

# WEST NEWBURY HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVE DESIGN WORKSHOP, JUNE 27, 2023, 6-9PM AGENDA

## Introduction

On June 27, 2023, the Town of West Newbury held a design workshop to explore aspects of multi-family housing design for the Housing Opportunities Initiative project. The design workshop was facilitated by staff from Dodson & Flinker, the Town's consultants for the project. Thirty participants attended the event, including community members, Town staff, and local board and committee members.

The evening began with a presentation by Dodson & Flinker. It briefly introduced the project scope, the MBTA Communities Law, and town-wide analysis of potential sites for zoning for multi-family housing. The presentation then provided an overview of selected sites that were the focus of the evening's design stations: the Mullen property, a town-owned site at 0 Main Street/0 Church Street; the Dunn property, a privately-owned site at 317 Main Street; and the Knapp Property, a privately-owned site at 147 Main Street. The presentation ended with a series of development examples showing multi-family housing with varying densities and site and building design characteristics. The development examples were selected to illustrate contemporary design and development practices, not because they were necessarily "good" examples for West Newbury to emulate.

After the presentation, there was a brief question and answer session. It was followed by design station activities. Participants were divided into four groups and visited four stations for about 20 minutes each. The results of the station activities are described below.

## Station 1, Town Center Visioning

Participants explored the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the Town Center and work with a facilitator to develop a vision for the Town Center. Participants discussed the following questions. What would make it a more vibrant place? How does multi-family housing fit in? What kinds of street improvements are needed? How could the Town Center be better connected to surrounding neighborhoods and open spaces? What role does wastewater play in the future of the area?

### Strengths

- Traffic is not excessive, though sometimes it goes too fast
- Town center has existing uses that draw people. Participants said they visit the Post Office, Food Mart, RFR Picture Framing, West Newbury Pizza Company
- The town center is convenient for those who live nearby. It is walkable.
- The sidewalk runs all the way from the Library to the Food Mart
- The Food Mart has a great selection of products—especially beer and wine
- Main Street has a quintessential New England look. Tree-lined road. The federal homes in the area are majestic. Great architecture. Beautiful.
- Town center is busy. It is happening.
- There is a new store—China Grove Gift Shop behind the pizza restaurant
- The Food Mart is the unofficial town hall—especially at morning coffee time
- The Mullen property is a huge gathering place for kids, especially tweens. There is a rope swing and BMX bike trails.



- The town has at least two town centers. There is a commercial town center in the vicinity of Maple Street and Main Street. There is another town center at the Library and Training Field. There is possibly a third town center at the Town Hall Administrative offices.

### Challenges

- Limited parking in the area is a challenge.
- Lack of foot traffic also limits the viability of some types of businesses
- Some of the existing businesses seem to have a small niche, limited customer base.
- Participants said that 291 Main Street is underutilized
- The West Newbury Pizza Company does not have eat-in service
- Food Mart does not have seating for customers
- Residents do not support businesses enough. Residents need to make a concerted effort for businesses to be able to succeed there.
- The town is changing. Old people don't know young people. There are fewer connections than there used to be. The biggest source of social connections is the school, but once your kids are finished with school it is difficult to connect with others.
- The town center has relatively small parcels. It would be difficult to consolidate parcels and move uses around to make more significant improvements viable
- Schools are not within walking distance of the town center
- The boundaries of the existing Business zoning district splits parcels and excludes some parcels, or portions of parcels, that would help the district be more viable.

### Desired improvements

- At least one person in every group said that they would like a coffee shop in the town center. Others also said they would like a sandwich place, baker. Participants pointed out—there have been several coffee shops over the years but they have all closed. At one point there was a diner.
- The town has limited places to gather. The town center is a gathering place, but it could use more to draw more people, provide more opportunities
- How do you attract new businesses? How do you get a critical mass of businesses so that they attract customers and support each other?
- Need to make the town center an actual destination. You need multiple attractions for a destination.
- Affordable housing—we want to double the requirement to 20% of the units being affordable. Want to make progress on subsidized housing inventory. If the requirement is 10% we will not make progress. Since we want to require more affordable housing, it seems like we need to adopt a 40R district.
- Church Street needs a sidewalk
- Wastewater
  - Where would a system be located? If it was at Dunn, it would need to be pumped up.
  - The high school is on Groveland's sewer system. Can Groveland's sewer be extended up to the town center area?
  - "Everyone would want to be on sewer if they could be."
  - Concerns about smells and the expense of operating a wastewater system
  - A wastewater system would be great for the downtown but it would be very expensive.

### Evaluation of potential housing sites

- Dunn site is closer to the town center than Mullen or Knapp sites. It would be close enough for residents to be able to take advantage of town center and support the businesses there.



- Locating a multi-family housing zone on Main Street makes sense. Traffic that it generates would have less impact because Main Street is already busy.
- Development of Dunn would be an opportunity to improve the street entrance. The visibility at the entrance is difficult. Entrance should be moved—though steep slopes make that challenging. Potentially get access from Maple Street or connect to another property along Main Street that has better access.
- Dunn site is one of the last working farms in West Newbury. Developing it would be a loss of heritage.
- Development on the hill at the Dunn Site would be visible.
- The most likely future for Dunn is for it to be developed into a couple of high-end houses located at the high points of the site.
- Mixed opinions of the conservation value of the Dunn Site. One participant said it did not have a high conservation value based on the criteria in the OSRP. Another participant said that its agricultural use gave it a high value.
- Some of the owners of properties adjacent to the Dunn site may be interested in development. It may be possible to connect a road from Dunn all the way to Daley Drive.
- The Page School would provide a better opportunity for a mixed-use village style development
- Apartments over businesses in two- or three-story buildings would fit in at the town center area

## Questions

- Can the zoning require specific building types, e.g. 2-units, 3-units, stacked flats? How specific can design standards be?
  - [Answer from research after meeting: Dodson & Flinker followed up with EOHLC, the state agency responsible for evaluating compliance with the MBTA Communities law. EOHLC did not see an issue with design standards specifying building types as long as the required density can be achieved.]
- Can the zoning split parcels, or does it need to include entire parcels?
  - [Answer from research after meeting: Typically zoning can split parcels, although it is generally better not to. Dodson & Flinker followed up with EOHLC and confirmed that the MBTA Communities Law does not restrict zoning districts from splitting parcels.]
- There was a plan drawn for the downtown circa 2008—possibly related to the Housing Production Plan. Is this plan available? Does it have relevant ideas for the current project?
  - [Answer from research after meeting: It appears this comment was referring to the 2004 Community Development Plan. A drawing illustrates the recommendations for the Town Center on page 50 of the plan, which can be downloaded here:  
[https://www.wnewbury.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf1436/f/uploads/community\\_development\\_eo418\\_plan\\_june\\_2004.pdf](https://www.wnewbury.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf1436/f/uploads/community_development_eo418_plan_june_2004.pdf)  
 The drawing focuses on street and parking improvements in the Town Center. It also recommends that the town “explore possible locations in the town center area for mixed-use development of existing structures.”





A map marked up with comments about the Town Center

### Station 2, Modeling—Dunn Greenhouses / Knapp

Using a 1" = 40' scale model of the focus area, participants worked with a designer to explore opportunities for multi-family housing. Topics included site layout, housing densities, open spaces, parking locations, etc. After each group finished, the resulting model was photographed for final presentation. During the first rotation, participants divided into two smaller groups focusing on both sites in parallel. The second group worked on both sites sequentially, with a focus on the Knapp site. Subsequent groups chose to focus on the Dunn site.

Consensus items common to all groups include:

- The southern half of the Knapp site is not a feasible or desirable location for development due to wetlands.
- Steep slope along the frontage of the Dunn Site has limited development potential and also limits potential views into the site from this side.



- All options for the Dunn Site assume improvement of the existing farm road to provide vehicular access to the interior of the site.
- Title V septic requirements will likely limit the development of either site to approximately 90 bedrooms, well below 15 units/acre based on lot size—unless a project proponent pursues a costly wastewater system permitted via a Groundwater Discharge Permit from DEP (required for systems that discharge 10,000 gallons per day). Groups focused on a development program of 40 to 90 units.
- Most participants seemed to be wary of using the larger model pieces representing 24+ unit building. They were concerned that this type of building would not be consistent with the size of existing houses in the community. However, there was a recognition that providing apartment sizes not already present in the Town would be beneficial, particularly for residents who are seeking to down-size and for younger residents, and that larger buildings can result in lower development costs per unit, making lower-priced units more feasible.



### Group One - Knapp Site

This concept (above) includes potential adaptive reuse of some buildings along main street, if determined to be feasible and desirable with further study. Within the previously developed area close to the street is a residential-scale mixed use building or buildings with 5-20 units of residential. The Manchester-by-the-Sea Summer Street mixed use example presented was mentioned as a model in terms of architectural style for this area. This redevelopment area would be served by the existing curb cut. An additional curb cut to the north is constructed and links the street to an interior green surrounded by 6-10 unit residential apartment buildings. If desired by a developer, 24+ unit apartment buildings could be acceptable if located at the back of the site away from view from the main street. The central green is multifunctional and could be the location of septic infrastructure.





**Group One - Dunn Site**

This concept (above) includes smaller, residential-scale mixed use buildings in the flat existing development area along the street. The existing farm road is utilized to provide access to the interior of the site. Farm fields to the east are protected as open space. The hilltop on the west side of the site includes multi-family and 6-10 unit apartment buildings organized around a central green. This concept does not include larger apartment buildings.



**Group Two - Knapp Site**



This concept (above) assumes that existing greenhouse buildings and residential buildings would be removed and replaced. There was a desire to have as few curb cuts as possible, but disagreement about whether one or two would be adequate. An adequate line of sight for driveway entrances relative to the curving road should be provided. The group wanted to preserve high quality views into the site to the east, and to protect the area of attractive, mature existing trees along the street. The concept assumes the greenhouse and garage buildings near the street would be removed, and probably the home as well—though the group was open to adaptive reuse of the home. In general, buildings along the street should be consistent architecturally with adjacent residential buildings. The concept includes a residential-scale mixed use building along the street—ideally with a coffee shop. A second development area is included to the south, out of sight of the road. This could be the location of larger 24+ unit apartment buildings, if desired by a developer, as long as this was not visible from the road. This would be a good location for medium size 6-10 unit apartment and multifamily buildings. Septic improvements should be located so as to blend in seamlessly with the existing agricultural character of the site and not distract from views into the site from the street.



#### **Group Two - Dunn Site**

(Above) The group spent less time on this site than on the Knapp site due to working on the sites sequentially. The general concept includes reuse of the farm drive into the site. The concept shows three separate clusters of multi-family and 6-10 unit apartment buildings, organized around central shared green space that could also be used for septic. These clusters are located out of sight, away from the street. One replaces the greenhouse buildings at the southern end of the existing farm road. Others are located on high ground to take advantage of views out from the site. Outside of these clusters, this configuration assumes existing woodlands and fields would be protected.





### Above: Group Three - Dunn Site

This concept (above) includes a residential-scale mixed use area on the low land along the street and two separate residential clusters to the interior of the site, with the goal of protecting existing field areas and providing plentiful high-quality open space amenities. A larger 24+ unit apartment building is built into the slope adjacent to the location of the existing farm road. This allows parking underneath while minimizing the scale of the building uphill. Uphill of this larger building is a small green that could provide a location for septic infrastructure, along with smaller multifamily buildings and apartments with views out to the surrounding landscape. North of this building the concept includes terraced gardens with stone walls, and opportunities for play and community garden spaces. Existing greenhouses are to be removed and would provide another potential location for community gardens. Another small residential cluster is located along the south side of the site. It also includes smaller multifamily residential buildings. The group discussed how the walking and biking access to the site is poor. Sidewalk/crosswalk improvements would be beneficial to connect this site to other areas of town.







**Above: Group Four - Dunn Site**

This concept shows residential scale (2 to 2.5 story) mixed-use buildings in the flat previously develop area by the street. This concept shows clearing a portion of the existing woodland near the greenhouses and locating a 24+ unit apartment building here, if desired by a developer. This was an attempt to make sure the apartment building was not visible from the street. However, the group generally would prefer no larger buildings of this kind. Residential development in this concept is organized in clusters of similar type, including a town house area, and an area of small multifamily and 6-10 unit apartments organized around a central garden/common area, with parking to the exterior. The upper field is envisioned as a publicly accessible green space with native meadow creation, public trails, and septic improvements if blended into the overall naturalized character of this area.

**Station 3, Design preferences—building design, site design**

Participants discussed examples of multi-family developments to identify design characteristics that are suitable for West Newbury: site layout, building design, open space configurations, parking locations, etc. Participants also completed a visual preference survey by placing colored dots on examples of multi-family building types to indicate which are appropriate (green dot) or inappropriate (red dot) for West Newbury.

Images of buildings were arranged on four boards with each board representing a different building type:

1. Duplexes, meaning two homes sharing a common wall. These can be side-by-side or arranged with one unit behind another;
2. Townhouses/manor houses with 3-5 units, with each unit sharing one or two walls with neighboring units. The term manor house refers to townhouses that have been designed intentionally to look like a large single-family estate or extended farmhouse;
3. Walk-up/stacked flats with 6-12 units. These buildings are one unit deep, so that each apartment has windows on at least three sides. Access to upper floor apartments is generally from a shared stairwell; and finally,
4. Apartments with 22-32 units along central hallways. In this case apartments are laid out on either side of a central hall, resulting in a wider building where each apartment has windows on one wall (or two for corner units. Many are designed with bay windows or balconies to provide more light and access to the outdoors).



The results of the visual preference survey indicated that participants generally preferred building types with fewer units over building types with more units. That said, at least one example of each building type was rated as appropriate by at least a supermajority of the participants (2/3rds of participants or more).

## Duplex: 2 Units with shared walls

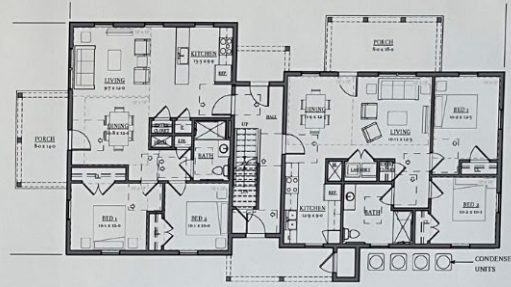


## Townhouse/Manor House: 3-5 Units with shared walls



## Walk-up/Stacked Flats: 6-12 Units with central stair hall

TYPE C: 6-UNIT MANOR HOUSE



3

## Apartments: 22-32 units with center hall on each floor



4



The images that received the most green dots were two historic duplex buildings and a more recent four unit building.



*The image on the left above is a historic farmhouse with additions that serves as a two-family dwelling. The image on the right is a traditional village-style side-by-side duplex with a broad front porch. The image at lower right is a recent building that uses additive massing reminiscent of a farm house that is grown over time to provide four units. The first two images received fourteen votes for being appropriate for West Newbury, while the third received fifteen.*



The images that were rated as being the most inappropriate for West Newbury were a three unit townhouse building (below left) and an apartment building with wings attached at angles (below right). Each received 11 red dots and no green dots. The townhouse building has similar massing to others in its group but has limited detailing and almost no landscaping. The apartment building has a longer continuous wall plan than other buildings in its group and also has minimal landscaping.



The most highly rated 22-32 unit building was an apartment building that is designed to look like a mansion (below). It received 9 green dots and 4 red dots, indicating that moderate-sized apartment buildings may be acceptable with a high design quality.





The discussion of various examples of multi-family developments revealed the following themes:

#### Building Style and Setting:

- Buildings with an attractive landscape setting are much more appealing – the buildings with parking in front are not as attractive.
- Don't waste the green space up front – put the building closer to the road, expand open space in the rear make sure it has a use.
- Examples with cedar siding seem too precious for West Newbury
- Farmhouse style is a good fit with West Newbury
- Like the examples that are designed to look like single-family buildings
- If the parcel is large enough the larger three-story buildings will work fine.
- There are many examples of large three-story captain's houses in Newburyport that could be a model.
- Getting the roof pitch right is important – many of the examples “have too much going on” - many traditional buildings in West Newbury are very simple.
- The third-story dormers should be subservient to the rest of the roof.
- Clustering the homes can feel claustrophobic – and the lack of space for fire access is worrying.

#### Mix of Building Types and Uses:

- Having a diversity of building types is important – avoid cookie-cutter development.
- West Newbury is increasingly attractive to people from Boston and elsewhere – a diverse selection of new houses would appeal to them.
- Mixed use buildings would be good fit for Main Street. People like the images of a village green with parking behind the buildings.
- Smaller buildings can be built along the street frontage to match existing homes, with larger buildings out back where they are not as obvious.

#### Implementation and Potential Impacts:

- Some worry about having an entire new neighborhood in one place – how will that affect traffic and the character of the town?
- Does site plan review allow the town to control the architectural design of buildings?
- If the MBTA zoning is as-of-right, how can the town control the buildout and get what we want?
- Can we really make it this nice? Will developers actually build it? How do you make sure it happens the way you want?
- The Dunn property is a natural extension of the village – Mullen property is really hidden in the woods.



#### 4. Modeling—Mullen Property

Using a 1" = 40' scale model of the focus area, participants worked with a designer to explore opportunities for multi-family housing. Topics included site layout, housing densities, open spaces, parking locations, etc. After each group finishes, the resulting model was photographed for final presentation.

##### ACCESS

- The potential access road on Main Street is narrow and may need to be widened. There is an existing house that is set back behind the rest of the houses on Main Street and lacks its own driveway. Participants said that the deed record and history of the lot is lost and/or unknown, so it is an aberration to the pattern of development and a difficult problem to resolve. Some participants wondered if it could be removed. Others thought it should be incorporated into the housing plan for the Mullen property.
- On Main Street, there is a house situated very close to the potential access road that would be impacted by an increase in traffic associated with a new housing development on Mullen property. The prior owner of that property adamantly opposed the previous housing plan for the Mullen property. There is a new owner now.
- Participants pointed out that the Daley Drive and the potential access road into the Mullen property are slightly offset, potentially making a challenging intersection with Main St.
- Participants identified a small vacant parcel on Prospect Street, that could potentially provide vehicular access to the Mullen Property. Participants envisioned an access road that arcs from the Main Street potential access road to the vacant lot on Prospect Street, providing pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle access through the site.
- Two parcels adjacent to the Mullen property were identified by participants who thought they should be included in a potential zone for multi-family housing because they offer additional space for housing or access



Figure 1. A work-in-progress model for the Mullen property. The orange arrow shows the location of a vacant parcel identified by participants as a potential alternative access to the site. The orange star indicates a vacant parcel identified by participants as potentially suitable for inclusion in a multi-family district, if one was established on the Mullen site.



## DENSITY

- Each group was able to arrange a minimum of 87 housing units<sup>1</sup> on the Mullen property using a combination of the smaller housing types. The last group assembled 100+ units on the site with either a wastewater treatment plan downslope or space efficient septic systems in the open space around the housing.
- Some felt that the proximity to the village center, stores, Senior Center, would be desirable for new residents, and that the new homes should be laid out as an extension to the existing village development.
- Others felt that meeting MBTA requirements was the bottom line, and/or that developing a greenfield like Dunn/Knapp, or a brownfield like Page School, makes more sense and/or is more economically viable.
- 3-story multi-family homes were overwhelmingly favored by most participants for being able to increase the density of housing stock while maintaining a scale and style that still fits within town.
- A local developer stopped by the table to offer his assertion that ANR development is a better approach to housing development and that if the town is looking for larger scale housing, the former the Page School site is a much better property than the Mullen site.

## CHALLENGES and ADVANTAGES

- Significant wetlands, steep slopes, access and traffic issues, and proximity to existing homes on Main Street were noted as challenges for housing development on the Mullen property.
- At the same time, some participants saw the advantage of development occurring downslope from Main Street because the new homes would not be visible from Main Street. Participants realized with the aid of the foam housing models that existing homes along Main Street could be buffered from new development by more than 200' of distance, plus vegetation and a significant grade change. Considering that the significant slopes would be beneficial for helping to screen the new development from view, participants were eager to explore what the apartments buildings looked like, to see what it would look like to maximize density on the site. The Town has a bylaw limiting building heights to 35', so that would need to be changed to allow four or five story apartments buildings. Generally, participants thought that apartment buildings of this height would be too visible from Main Street.
- Participants thought that new development at the Mullen site would offer a view of the Merrimack River.

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<sup>1</sup> 87 housing units is the minimum number of multi-family housing units that West Newbury is required to zone for to fulfill the requirements of the MBTA Communities Law and its Compliance Guidelines.





*Group 1 envisioned 2 clusters of townhouse style and two-family homes around a central green space, close to Main St. (108 units)*



*Group 2 explored how to keep the development out of view from Main Street (124 units)*







*Group 3 was interested in maximizing new housing on the site and in providing a diversity of housing types. They envisioned 2 circular clusters of duplexes, multi-family houses and apartment buildings, serviced by a shared septic system in the central open space (114 units not including the apartment building at the back of the site).*



## Closing Discussion

The meeting closed with a brief opportunity for participants to share their final thoughts. The following bullets summarize comments made by participants.

- We should zone several parcels and let the market decide which are viable to develop. We should also add vacant land next to the parcels we select.
- We should use this an opportunity to get closer to 10% of our housing being on the Subsidized Housing Inventory. We should explore use of Chapter 40R so that we can get more affordable housing.
- Older people are being forced out of West Newbury. They need smaller units and this zoning could make that possible. Younger people and families also need places to live that they can't find in West Newbury.
- We have lots of 3-5 bedroom houses. We are short on smaller units. Houses built under this kind of zoning could fill that need.
- The best arguments for these zoning changes are:
  - We need smaller units for older people and young people
  - The consequences if we don't comply would hurt the town
  - We can do this without impacting the look of Main Street.
  - Just because the zoning changes, doesn't mean that development will happen, and because of the constraints—septic—development may not be anywhere close to the densities allowed by the zoning.
- Don't say "units", say "homes"
- The Selectboard and the Planning Board have a responsibility to bring a thoughtful proposal to Town Meeting. The voters will decide whether they support it or not. It shouldn't be a hard sell. We don't want this to be acrimonious. The voters can make their own decisions.
- Since this requires a town meeting vote, the results are unpredictable
- We should limit the zoning proposal to one parcel. Another participant disagreed.
- People will show up to town meeting if they are passionate
- Talk to your friends, neighbors, people who disagree with you. Keep the conversation going so that we all learn what the town wants and doesn't want for zoning changes and so that everyone understands the MBTA Communities Law at town meeting.

