

**NEEDHAM HOUSING PLAN WORKING GROUP**  
**\* MINUTES \***  
**March 10, 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](http://www.needhamma.gov/housingplan2021). Present were Jeanne McKnight 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, Helen Gregory from the Council on Aging, Ed Cosgrove from the Board of Health, Ed Scheideler from the Needham Housing Authority as well as Emily Cooper 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, Community Housing Specialist Karen Sunnarborg, and Director of Health and Human Services Timothy McDonald.

**Welcome and Introductions** – Ms. McKnight, Co-Chair of the Housing Plan Working Group, offered a welcome and asked for a roll call of Working Group members. She mentioned that additional members would be brought into the meeting as they became available. She also introduced staff and noted that the Town had a special website dedicated to the preparation of the Housing Plan at [www.needhamma.gov/housingplan2021](http://www.needhamma.gov/housingplan2021).

While Ms. McKnight indicated that public comments will not be entertained as part of this meeting, there will be other opportunities for community input throughout the planning process. She emphasized that written comments were also encouraged.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes**

**Motion: Mr. O'Brien moved that the Minutes from the February 10, 2022 meeting be approved. The motion was seconded by Mr. Cosgrove. Approved: 9-0 with Ms. Fachetti abstaining as she was not present.**

**Discussion of Subgroup Logistics** – Ms. McKnight indicated that Ms. Espada had sent members a list of four subgroups with a preliminary list of members under each. Ms. Cooper offered that Ms. Espada had distributed a more recent list that included several changes. Ms. Fachetti asked to be added to the Capacity Building subgroup, and Mr. Scheideler requested the Zoning Subgroup.

Ms. Newman then stated that the subgroups will have to operate under the Open Meeting law that will require official posting of the meetings and minutes. She listed several options for holding the meetings in person, including the Public Services Administration Building (PSAB) during normal work hours, Town Hall when other boards are meeting, and, for virtual meetings, webinars that are initiated by staff and then passed on to the subgroup members to coordinate. Ms. McKnight added that it is not feasible to have staff attend these meetings and take notes.

Ms. Fachetti inquired whether it was necessary to prepare minutes if the meetings were recorded on Zoom. Ms. Newman said she would check but meetings have never been treated that way in the past. Ms. McKnight offered that subgroups do not need to be fussy about the meeting notes but they can be helpful in keeping track of comments and subgroup progress. She then asked if the Working Group should leave it up to the individual subgroups to identify a person to coordinate with staff to provide advance notices and schedule space.

Ms. Newman mentioned that the subgroups should plan to complete their work by the end of May and that Ms. Sunnarborg is preparing a framework to help subgroups plan their work products. A memo on this will be issued soon.

Mr. Matthews observed that the Working Group appeared to be pretty set on the path regarding the planning process and he further indicated that he has expressed concerns in the past. He suggested that the Working Group establish a Steering Committee that would be responsible for the primary work on the Plan. He added that the Working Group represents a wide range of experience but some members do not have as much time to get involved in the project as others. He further commented that there has not been an opportunity to address the changes to the first draft sections of the Plan.

Ms. McKnight indicated that the logistics of the planning process have been undertaken by the Working Group co-chairs as well as several staff members. Since the focus of this logistical work has been on administrative issues in planning Working Group meetings, the Open Meeting law has not been applicable. She asked the Group whether it should further discuss this suggestion tonight.

Ms. Cooper stated that she wanted to make sure that there was a conversation about what the subgroups should do. Ms. McKnight responded that she thought the zoning subgroup should follow-up on the work that is being done in response to the MBTA Communities Guidelines. Ms. Sunnarborg then briefly summarized a proposed framework that the subgroups can decide to follow in undertaking work which will be provided to Working Group members as part of a memo to be circulated very soon.

Ms. McKnight asked members whether they were prepared to further discuss the suggestion of a Steering Committee tonight. Ms. Dorfman questioned whether it was necessary to handle Working Group work in such a formal way, stating that

subgroups have not been involved in any of the other boards and committees in which she has been involved. Ms. McKnight suggested that staff will prepare a memo on a framework for the subgroups and moving the planning process forward. She then asked if there were any volunteers for serving on a proposed Steering Committee.

Ms. Cooper asked whether the subgroups have to touch on all topics that have been addressed thus far within each subgroup or have autonomy to more narrowly focus their work. Ms. McKnight suggested that it was up to the subgroup to determine the actions on which they will focus.

Mr. Matthews added that the Steering Committee would include the two Working Group co-chairs and other members who might want to serve. It would then report back to the full Working Group on recommendations.

Mr. Mertz said that he would like to take Ms. Sunnarborg up on her offer to be a resource for the subgroups and asked whether she might be interested in attending the first meeting of the zoning subgroup to help them get started. Ms. Sunnarborg replied that she had not planned to attend subgroup meetings but would try to be available. Ms. McKnight observed that the subgroups might need to reach out to Town staff on occasion for specific information during the course of their work.

**Discussion of Plans for the Community Housing Workshop** – Ms. Sunnarborg provided an overview of the agenda for the March 24<sup>th</sup> Community Housing Workshop, including instructions for the breakout groups. Ms. Cooper suggested that there be a specific end time to the Workshop, and Ms. Sunnarborg responded with 9:00 p.m. Ms. Cooper added that it may be useful to shorten some of the presentation on the Housing Needs Assessment as it is likely that participants from the January 27<sup>th</sup> Public Education and Listening Session, who already heard some of it, will attend the Workshop as well. She further suggested that there be a question for participants on what affordable housing means to them which Ms. Sunnarborg pointed out was included in the first question that will be tackled in the breakout groups.

There was also a discussion of the draft handout for the Workshop which Ms. Cooper suggested included a list of actions that made the Working Group look like it had done more work than has actually been accomplished, some of which were very specific and others of which were broad. She said that we do not want to lead participants down any specific path with respect to specific strategies at this point in the process. She further stated that she has not had the opportunity to provide her thoughts on priority actions.

Mr. Mertz offered that not everyone has had the time to digest the materials. The handout is largely a collection of past goals and strategies, and he acknowledged that these evolve over time. He suggested that it is helpful to have some reference of past recommendations, but further discussions on goals and actions are priorities.

Ms. McKnight responded that we can entertain comments to improve the handout, and staff will make the appropriate changes.

Ms. McKnight raised the issue of the role of the Facilitator in the breakout groups, and Ms. Newman replied that we will largely rely on Working Group members and that the number of Facilitators needed will depend on the number of participants. Mr. Matthews suggested that staff send a memo to Working Group members to gauge any interest in serving as a Facilitator.

Ms. McKnight mentioned that the role of the Recorder is also important as this person will be responsible for reporting back to the full group at the end of the meeting. This person can be a Working Group member or another participant in the breakout group. Ms. McKnight urged Working Group members to spread the word on the Workshop to their boards or committees to boost participation.

Ms. Gregory stressed the importance of keeping track of time during the Workshop, and Ms. Sunnarborg suggested that this is an important role of the Facilitators but that staff will also make announcements regarding the schedule. Ms. Newman indicated that staff will be testing the logistics of virtually holding this type of meeting next week.

**Next Steps** – Ms. Newman mentioned that in addition to the Community Housing Workshop scheduled for March 24<sup>th</sup>, the Working Group will meet on April 14<sup>th</sup> when it will do a debriefing of the Workshop and review a draft Community Housing Survey. This Survey will be conducted on a community-wide basis as opposed to the polling to occur right after the Workshop which will enable attendees to vote on their top priority actions.

Ms. McKnight expressed her appreciation for the work that has been done so far on the MBTA Communities Guidelines and asked if Mr. Matthews could say a few words on this issue. Mr. Matthews indicated that the Town will have to prepare an Action Plan for the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in response to the Guidelines which will need to be addressed in the Housing Plan. He mentioned that, given comments from communities, the state Guidelines are unlikely to be formally adopted in the same form that is currently under review. He suggested that the Town has a significant concern about the length of time offered for community review in the draft Guidelines and some extension of the timeframe involved in adopting new zoning will hopefully be granted.

Mr. Mertz added that the Guidelines will change the way of doing business with respect to zoning as there will be a focus on by-right approvals instead of special permits in the designated districts. It also means that the Town will have to be proactive in engaging with school officials on capacity issues given future growth.

Ms. McKnight introduced Mr. McDonald, the Town's Director Health and Human Services, stating that he was very helpful in the preparations of the Accessory

Dwelling Units bylaw through the Council on Aging and Department of Public Health. Mr. McDonald expressed his interest in being involved in this housing work and thanked Ed Cosgrove and Helen Gregory for their participation in the Working Group.

8:48 p.m. **Motion: Mr. Matthews moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mertz. Unanimous: 11-0.**