

**NEEDHAM HOUSING PLAN WORKING GROUP**  
**\* MINUTES \***  
**May 26, 2022**

7:19 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 and Natasha Espada representing the Planning Board, Marcus Nelson and Heidi Frail from the Select Board, Michael O'Brien from the School Committee, Helen Gregory from the Council on Aging, Ed Cosgrove from the Board of Health, Carol Fachetti from the Finance Committee 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, and Community Housing Specialist Karen Sunnarborg.

**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](http://www.needhamma.gov/housingplan2021).

**Approval of Meeting Minutes**

**Motion: Mr. Cosgrove moved that the Minutes from the April 14, 2022 meeting be approved. The motion was seconded by Ms. Spector. Approved: 6-0 with Ms. Frail abstaining.**

**Report on Results from the Community Housing Survey** – Ms. McKnight indicated that the Community Housing Survey drew 234 responses and referred to the help provided by the Town's Public Information Officer, Cynthia Roy Gonzalez, with the Survey, especially outreach. She then proceeded with a review of the results. In regard to the first question, she indicated that Ms. Sunnarborg had reviewed the responses to the open-ended questions and tried to best categorize them. Ms. Fachetti asked if there was any data regarding the categorized comments such as a percentage of the responses. Ms. Sunnarborg replied that she did her best to highlight those responses that were most prevalent among the comments.

Ms. Spector suggested that the Working Group needs to decide what it means by affordable housing, and Ms. McKnight offered that specific definitions were included in the draft Housing Plan as well as the introduction to the Survey. Ms. Spector then questioned how the definitions will relate to the Housing Plan's goals

and the comments from question #3 of the Survey. For example, one of the comments in the Survey suggested the need to provide affordable housing for municipal workers and will that be a goal of the Plan? Ms. Espada responded that the Survey results provide some guidance on the goals, but it is up to the Working Group to determine the housing goals that will become a part of the Housing Plan. Ms. Espada further suggested that the Working Group must pay attention to the demographic of Survey respondents which were largely White, older, and homeowners. She added that while we tried to cast a wide net to get community input, we nevertheless ended up with a group of fairly homogeneous respondents.

Ms. Frail expressed her concern about how much of the information from the Survey is qualitative and how the Working Group will use the information and appropriately manage community expectations about what the Town can do to address housing issues. She was concerned that the Survey opened with a question regarding subjective definitions of affordable housing.

Ms. Fachetti pointed to the hairline differences between the levels of response to various actions included in the Survey such as the differences between the response rates on the fifth, sixth, and seventh highest levels of response regarding priority actions. She then asked what was meant by the conversion of larger properties which Ms. Sunnarborg indicated related to the conversion of larger single-family properties into multiple condos or apartments.

Ms. Cooper brought up the relatively high level of response related to the challenge of lack of political will in question #4. She asked about the Plan's scope, given so many local housing needs, and questioned whether we might end up with agreement on only a few minor actions that will not move the needle much when it comes to actual progress. Ms. Espada responded that the goals will provide a framework that will then suggest and group action items. Ms. McKnight added that the Working Group will have to use good judgement on the importance of relative housing needs. She further announced that Marcus Nelson and Mike O'Brien had joined the meeting.

**Discussion of Aspirational Housing Goals** – Ms. Espada referred the members to the list of housing goals that were included in the 2007 Affordable Housing Plan. This list was provided to members as a starting point for discussion. She read the first goal which Mr. Cosgrove suggested might be kept although Ms. Frail said she was not sure of what it meant. Mr. Mertz added that the goals were soft and could be interpreted in various ways. He further added that they might be too broad and required more focus but were still relevant. Ms. Cooper recommended that the goals be instead referred to as guiding principles and that they needed to be more specific like the ones she reviewed in Natick's Plan.

Ms. Espada facilitated a productive back and forth discussion regarding changes in the 2007 goals, editing the list on the screen as members proposed specific changes. The result of this discussion included the following list of guiding principles:

- To build a more diverse and welcoming community that includes residents of all ages, races, ethnicities, gender identification, sexual orientation, religion, abilities, and stages of life.
- To be a community having broad socio-economic diversity.
- To be an engaged community that actively shapes a vision for its housing future that is sensitive to regional considerations.
- To ensure that new housing is appropriate to its location and context.
- To provide opportunity for different housing types of a broad range of size and price.
- To enhance the vitality of our commercial areas to encourage walkability, commuting, shopping, services, socializing, and health.

**Update on 2020 Census Estimates** – Ms. Sunnarborg provided a PowerPoint presentation that summarized the results of 2020 census data as they related to demographic, economic, and housing trends, noting changes from the 2010 census data. Ms. McKnight said she was surprised by the reduction in the numbers of individuals who were living alone given developments such as North Hill and Wingate. Ms. Sunnarborg noted that those units are included separately under a group quarter category that also includes student dormitory units. Mr. Mertz asked whether we had this data, and Ms. Sunnarborg replied that it was detailed in the Housing Needs Assessment.

**Next Steps** – Ms. Newman mentioned that the schedule for the next Working Group meetings from June through October was sent to members. The June meeting will include a presentation by the Needham Housing Authority Board Chair, Reg Foster, on the NHA’s Modernization and Redevelopment Initiative as well as reports from each of the three HPWG Subgroups. The July meeting will involve further discussion on the MBTA Communities Guidelines as well as a review of the strategic/quantitative goals. There will not be an August meeting, but the September 8<sup>th</sup> 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 29<sup>th</sup>. In October, the Working Group will reconvene to discuss the outcomes of the community meeting, additional comments on the draft Housing Plan, and next steps towards approval and implementation.

Ms. Espada added that the Working Group has an aggressive schedule over the next few months and members should make sure to review meeting materials ahead of time to ensure productive meetings.

**Other Business** – Ms. McKnight mentioned that Mr. Scheideler stepped down from participation in the Zoning Subgroup given his demanding work as part of the NHA Board, including a search for a new Executive Director as well as the Redevelopment Initiative. Ms. McKnight asked if other members might want to serve on the Zoning Subgroup. Ms. Frail offered to serve, and Ms. Espada expressed her potential interest depending on meeting schedules.

**Approval of Membership**

**Motion: Ms. Espada moved that Ms. Frail be approved as a member of the Zoning Subgroup. The motion was seconded by Ms. Gregory. Approved: Unanimous 8-0.**

Ms. McKnight also indicated that there was a technical interruption in the last meeting, and some members were not present for a discussion about a proposed Steering Committee. She offered that the Co-Chairs had been meeting with staff ahead of Working Group meetings to discuss the agendas and other logistical issues and that the Subgroups were created to provide more substantive input into the planning process through the greater involvement of those able to commit more time and effort into the preparation of the Housing Plan. Ms. Espada added that she preferred this broader based involvement as opposed to the greater involvement of one or two members on a Steering Committee.

Ms. Frail responded that she was initially concerned that there was not a Steering Committee but feels better after this evening's meeting as she now has a better understanding of what the job is ahead. Ms. Spector added that she also feels better about the planning process. She stated that it took a lot of time to get to this place in the planning process with less reporting and a greater focus on the more important components of the Plan. She added that the meeting's work on the guiding principles was very productive.

Ms. Frail suggested that given the small sample involved in the Survey, the results should not become a foundation for making decisions on what is included in the Housing Plan.

Ms. Newman announced that following July 15<sup>th</sup> the Town will need to move off Zoom to in-person or hybrid meetings, and she is working out the logistics for future meetings.

9:30 p.m.

**Motion: Ms. Espada moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ms. Spector. Unanimous: 11-0.**