

**NEEDHAM HOUSING PLAN WORKING GROUP**  
**\* MINUTES \***  
**October 22, 2021**

9:04 a.m. A meeting of the Needham Housing Plan Working Group was convened by Jeanne McKnight, Co-Chair, as a virtual Zoom Meeting. Ms. McKnight announced this open meeting is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of March 12, 2020 due to the current state of emergency from the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. She said all supporting documents used at this meeting are available on a special section of the Town's website [www.needhamma.gov/housingplan2021](http://www.needhamma.gov/housingplan2021). Present were Jeanne McKnight and Natasha Espada representing the Planning Board, Dan Matthews from the Select Board, Laura Dorfman from the Community Preservation Committee, Michael O'Brien from the School Committee, Ed Scheideler from the Housing Authority, Carol Fachetti from the Finance Committee, Helen Gregory from the Council on Aging, Ed Cosgrove from the Board of Health, and Rhonda Spector and Oscar Mertz as Citizens At Large. Also present were Assistant Town Manager Kathleen King, Director of Planning and Community Development Lee Newman, Assistant Town Planner Alexandra Clee, Public Information Officer Cynthia Roy Gonzalez, Director of Public Health Timothy McDonald, and Community Housing Specialist Karen Sunnarborg.

**Welcome and Introductions** – Ms. McKnight welcomed all members of the Needham Housing Plan Working Group to this initial meeting and also introduced staff that will be providing support during the duration of the planning process. She then provided some brief words on her interest and background in the issue of affordable housing and requested that each member introduce themselves and provide some information on what drew them to participating as part of the Working Group. Members then introduced themselves and provided such information.

**Project Goals** – Ms. Espada, also Co-Chair of the Working Group, provided a summary of the purpose of the project. She indicated that Needham has not had an approved Housing Plan in place since 2007, although it has made considerable progress in producing affordable housing since then, adding 894 new units to the Town's Subsidized Housing Inventory and surpassing the state affordability goal of 10%. Despite reaching this threshold, the Town recognizes that significant unmet housing needs remain in the community, particularly in the context of unprecedented housing prices and the pandemic. Consequently, the Town has determined that it should revisit its housing agenda by obtaining updated documentation to identify priority housing needs and then prepare an Action Plan to strategically address these needs.

**A Review of the Scope of work and Timeline** – Ms. Sunnarborg, the Town's Community Housing Specialist, reviewed the project's Work Plan. In addition to

this initial meeting, early work will involve background research and information gathering. She indicated that only very limited 2020 U.S. census data has been released thus far, and the Census Bureau estimates that the bulk of the data will not be available until the end of November. In the interim, she is accessing and analyzing data from other sources.

It is expected that the draft Housing Needs Assessment will be completed by February 2022, and the first community workshop will occur in March. This community-wide meeting will highlight the key takeaways from the Housing Needs Assessment followed by small breakout group discussions to engage participants in a housing visioning process and key questions related to housing challenges, goals, and priority actions. Based on this meeting, Working Group meetings, interviews of local and regional housing stakeholders, and a local survey, she will then draft a Strategic Action Plan that summarizes key short-term and longer-term strategies to promote greater housing diversity and affordability in Needham. This Action Plan is scheduled to be completed by the end of spring 2022 and will be presented for community input as part of a second community-wide meeting in June. The Housing Plan will then be finalized in the summer. Ms. Sunnarborg further mentioned that Working Group meetings will be scheduled on a monthly basis.

**Public Engagement Process** – Ms. Newman provided some history on work related to affordable housing including past planning efforts, zoning changes, Local Chapter 40B Guidelines, the establishment of the Needham Affordable Housing Trust, the passage of the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bylaw, and special programs to support the housing needs of homeowners and tenants through the Small Repair Grant Program and Emergency Rental Assistance Program.

Ms. Newman emphasized that engaging the community in the process of preparing the Housing Plan is pivotal to the work ahead and will be accomplished through a series of workshops, interviews, and a local survey, for example. She indicated that unlike previous housing planning work, the Town now has a Public Information Officer who will be involved in conducting outreach to the community on opportunities to provide meaningful input into the planning process. She then introduced Ms. Gonzalez who expressed her enthusiasm for the project. Ms. Gonzalez pointed out major components of the project's community outreach effort including the dedicated website, social media outreach, the Town's newsletter, support from other Town departments and local organizations, the Needham Channel, local papers, and a new community polling tool.

Ms. Espada mentioned that Needham United Against Racial Inequity (NUARI) can be a useful group to bring into the process. Ms. McKnight referred members to written materials that will be posted in the project's website including a Housing and Zoning Analysis prepared by the Planning and Community Development Department and a Demographic Study commissioned by the School Department.

Ms. Dorfman asked whether any of the materials will be translated into other languages, and Ms. Gonzalez replied that she will take a look at this. Mr. Mertz suggested that the Working Group review the Pioneer Institute's report on ADUs. Ms. Espada emphasized the usefulness of making good use of existing information from other sources that are pertinent to our effort.

Mr. Matthews spoke to emphasize a number of key issues related to the Housing Plan that should serve as a context in moving forward. These include the importance of stakeholder participation, the need for family housing but likely challenges to moving such projects forward, and the benefits of Town control due to surpassing the 10% Chapter 40B affordability threshold. He identified two affordable housing crises related to not only a shortage of housing that counts as part of the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) but also the lack of market-based affordable housing due to an imbalance in housing supply and demand not only locally but throughout the region. He stated that there are 101 communities in the region within Route 495 which makes important regional coordination around the issue of housing production, including affordable housing, daunting. He further mentioned that the League of Women Voters is sponsoring a public forum on affordable housing on October 28<sup>th</sup> and urged members to attend.

Mr. Mertz mentioned that the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) includes some market units, given a community's ability to count all units in Chapter 40B developments as part of the SHI. Mr. Matthews pointed out that this is only the case with rental developments and that such projects have helped diversify Needham's housing stock. Ms. McKnight added that while the Town's SHI is at 12.7% of its year-round housing stock, the actual percentage of affordable units is 6.7%.

Ms. Espada suggested that there is some information on ethnicity that she will share and pointed to the need for information on school capacity issues. Mr. O'Brien offered that the schools are currently at capacity and discussions are underway regarding potential new school construction. He added that enrollment projections indicate that there will be increases in student enrollment over the next few years which are then forecasted to plateau. These projections are based on the current housing stock, however.

Ms. Spector suggested that the Town consider public subsidies to finance new affordable housing development including Low Income Housing Tax Credits for example.

**Next Steps** – Ms. Newman asked whether Thursday evenings would be a good time to schedule Working Group meetings. She will follow-up with members on a meeting schedule. She will also follow-up with Marcus Nelson who was unable to attend this meeting.

Mr. Mertz asked if there was any homework for the Working Group, and Ms. Sunnarborg responded that it would be useful for members to review the materials included in the project website.

10:25 a.m. **Motion: Ms. McKnight moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ms. Espada. Unanimous: 11-0.**