need and want. The city must allow, plan for and provide the essential infrastructure that can create inviting and accommodating communal gathering spaces. Generous, accessible, well-furnished sidewalks, outdoor dining and bistro cafes, street trees, landscaped plazas, pocket parks, public art, a venue for entertainment are things that build a sense of community. Accommodations for accessible parking and bike racks are necessary. More compact housing, walkable to village centers, served by public transit is key to getting the right mix.

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

VCOD is a, thoughtful, careful plan to allow by-right multi-family housing in 12 village center business districts and immediate neighborhoods, at the right scale, and right mix of uses. Size and design standards require mixed-use buildings step from 4.5 stories to 3.5 stories in business cores, to 2.5 stories in adjacent neighborhoods, allowing multiple units. Incentives promote adaptive reuse of existing homes.

The draft plan facilitates more smaller housing options, more customers walking to local businesses. Mixing complimentary uses reduces car trips, shares precious infrastructure, helps support city investment in public spaces. I support allowing a one story bonus for more affordable units and using VCOD to comply with the MBTA Law.

Staff & councilors are working summer and fall to refine text and maps. VCOD is designed to protect and improve the quality of community life for a more diverse population and future generations.

3. What steps would you take to encourage more varied and locally owned businesses in Newton? Passing VCOD is a strong first step. Our local businesses need more patrons. I served on the Land Use committee when we grappled with how to require lower rent space in new construction. The market determines this citywide, but Council may require mitigation under Special Permit authority. Council may also explore requiring some floor area be made available to local businesses proportional to the development size, much like the inclusionary ordinance requires a percent of housing be affordable to a certain income levels. Finally, allowing temporary leases for “pop-ups” in vacant storefronts helps to activate the street, provides some income for the building owner and can help new companies get started. Win-win.

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

Our city must not only be accessible financially to a range of income earners (pass VCOD to get more, smaller and more varied housing types), but also welcoming in every respect. To me, this is about living the ‘Golden Rule’ – treating everyone equally well. To a greater or lesser degree, most

of us are unaware of biases we harbor toward others for their superficial characteristics or beliefs they embrace. Inclusivity means we all must work on understanding our own biases. We can educate ourselves on unconscious bias, and make sure everyone has equal and unfettered access to all city programs and services. We can identify and expose discriminatory lending practices, hateful actions in our schools and places of work – and not tolerate mean-spirited discourse in the public realm.

5. **What actions would you support on the City Council to make Newton more environmentally sustainable?** We must carefully prioritize, set and meet interim goals, continually monitor new technologies and grants. As current chair of Zoning & Planning and serving on the Public Facilities committee, I support both long-range plans to advance more sustainable development patterns, (compact mixed-use development near transit, goods and services), as well as multiple measures to reduce energy demand and supply clean renewable energy to meet that (lowered) demand. This includes: - adopting the most stringent energy codes (approved Specialized code 2023, effective 1/24), developing a Building Energy Reporting/ Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO) to retrofit existing commercial buildings (ongoing), requiring electrification of new construction (application in to DOER), using electric vehicles and high efficiency infrastructure to the greatest degree possible, expanding municipal solar installations (now serving 40% city electrical demand), and lobbying the state DPU to eliminate toxic methane gas escaping NGrid's system under our streets.
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 feel we are privileged and fortunate to live in a place like Newton. Climate disasters are wreaking havoc throughout our country and world, and still some seem oblivious to these realities, Newton – and much of New England, stand apart as havens of relative safety, sanity and security. We still have the ability and strength while mindful of these global issues, to continue improving our community and to plan wisely for the future. I'm all in - sleeves rolled up - to continue the necessary work to repair, retrofit, restore, rebuild - and maintain - to keep the people's place in shape, and to work hard to bring our community to consensus so that we can plan wisely and strategically for a brighter future for everyone.