

[In Newton, a super Tuesday for pro-growth side](#)

By Michael Jonas
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All politics is local, and for some residents in Newton that meant yesterday's Super Tuesday vote in the presidential primary took a backseat to a question of what would happen in their backyard.

The affluent Boston suburb of 88,000 residents has been riven for months by a proposal for a massive mixed-use development project in the Newton Upper Falls section of town. Residents voted yesterday by a fairly comfortable margin to greenlight the project, which will bring thousands of square feet of office and retail space and 800 apartment units to a 22 acre site near Route 128 and the Newton Highlands stop on the MBTA's Green Line. The vote to approve the zoning change needed for Northland Investment Corp's plan was 18,565 in favor and 13,449 against, according to the Globe.

The contest played out along familiar lines, with proponents touting the need for more housing to address a regional shortage contributing to stratospheric prices for homebuyers and renters, while opponents said the scale of the project would bring traffic nightmares and overwhelm schools with new students.

The vote also took place against the backdrop of a continued stalemate on Beacon Hill, where lawmakers have held back a vote on Gov. Charlie Baker's "Housing Choice" legislation. Baker has implored the Legislature to act on the bill, calling it crucial to the state's continued economic vitality. A chief feature of the bill is its reform of local zoning rules to allow projects to be approved by a majority vote of the municipal board or town meeting in charge of development reviews. Many major zoning changes currently require two-thirds approval, a high bar that critics say ends up killing reasonable projects that enjoy majority support.

The Newton battle showed the extent to which development opponents will go to block projects. Zoning for the Northland plan cleared the two-thirds support needed with a 17-7 vote of the City Council, but opponents then mounted a signature drive to put the question on the citywide ballot.

The pro-growth side was aided by heavy campaign spending by Northland and enjoyed the support of Newton Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, business leaders, and housing and environmental advocates.

In December, the president of the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce called the opposition a classic case of the NIMBY — not in my backyard — mentality that has fueled the state's housing shortage. "That's why we have a housing crisis — because the suburbs have refused to step up," Greg Reibman said. "There is a legitimate concern about the congestion, but that congestion is a legitimate concern for all of Eastern Massachusetts."

Reibman said last night that the vote to approve the project sent “a loud message that the city’s residents want to be a community that is more welcoming and part of the solution to the region’s housing crisis and climate change.”