

Green Newton and Newton Leads 2040 Housing Strategy

Green Newton strongly supports the overall Newton Leads 2040 Housing Strategy, noting that one of its 6 main principles is to “Pursue Green Design”. As an environmental organization we know how closely land use and development are intertwined with environmental issues, and we support the concept of Smart Growth.

Smart growth encourages new development in walkable places served by public transportation, where there is compact housing in energy-efficient units, requiring fewer cars per household.

Environmental quality is profoundly affected by the ways cities are built. When new development is located near public transportation and village centers, residents’ daily needs are more easily met by walking to shops and restaurants, and public transportation is more likely to be utilized for commuting, shopping and other purposes.

Everyone benefits from saving environmental resources and from less pollution when there are increased options for walking, biking and shared vehicular transportation on safe routes, especially when public transit is available to get to work or school, attend sporting events or get to appointments. This has long been evident in some of our village centers.

Newton households drove an average of 47.6 miles per day in 2008, substantially more than Brookline, Watertown, and most other communities within the Route 128 belt. Transportation accounted for a third of our carbon emissions. We have 1.7 vehicles per household - lower than the state average but significantly higher than Boston, Cambridge, and Brookline. We need to do much better in order to turn the corner on global warming and climate change.

We are not yet taking positions on individual priority actions in the housing strategy, but will review each development and work to enhance services in villages and neighborhoods where development is planned so as to further environmental goals. The city already has an effective process for evaluating special permit applications under the zoning ordinance to maximize environmental benefits and minimize environmental impacts. Green Newton supported the Austin Street project based on that evaluation.

We think that the Newton Leads 2040 Housing Strategy will also have a wide range of social and economic benefits, but our primary reason for supporting it is that we have concluded that it will make Newton a more sustainable city.