

NEEDHAM HOUSING PLAN WORKING GROUP
*** MINUTES ***
April 14, 2022

7:16 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, 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, 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, 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 conducted a roll call of Working Group members who were then present, and 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. Ms. McKnight offered a special thank you for the contributions of Dan Matthews who recently stepped down as a member of the Select Board and the Housing Plan Working Group.

As in previous meeting, Ms. McKnight indicated that public comments will not be entertained as part of this meeting, but 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. Cosgrove moved that the Minutes from the March 10, 2022 meeting be approved. The motion was seconded by Ms. Gregory. Approved: 7-0.

Discussion of Community Housing Workshop – Ms. Espada, Co-Chair of the Housing Plan Working Group, offered a summary of what we learned from the Community Housing Workshop that was held virtually on March 24, 2022. She suggested that it will continue to be necessary for the Working Group to prioritize recommendations that have been offered as part of various community outreach

efforts. She asked if there was any additional feedback from Working Group members.

Report on Results from the Community Housing Workshop Poll – Ms. McKnight indicated that all Workshop attendees received a follow-up poll to obtain feedback on their relative support for the priority recommendations that were provided by each breakout group. She then introduced Ms. Gonzalez who provided a report from this follow-up poll. Ms. Gonzalez explained that the poll was sent to 73 people with 32 respondents. She then listed the top six recommendations and noted that zoning changes as part of the MBTA Community Guidelines for pursuing new multi-family zoning in proximity to transit nodes and the Modernization and Redevelopment Initiative that is being sponsored by the Needham Housing Authority attracted the greatest amount of support. All attendees expressed interest in being part of future community discussions related to the Housing Plan.

At this point in the meeting, Ms. McKnight introduced the recently elected Select Board member, Heidi Frail, and offered her congratulations. She then mentioned the possibility of Ms. Frail being added to the Housing Plan Working Group, representing the Select Board in place of Dan Matthews. Ms. Frail responded that she had received support from other Select Board members on serving as part of the Working Group. She then asked whether the results of the poll were included in the meeting packet. Ms. Clee responded that they were not but would be sent to all members following the meeting. Ms. Spector emphasized the importance of this information to the work of the Working Group's 3 Subgroups. Ms. Gonzalez interjected that not only do we have the polling results from the Community Housing Workshop but will also be obtaining broad community input from a Community Housing Survey.

Discussion of Draft Community Housing Survey – Ms. Sunnarborg provided an overview of the recommended timeline for the Community Housing Survey that is planned to provide another vehicle for obtaining community input on local housing needs, goals, and priority actions. She suggested that the Survey results should be available in May ahead of the May Working Group meeting. Ms. Gonzalez indicated that the Survey will be conducted through Survey Monkey, and outreach will be similar to the previous community activities including the Public Education and Listening Session and the Community Housing Workshop. Ms. McKnight urged members to once again assist this outreach effort by notifying members of their particular boards or committees.

Ms. Frail asked if notification was going to be provided to Town Meeting members, and Ms. Gonzalez responded that this will continue to be the case, working with the Town Clerk's Office. Mr. Mertz requested that the list of outreach contacts be shared with the Working Group members.

Ms. Spector suggested that the Survey should provide the results from the previous outreach efforts and ask respondents to indicate whether the priorities were moving in the right direction. Ms. Sunnarborg responded that the Survey, in addition to the Public Education and Listening Session and Community Housing Workshop, was meant to provide another opportunity to obtain broad community input, particularly for those who were less able or interested in attending meetings. The intent was to still be open-ended in our inquiry as opposed to narrowing in on what some might view as preconceived Town priorities. With the results of the Survey and prior input, the Working Group will be able to focus on a package of priority strategies with the credibility of a robust community outreach process.

Mr. Cosgrove emphasized the importance of disseminating information on the Survey to the school system, local places of worship, and social/civic organizations. Ms. Gonzalez responded that this will continue to be done.

Ms. Cooper expressed some confusion about the process given that the Survey results will not be available much in advance of the bulk of the Subgroup work that is due by the end of May. Ms. Newman responded that the Subgroup results would not formally be due until the June Working Group meeting.

Mr. Mertz added that there would be some value in reaching larger employers and institutions, including the hospital, to try to get Survey responses from employees. Ms. McKnight welcomed Mr. O'Brien to the meeting and suggested that Amy Haelsen, the Town's Economic Development Manager, and the Chamber of Commerce are important resources for reaching out to the business community. Mr. O'Brien inquired about outreach to the schools, and Ms. Gonzalez responded that she has been working through a contact and has been able to provide notifications to families through school newsletters. Ms. Frail added that she works at the hospital and indicated that most employees can no longer afford to live in Needham. Mr. Mertz emphasized the importance of hearing from these employees and indicated that workforce housing was a regional challenge.

Specific comments on the draft Survey were offered. Mr. Cosgrove suggested switching question #1 and #2. Mr. Mertz proposed adding a more specific definition of affordable housing and market affordable housing which Ms. Sunnarborg will insert on the first page. Ms. Cooper recommended that the table on area median income levels be switched to the first page in support of the definitions. Mr. Mertz suggested that question #5 and #6 be flipped and also proposed that categories related to density be added to the list of housing types in question #6, perhaps with designations of minimal density as opposed to greater density in terms of number of units where appropriate. Ms. McKnight recommended adding the inventory of Town-owned land be included under question #7 as it was a priority in the polling from the Workshop.

Ms. Cooper suggested that there be a pilot effort to test the Survey before it is released to provide some assurances that respondents will understand the content.

Ms. Sunnarborg indicated that this was not part of the process in her prior experience with similar surveys but it bears further discussion. Ms. McKnight suggested a possible test group.

Ms. Espada proposed that the Survey include an optional question related to race, which Ms. Sunnarborg indicated could easily be added.

There was an interruption in the meeting at this point due to a technical problem, and it took a few minutes for members to return.

Brief Status Reports from Subgroups – Ms. Espada provided a list of members from each Subgroup. She then offered that the Capacity Building Subgroup had been slow in starting but was scheduled to meet twice in April. They will focus on the recommendations from the Public Education and Listening Session and Community Housing Workshop.

Ms. McKnight indicated that the first meeting of the Zoning Subgroup occurred on March 22nd and began with a review of existing zoning, particularly as it relates to multi-family and mixed-use requirements. The meeting also focused on MBTA Communities Guidelines, which will be further discussed at their next meeting, as well as the rezoning of a property on Hunting Road, which the Select Board referred back to the Planning Board. She added that the Survey results will be helpful in informing the Subgroup, and that they will also review zoning for ADUs, particularly the new bylaw that was adopted in Wellesley, and zoning related to group homes for young adults.

Mr. Mertz suggested that Working Group members may want to review comments that were submitted by Citizens Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) concerning the MBTA Communities Guidelines. Ms. McKnight recommended the review of the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) comments as well. She suggested that members need to also see the comments that were submitted by the Town to DHCD. Of particular concern is the draft timeline that would short-cut the time the Town normally requires in any rezoning effort.

Ms. Spector provided a summary of the four priorities of the Housing Development and Preservation Subgroup that included the NHA Modernization and Redevelopment Initiative, teardown activity, potential properties that might be suitable for development, and housing for seniors and those with disabilities. She added that the Town needs to consider how it can incentivize density to draw developers to Needham.

Ms. McKnight referred to Dan Matthews recommendation as part of the March 10th Working Group meeting to establish a Steering Committee, which did not precipitate a discussion at that meeting. She noted that, to date, the Working Group Co-Chairs and Town staff have met ahead of Working Group meetings on administrative issues and logistics. Given the extra layer of including Subgroups

as part of the planning process, including added work from most members, a Steering Committee will add to the complexity of managing the planning process. Mr. Cosgrove indicated that he was fine with this decision.

Ms. Cooper expressed concern that some members were lost when the meeting was interrupted and that a link to the second part of the meeting be made available to those who are no longer participating in this meeting.

Next Steps – Ms. Newman mentioned schedule for the next Working Group meetings from May through October was sent to members. The May meeting will focus on the results of the Survey, aspirational goals, and a 2020 census update. The June meeting will include a presentation by the NHA Board Chair, Reg Foster, on the Modernization and Redevelopment Initiative as well as reports from each Subgroup. The July meeting will involve further discussion on the finalized MBTA Communities Guidelines as well as a review of the strategic/quantitative goals. The August meeting will address the preliminary draft of the Housing Plan and will discuss the community-wide meeting to present the Plan that is scheduled for September.* In October, the Working Group will reconvene to discuss the community meeting, additional comments on the draft Housing Plan, and next steps towards approval and implementation.

9:19 p.m. **Motion: Ms. Espada moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. O'Brien. Unanimous: 7-0.**

*It was later decided to have no Working Group meeting in August and two meetings in September: a Working Group meeting on September 8 and the community-wide meeting on September 29.