

NEEDHAM HOUSING PLAN WORKING GROUP
*** MINUTES ***
June 9, 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 at <https://www.needhamma.gov/housingplan2021>. Present were Jeanne McKnight and Natasha Espada representing the Planning Board, Heidi Frail from the Select Board, Michael O'Brien from the School Committee, Helen Gregory from the Council on Aging, 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, 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 then introduced staff.

As in previous meetings, Ms. McKnight indicated that public comments will not be entertained as part of this meeting, but there will be other opportunities for community input as part of the planning process. She emphasized that written comments continue to be encouraged.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Motion: Mr. O'Brien moved that the Minutes from the May 26, 2022 meeting be approved. The motion was seconded by Ms. Espada. Approved: Unanimous 9-0.

Summary of Needham Housing Authority's Preservation and Redevelopment Initiative – Ms. McKnight introduced Reg Foster, the Board Chair for the Needham Housing Authority, who offered a PowerPoint presentation on NHA's overall goals and objectives as well as how the Town can help meet these expectations. (The presentation is included in the project website noted above.)

Ms. McKnight thanked Mr. Foster for his presentation indicating that he offered some new ideas for the Working Group to consider. She pointed out that zoning relief might be needed in the area of the Linden-Chambers and High Rock developments in the case of developing more than two units per lot in the existing General Residence Zoning District. Some rezoning in connection with the MBTA

Communities Guidelines might be considered given the location within one-half mile of the Needham Junction commuter rail station.

Ms. Cooper remarked that the presentation was very helpful and suggested that NHA define how its plans would serve various target populations and impact the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). She added that new funding sources, such as American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, could be helpful in financing new development. She further mentioned that the NHA could enter into partnership with another private entity to undertake the work and offered an example of a project in Ipswich. Mr. Foster responded that these recommendations are on point, and the NHA does have more detail on target populations which it will continue to update. Additionally, establishing a public/private partnership is on the table for discussion, however, it is very important to the NHA Board that it continue to maintain ownership and fiscal control over its developments.

Mr. O'Brien also expressed appreciation for the presentation and asked if NHA was looking at how other towns were undertaking this work. Mr. Foster stated that other similarly-sized communities were struggling on how to improve their public housing and that, in fact, NHA is largely in the lead on tackling these problems. It is also why it has brought on the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) as consultant given its success in redeveloping more than 2,000 of its own units. CHA has also effectively advised several other clients including the Medford Housing Authority. He also indicated that at some point the NHA would like to sit down with the leadership at the School Department to discuss issues of common interest related to NHA activities, which Mr. O'Brien said he welcomed.

Ms. Espada asked about any capacity issues related to implementing NHA's Master Plan such as impacts on schools and infrastructure. Mr. Foster stated that the NHA will be identifying these impacts and mitigation measures as it makes progress on development plans. While work related to housing for seniors typically has less impact on Town services, family housing will have somewhat more local impact and is one reason the NHA would like to connect with the School Department at some point.

Ms. McKnight asked whether any redevelopment that would include new units at the Linden-Chambers project or High Rock would involve family housing. Mr. Foster replied that any redevelopment of the 152 units at Linden-Chambers would have to include at least 152 units for seniors or those with disabilities but any additional development is open for discussion. He added that some seniors do not like living among children.

Mr. Mertz offered his appreciation for the information on NHA's latest thinking about the work ahead and suggested that it might be useful to schedule a work session to set targets across the whole spectrum of local housing needs, to which Mr. Foster indicated he was available.

Progress Reports from Subgroups – Ms. Espada opened the next agenda item with a PowerPoint presentation from the Capacity Building Subgroup, sharing the presentation with Mr. O’Brien. (Details from all Subgroup presentations can be found on the Housing Plan website at www.needhamma.gov/housingplan2021.)

Ms. McKnight added that Town Meeting has allocated funding to undertake a parking study for the downtown that will be helpful. Ms. Espada added that traffic is a hot topic, and perhaps there is a need for a broad community traffic study.

Mr. Mertz suggested that the Town needs an overarching study of transportation goals including, for example, train hours, re-use of dormant MBTA rights of way, and shuttles. Ms. Espada asked Ms. Newman whether such plans exist to which Ms. Newman indicated that traffic management plans have been prepared on a project-by-project basis including any zoning changes. Ms. Espada commented that, in such a case, the analysis was thus being done on a more reactive rather than proactive basis. Ms. Frail suggested that it might make sense to expand the parking study beyond the Town Center and coordinate work with the MBTA.

Ms. Spector interjected that this discussion is helpful but the Working Group should stay focused on housing as we cannot solve all local problems in this Plan. Ms. Espada suggested that perhaps there should be a checklist for any new development that includes these wider issues. Mr. Mertz expressed his agreement with Ms. Spector and emphasized the importance of reinforcing Needham’s denser commercial spine in our analysis of housing opportunities, emphasizing how people move in the community is a critical component of planning work.

Mr. Foster interjected that it is unnecessary to get in the weeds on this topic, however, traffic and parking can be major barriers to new development. He offered that the Housing Plan might want to weigh-in on some of these issues including impacts on the High Rock School with any redevelopment work at Linden-Chambers or whether current parking requirements of multi-family development make sense.

Ms. Espada suggested that the agenda move on to the presentation of the Housing Development and Preservation Subgroup, which was offered by both Ms. Cooper and Ms. Spector.

Ms. Espada asked whether the Historic Commission has put anything together that might be helpful in our work. Ms. Spector indicated that while she does not know yet, she is setting up a meeting to discuss various issues related to teardowns and historic districts. Ms. McKnight interjected that the Town of Wellesley has a historic district along Cottage Street and such districts can exert enormous control over housing development and preservation efforts. She also indicated that Needham has special areas in town with older homes that have been the targets of teardown activity and asked whether such neighborhoods could be interpreted as meeting any historic preservation standards. Ms. Spector added that she lives in

the older Carter Mill area where she has witnessed a lot of older homes coming down.

Ms. Cooper stated that it is hard to find a home for less than \$800,000 due to teardown activity, but also understands concerns related being able to sell one's home at full market value. If you look at the range of incomes, Needham is losing its middle. She added that any significant constraints related to teardown activity might not make it past Town Meeting, but it might be worthwhile to explore historic preservation districts and a one-year demolition delay rather than the current 6-month demolition delay.

Mr. Mertz suggested that current dimensional controls in zoning are insufficient and mentioned Wellesley's Large House Review process which has delayed teardown activity. He also mentioned Milton's two-year demolition delay bylaw. Ms. Frail observed that there may be an appetite for increased zoning restrictions beyond what the Town approved through its Large House Study Review process several years ago, but it is hard to find agreement on more restrictive requirements that can be applied uniformly across the community. Moreover, some residents can find the introduction of historic preservation districts threatening.

Ms. Espada then suggested that the Zoning Subgroup offer its report, which was presented by Mr. Mertz.

Ms. Espada asked Ms. Newman about the Planning Board changes in density to the downtown, and Ms. Newman explained that the Center Business District (CBD) allows development of up to three or four stories based on proximity to Town Hall by special permit while the Chestnut Street Overlay District allows development of up to four stories, also by special permit. To include these areas as part of the Town's compliance with the MBTA Guidelines would require a conversion to by-right permitting as well as a study of dimensional requirements to ensure they meet the minimum density conditions.

Ms. McKnight added that recommendations not only focus on multi-family development but mixed-use development. While Avery Square zoning allows housing above retail uses, it may be necessary to increase the height limit to comply with MBTA Guidelines, and further study is needed. Ms. Espada offered that zoning in commercial areas has not sufficiently encouraged new development. She suggested that it may be useful to engage with local developers on what requirements are impeding development and what would be necessary to incentivize it.

Ms. McKnight summarized several recommendations that were not site specific related to Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and inclusionary zoning. Ms. Cooper expressed her support for the recommendations, and Ms. Spector also agreed that inclusionary zoning was important, however, questioned the potential impacts of ADUs. Ms. McKnight offered that current zoning limits the size of ADUs and

requires off-street parking. Ms. Frail added that ADUs must meet certain requirements that limit neighborhood impacts. Mr. Mertz stated that zoning in other communities has not resulted in large numbers of new ADUs, and they are also challenging to build within the configuration of existing homes. Ms. Spector expressed her continued concern about the size of the homes that are being built as part of teardown activity, and said she would like to see any changes in the ADU bylaw combined with FAR and other dimensional restrictions to control teardowns and reconstruction.

Ms. Espada pointed out that NUARI is very much interested in the issue of sustainability and efforts to ensure that there are no remnants of redlining provisions.

Ms. Cooper recommended a way of packaging ADUs as an alternative for seniors to downsize in their own home or move out of the primary unit of their house into an ADU.

Ms. Espada observed that there will be more opportunities for discussion on the recommendations and thanked everyone for their hard work. She then turned to Ms. Newman for next steps. Ms. Newman indicated that the July 28th meeting will focus on the MBTA Communities Guidelines, which hopefully will be finalized by then. It will also involve a discussion of quantitative/strategic production goals. After that Ms. Sunnarborg will provide a framework for assimilating the Subgroup recommendations into a draft Housing Plan which will then be reviewed at the early September meeting. The draft Plan is then planned to be presented at a community-wide meeting on September 29th, after which it will be finalized.

Ms. Espada asked whether it would be possible to invite developers to the July meeting or even the Historic Commission. Ms. Cooper suggested that she and Ms. Spector will try to get more information from the Historic Commission.

Ms. McKnight asked if the work of the Subgroups has been completed and whether there is some value in additional meetings. Ms. Newman said she would leave that up to the individual Subgroups, and Ms. Espada indicated that she would welcome more input from the Subgroups. Ms. McKnight suggested that the Subgroups remain in existence given remaining issues that deserve further work including further input from developers and local capacity issues, for example. Ms. Espada agreed and thanked the members once again for their contributions.

Ms. Clee announced that the next meeting might require having a quorum represented by members in person. She added that a hybrid model will likely be used and logistics are still being determined. Ms. Newman suggested that the Governor is considering extending the ability to meet virtually through December 2023.

9:40 p.m. **Motion: Ms. Frail moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ms. Gregory. Unanimous: 7-0.**