



Construction imminent on 14-building Newton development following vote

By Tom Acitelli
March 4, 2020



Northland Investment

Demolition work could start before the end of 2020 on a 22.6-acre, 14-building development in Newton's Upper Falls area following a March 3 vote by residents that broke in favor of the project by more than 5,000 ballots. Construction work would follow in 2021.

Recall that in December the Newton City Council overwhelmingly approved Northland Investment Corporation's plans to develop the acreage at Needham and Oak streets in Upper Falls, including into 800 apartments, with 120 designated affordable.

The project—at 156 Oak Street, 275-281 Needham Street, and 55 Tower Road—is also slated to include 180,000 square feet of offices and 115,000 square feet of retail and community space. It would replace much of a strip mall that Northland controls.



Northland Investment

The early December approvals from the City Council represented the culmination of a long back-and-forth with elected officials and locals. As with other Newton projects—and with many projects in the Boston area—there had been concerns about the impact of such a development on traffic and infrastructure.

Northland for its part is planning to offer shuttle service back and forth from the Newton Highlands stop on the Green Line, perhaps a sign of more privately funded public transit to come. And the developer will provide \$1.5 million for work on a local elementary school. Plus, Northland will reserve 10 acres as privately owned public space.

Such sweeteners were enough for a majority of the council and for other supporters, but some residents vowed after the December approvals to force a referendum. That set up the Upper Falls vote as a kind of bellwether on public support for much-needed housing construction in areas of the Boston region that don't typically host it—usually, as in this case, because of zoning that restricts it.

The March 3 referendum on zoning changes—which likely benefited from the turnout for Massachusetts' Democratic presidential primary—favored the project.