

**NEEDHAM HOUSING PLAN WORKING GROUP
PUBLIC EDUCATION AND LISTENING SESSION**

*** MINUTES ***

January 27, 2022

7:04 p.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. Present were Jeanne McKnight and Natasha Espada representing the Planning Board, Dan Matthews and Marcus Nelson 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, as well as Emily Cooper, Rhonda Spector and Oscar Mertz as Citizens At Large. Also present were Director of Planning and Community Development Lee Newman, Assistant Town Planner Alexandra Clee, Public Information Officer Cynthia Roy Gonzalez, and Community Housing Specialist Karen Sunnarborg.

Welcome and Introductions – Ms. McKnight, Co-Chair of the Housing Plan Working Group, offered a welcome to this special Public Education and Listening Session and asked for a roll call of Working Group members. She also introduced staff and mentioned that the Town had a special website dedicated to the preparation of the Housing Plan at www.needhamma.gov/housingplan2021 and invited community members to access these housing resources.

Ms. Espada, the other Co-Chair of the Working Group, provided a summary of the purpose of the project with a list of key next steps in the planning process including a draft Housing Needs Assessment, Community Housing Workshop on March 24th, and a Strategic Action Plan to address identified priority housing needs. She also emphasized that the purpose of this evening's meeting was to offer an opportunity for community leaders and residents to provide their perspectives on housing concerns, needs, and strategies for the Working Group to consider as part of its Housing Plan.

PowerPoint Presentations of Housing Basics – Ms. Sunnarborg reviewed basic requirements of affordable housing, recent demographic shifts, and housing cost and affordability information. Ms. McKnight provided a presentation of the history of zoning in Needham including current zoning related to types of units allowed and affordability requirements in various zoning districts.

Questions, Comments and Input – Following the presentations, Ms. McKnight asked attendees to provide their thoughts about the future of housing in Needham.

Henry Reagan inquired about the process of rezoning, and Ms. McKnight responded by explaining the role of the Planning Board and Town Meeting. She noted that some amendments focused on housing will require only a majority Town Meeting vote under the new Housing Choice Initiative law.

John Bulian agreed that the Town should add levels of affordability and said we need more information on the new rule regarding multi-family zoning in communities with MBTA services, including Needham. He stated that while creating more housing is a good thing, it needs to be done incrementally so as not to destabilize services. He offered that we do not want the Pollard and Mitchell Schools to need expansion sooner than planned. He also expressed concern that tax increases will drive out current residents.

Gerry Rovner asked about the definition of ADU's, and Ms. Newman answered with a short summary of the current bylaw and the process of obtaining approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals. He further inquired about any parking requirements and whether anyone could occupy an ADU. Ms. Newman indicated that one off-street parking space is required for the ADU, and there has been some discussion about broadening occupancy requirements beyond family members and caregivers.

Rachel Green indicated that the Town should take a strong stance on promoting racial equity and consider reparation programs. She mentioned that the new MBTA Communities requirements from the state are a good start in promoting greater housing density as the benefits to the community outweigh concerns.

Peter Olive expressed his appreciation of the zoning presentation and asked what might have been the Town's motivation in changing zoning in 1948 that reduced density. He also echoed Rachel Green's comments, suggesting that the Town needs remedies for past practices that will address segregation.

Deana Springer indicated that she has a disabled young adult son and is concerned about housing for such young residents who want to remain in the community but are less able to live independently. Ms. McKnight mentioned that the Town has group homes and noted that the Housing Authority is a resource.

Moe Handel expressed his concern about Needham's starter housing stock that has been so reduced by teardowns. He suggested that there needs to be regional approaches to resolving this housing problem. He added that while the Town is becoming increasingly diverse regarding race, it is becoming increasingly less diverse regarding income given such high land costs that translate into high housing costs. Units that have been affordable in the past are now only available to those with substantial resources.

Peter O'Neil asked whether the new MBTA Communities zoning requirements will be similar to Chapter 40B. Ms. McKnight responded that it will not be, but and added that the Town will not have access to certain state grant funding without addressing in its zoning the requirements of the new state law.. He also asked about zoning for group homes as he has a disabled son who wants to live independently and stay in Needham. Ms. McKnight responded that group homes are allowed by right in the single-family residential districts if they are single-family homes, even if four or so unrelated people live in the home.

Paula Dickerman underscored Moe Handel's concern about the lack of starter homes. She suggests allowing four units on 10,000 sq. ft. lots. She also advocated for a local goal for affordable housing that does not include market-rate apartments in mixed-income developments, suggesting 10%, 12% or 15%. She further stated that the Town needs greater diversity, both racial and economic.

Louis Wolfson suggested that the Town reduce the parking requirement for multi-family housing that is transit-oriented. Ms. Newman responded that Needham will participate in a MAPC HOME Consortium parking study, noting that an earlier study found that parking requirements were too restrictive.

Mr. Matthews, a member of the Housing Plan Working Group, pointed to the recently released state guidelines that would require new zoning to increase housing density near MBTA stations. He suggested that we look to zoning more areas for multi-family housing and perhaps increase the number of units allowed in the General Residence District from two to three units per structure.

Mr. Nelson, also a member of the Housing Plan Working Group, stated that these comments are very important for the Working Group to hear. He mentioned that amending the ADU bylaw might be able to happen soon, and we should look to other zoning to better promote affordable housing and address the needs of all residents including those with disabilities as well as diverse income and racial populations. He further observed that more people are getting involved in the housing issue and agree that it is important that Needham be open to people from all paths of life.

Ross Donald asked if there was a representative of the Needham Housing Authority on the Working Group and was informed that Ed Scheideler was the representative. He suggested that race is not the problem in Needham, but the root of the problem is economic given such high housing costs. He indicated that he is a Needham Housing Authority tenant and that conditions at NHA properties need attention.

Cynthia Landau asked about teardown activity and whether they are approved as of right or by special permit. Ms. Newman responded that no special permit or other relief is needed if the new home complies with dimensional requirements. Ms.

Landau then said the Town should have a moratorium on teardowns or at least require a special permit. She also agreed with Mr. Bulian's comments about the need for incremental change and questioned how big we want the Town to grow. She expressed her concern about Needham becoming more urban and emphasized that we look at the capacity of our social services, infrastructure, and schools while remaining a welcoming community.

Ms. Dorfman, a member of the Working Group, indicated that she serves on Needham's Historical Commission as well as on the Community Preservation Committee. She noted that the demolition delay by-law that Needham has adopted only delays teardowns by six months and only if the property is an historically recognized structure. She noted that other towns have restrictions based on the age of the house being torn down.

Mr. Mertz, a Working Group member, suggested that we need to lay the groundwork through zoning reform for additional ADU's and multi-family developments, recognizing that it takes years to effect changes. He noted that there is a reported regional housing shortage of 200,000 units. He also agreed that we need to know the effects of any proposed housing strategy on local services.

Ms. Espada expressed the Working Group's intention to obtain substantial and diverse community input into the planning process and that there will be additional opportunities for such input in the future.

Mr. Matthews emphasized the need for regional solutions to the housing problem including both for subsidized and moderate-income housing. He further noted there are 101 zoning authorities within Route 495 and suggested that the new MBTA Communities guidelines can potentially be effective throughout the region. He also mentioned that it is important to support the NHA's 2019 Capital Plan.

Ms. Spector, also a Working Group member, added that this meeting has helped the Working Group learn a lot about what people care about when it comes to housing.

Next Steps – Ms. Newman expressed her appreciation to the members of the Working Group and those who attended the meeting. She mentioned that next month the Working Group will be reviewing a draft Housing Needs Assessment and will hold a Community Housing Workshop on March 24th to present the key findings from the Housing Needs Assessment and obtain important community input on a vision for Needham's housing future, housing goals, as well as priority needs and strategies. The Working Group also intends to conduct a Community Housing Survey as a means for obtaining further community input and will hold another community-wide forum to present the Strategic Action Plan once it has been prepared.

8:54 p.m. **Motion: Mr. Matthews moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ms. Cooper. Unanimous: 13-0.**