

This report summarizes the work of the Newton Centre Subcommittee on Property Use in the data collection phase (Phase I) of the Newton Centre Task Force effort.

The Subcommittee's objective was to provide information on the use of properties in Newton Centre, in order to get perspective on how the area was being used and on the resulting character of the business center in Newton.

The Subcommittee started with the Newton Assessor's database of properties in Newton Centre. For each property, the Subcommittee established the location on the map, ownership, zoning, use classification, square footage, frontage, square footage of commercial buildings, and the 2005 assessment. Then, on basis of visual observation, the business establishments (or other uses) of each property were noted. For each establishment, a record was made of the name of the business, type of activity, floor location, availability of parking for employees and/or for the public, estimate of size (large, medium, or small), and any special characteristics (See Attachment A for full record of each parcel). The area covered was limited to the Newton Centre business area, approximately 40 acres over parts of 12 blocks, as shown on the attached map. This central business area is largely but not entirely separate from the single and multiple family residential area that extends for a considerable distance around it. Aggregates were computed for the area surveyed only. On the basis of the assessor's property list, we determined the use being made of each property—the businesses and/or other uses that could be found on each property. This

material is based on visual observation since it was not possible to solicit information directly from each business location.

The overall results of the survey are summarized in the attached table. We note in particular:

- > Not counting the Newton Centre playground and street area, the Newton Centre business area surveyed encompasses approximately 40 acres, of which 57% are zoned for business, 38% are public (parking lots, city buildings, and open spaces) or non profit (a large part in church properties), and 5% are residential.
- > Total assessments amount to \$110 million of which approximately \$100 million represent business.
- > The area includes much retail business aimed at a broad market area, particularly
 - 26 beauty salons
 - 24 restaurants
 - 19 clothing stores (high end)
 - 9 bank branches
- > There are no general food stores, hardware stores, etc. that might be aimed at an immediate neighborhood market.
- > There are approximately 245 professional offices, but few regional or headquarters offices (3).

- > There is comparatively little apartment housing, altogether 112 units, with most of them located peripherally at the south end of the Newton Centre business area surveyed.
- > Based on calculation using Google Maps, off-street parking comprises an estimated 1300 off-street parking spaces, of which 650 are for private restricted use (most reserved for employees and residents based on property survey), 270 are private and available to customers of adjacent businesses (also based on property survey), and 381 are in public metered parking lots (some short term and others metered for all day stays). In addition to the 1300, there are 267 metered street parking spaces along city streets in the Newton Centre study area.

On the basis of maps and survey materials, we draw the following conclusions:

POSITIVIES

- The business area of Newton Centre is remarkably well located in the middle of a predominantly single family (and in some cases two family and multiple) residential area, with excellent transportation links (T and highway intersection) and has a long tradition as a community center.
- > Newton Centre has much open space, some in parkland and playground, and low buildings reinforcing an impression of suburban spaciousness

- > As an intersection of major traffic routes, Newton Centre serves as a destination for customers coming from a wide surrounding area. The configuration of shops and offices suggests that commercial establishments draw more widely than the neighborhood population.
- Newton Centre has considerable promise for (re)creating a more cohesive community than it is at present.

NEGATIVES

- > Land use in many parts of Newton Centre falls short of "best use".
 - A large expanse in and adjacent to the center of Newton Centre is devoted to surface parking lots: some public for general use, some restricted-use private and non-profit. These parking lots include the "triangle" in the very center of Newton Centre.
 - There is substantial open space but much of it remains little used and poorly maintained, for example, the area around the fire station, the MDC commission and Water and Sewer Board properties, the T properties, and the Smith Homestead memorial.
 - With exceptions (parts of Union Street, corner of Langley Rd. and Beacon, Langley Road and Centre Street, for example), business buildings have only one floor. The potential of additional floors for offices and/or housing remains untapped.

- > Newton Center lacks coherence. This is true from a number of perspectives:
 - There is no central point signaling arrival in Newton Centre and/or attracting the passerby, only a parking lot
 - The business blocks are separated by roads and parking facilities making difficult pedestrian movement from one part of Newton Centre to others.
 - Density and building height varies considerable from one part of Newton Centre to another.
 - There is little relationship between the immediate surrounding neighborhoods and the business center. Newton Centre lacks stores designed to serve local residents, for example there is no food store, no hardware, etc.
- > The potential for apartment housing that might serve as a basis for a 24/7 population is largely unrealized.
- > Parking lots are located away from the main business centers (except for the triangle lot and some private parking).
 - There is the perception among local business and residents, that short-term parking is inadequate and competes with longer period parking of commuters and workers in local businesses.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- > A consultant should be hired to evaluate in more detail the economic situation and potentials of

Newton Centre. Detailed data on the size of the businesses, origin of their customers, their revenues, employment, and accurate data on parking of their customers and employees will require additional survey efforts. It is important also to evaluate the tax revenues that could be obtained from development of better utilization of properties in Newton Centre.

- > Evaluating alternatives about the concept of the Newton Centre community need to be presented and discussed. Among the possibilities that could be considered are, for example:
 - A central "use" or focal point for the Centre to draw the community to the area. Examples might include a cultural center, a community center, an entertainment establishment, etc.
 - A more developed and integrated residential community for various income levels in mixed use buildings to provide a 24/7 population and to support a different mix of business.
 - Alternative uses for public properties and collaboration with the private sector in securing better use of privately owned-properties.
- > Focus on particular properties to catalog the factors that influence the potential use of various sites, like location, size, elevation, traffic, etc.