

Honorable City Council, Marc Laredo, President
1000 Commonwealth Ave
Newton, MA 02459

June 13, 2024

Dear President Laredo:

As Newton community and business organizations that represent hundreds of your constituents, **we urge you not to amend the Electrification Ordinance** (Fossil Fuel-free Ordinance, Article VI, Sec. 5-59) **to exempt gas stove cooking.**

Newton is one of ten Massachusetts communities that has been approved to participate in the Municipal Fossil Fuel Free Building Demonstration Program, referred to as the Ten Communities Program.

As a pilot community, we have the opportunity to demonstrate to the state – and the nation – how we can attain our goals to drive down greenhouse gas emissions and protect our children’s future.

We greatly appreciate the leadership of the Councilors who voted to oppose the amendment to exempt gas stoves from the ordinance, including: Councilors Susan Albright, Martha Bixby, Victoria Danberg, Andreae Downs, Rebecca Grossman, Bill Humphrey, Andrea Kelley, Alison Leary, Rick Lipof, Alan Lobovits, and Maria Scibelli Greenberg. You clearly understand that although this amendment appears to be a “small exception” to the ordinance, it has large effects on our efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve our Climate Action Goal of zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

We know that many of the Councilors who voted for this exemption understand that natural gas emissions are both a public health threat and a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions in Newton.

We are confused why Councilors would hamstring our City’s efforts to protect our community’s health and environment by supporting this amendment. The amendment would dramatically decrease the effectiveness of the ordinance because allowing gas stoves in new construction and major renovations would require gas supply for the entire building, which means new gas infrastructure to supply gas, and new gas leaks in that infrastructure.

In addition, the requirement only impacts a small minority of existing homeowners: only people who conduct major renovations. The requirement to eliminate gas cooking is only triggered in a renovation when a kitchen is included where at least 50% of a building is being renovated, or over 1,000 sq. ft. is added to a low-rise residential building.

We urge you to pass an ordinance that prohibits the installation of gas stoves as described in the original ordinance. Exempting gas stoves from the ordinance would:

- **Undermine the basic principle of the ordinance**, which is to eliminate reliance on fossil fuels. If gas cooking is allowed for all renovations and new construction, gas connections would be necessary to keep or add to enable this. New gas infrastructure means more gas leaks - which already account for 8% of our greenhouse gas emissions.

The Department of Energy Resources “strongly recommends against Newton” allowing gas cooking because it is “contrary to the intent of the Act and the Municipal Fossil Fuel-Free Program.” According to the DOER, allowing gas cooking will undermine the effectiveness of the pilot to ban the use of fossil fuels in new construction and major renovations.

- **Not follow the spirit and letter of DOER requirements.** If councilors want Newton to be one of the Ten Communities, and model the reduction of fossil fuel use for the rest of the state, we should abide by the intention of the ordinance.
- **Thwart implementation of Newton’s Climate Action Plan** and its goal to attain zero carbon emissions by 2050. Allowing gas stoves in new residential units, for example, requires new gas pipeline infrastructure, continuing our reliance on fossil fuels - in direct contradiction to the City’s plan to create a healthy, sustainable City so that our children can live long, healthy lives.
- **Threaten public health.** The use of fossil fuel for cooking has been proven to harm the health of building occupants, particularly children and elderly. The nitrogen dioxide produced by gas stoves is a respiratory irritant that increases the risk of asthma attacks, incidence of respiratory infections and respiratory disease. We experience today that gas pipelines through Newton’s residential neighborhoods also degrade Newton’s outdoor air quality and kill nearby trees. So called “natural gas” is not clean, not green and not safe, not for us, not for our children, not for anyone’s children.

Thank you for helping to protect Newton’s environment and the health of all residents by passing a strong Electrification Ordinance that prohibits gas stoves.

Sincerely,

Dan Ruben and Judy Jacobs, Green Newton

Greg Reibman, Charles River Chamber

Cindy Callaway and Melanie Renaud, Mothers Out Front Newton

Peter Barrer and Demie Stathoplos, 350Mass Newton Node

Fran Godine, Lynn Weissberg, Nancy Zollers and Doris Ann Sweet, Engine 6 Newton Housing Advocates