

NEEDHAM HOUSING PLAN WORKING GROUP

* MINUTES *

July 28, 2022

7:18 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 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, 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 may be brought into the meeting as they became available.

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.

Ms. McKnight also presented a revised meeting schedule for consideration. Because the Town has yet to receive the final MBTA Communities Guidelines from DHCD, their discussion has to be delayed. To avoid an August meeting and include the Guideline discussion as an agenda item, the schedule is proposed to be postponed by a month to September 8th. Additionally, any additional input from the Subgroups should be submitted no later than August 17th in order to allow adequate time for compiling the draft Housing Plan for review on September 29th. The community meeting would then be pushed back to October 13th with another Working Group meeting on November 17th to review comments from the community meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Motion: Mr. Mertz moved that the Minutes from the June 9, 2022 meeting be approved. The motion was seconded by Ms. Gregory. Approved: Unanimous 9-0.

Discussion of Strategic Quantitative Housing Production Goals – Ms. Sunnarborg explained that the Working Group agreed on guiding principles at its May 26th meeting that were qualitative or more aspirational concerning the Town’s future housing agenda. This evening the discussion focuses on more quantitative housing goals related to how the Working Group proposes to target unit production based on tenure (rental versus ownership) and types of households. She indicated that the meeting packet included sections from the Priority Housing Needs section of the draft Housing Needs Assessment as a context and starting point for this discussion.

Ms. Espada then guided members through several tables, the first of which showed the distribution of unmet housing needs, reflected by those with cost burdens (spending more than 30% of income on housing costs), by tenure, income ranges, and types of households. The second involved a first stab at translating these needs into a distribution of percentages of units to be produced by tenure and targeted populations that is largely reflected by bedroom size.

Ms. Spector asked for clarification regarding the definition of market affordable units which Ms. Sunnarborg said were units that were occupied by households who were not experiencing cost burdens as recommended earlier in the planning process by Dan Matthews. Mr. Mertz stated that most of the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) units likely fell into this category but were not market units and the column title should be changed.

Ms. McKnight asked whether the production goals for ownership units reflected multi-family development of condominiums. Ms. Sunnarborg responded that was largely the case, however, there may be instances of some smaller-scale developments of condos including the conversion of two-family homes or townhouses for example. Ms. McKnight indicated that some towns are promoting manufactured housing. Mr. Mertz mentioned that co-housing might be another alternative.

Ms. Espada asked if Needham Housing Authority (NHA) units were included as part of the table on unmet housing needs which Ms. Sunnarborg indicated was the case. Ms. Espada then mentioned the redevelopment opportunities of NHA properties, including the continued conversion of single-family homes to duplexes. Ms. McKnight offered that the High Rock area is currently zoned for two-family homes on a by-right basis. Ms. Espada also mentioned the opportunities posed by the MBTA Communities Guidelines, which will be addressed in the strategies section of the Housing Plan.

Ms. Cooper indicated that the production table might get into more detail regarding the distribution of income levels and types of households. Given what we heard in the public meetings and Special Education Parents Advisory Council (SEPAC) recommendations, it might be useful to breakout the younger disabled from the total commitment to special needs populations. Ms. Sunnarborg indicated that she

welcomed specific recommendations on the goals. Ms. Cooper also suggested that some of the unmet need of lower income homeowners might be addressed by the production of more affordable rentals. Teardown activity is also eroding the supply of the relatively more affordable ownership units in the community.

Mr. Mertz suggested that the recommended goals of 80% rental production to 20% ownership is a reverse of current conditions in Needham and thus represents significant systemic changes.

Ms. McKnight acknowledged that the Subgroups have more work to do and may have recommendations regarding changes to the production goals. Ms. Espada added that she will send out her notes on the discussion.

Ms. McKnight announced that the Town has received results from a Community Survey that indicated two in ten respondents cited problems regarding housing affordability. She urged members to review the survey results.

Discussion of Summary Spreadsheet on Strategies – Ms. McKnight reviewed a spreadsheet that was part of the meeting packet. She emphasized that it was a first start on a compilation of housing strategies, most of which had been discussed or recommended during the planning process. She stressed that the spreadsheet was a work in progress, initiated by Mr. Mertz. Most of the early input was on the first several columns.

Ms. Spector asked whether ADUs would still have to be in compliance with existing FAR and setback requirements, and Ms. McKnight responded that this was the case. Mr. Mertz suggested that there might be some consideration for incentivizing the creation of ADUs through zoning.

Ms. Cooper and Ms. Spector then presented a report from the Housing Development and Preservation Subgroup. This report provided more detail than an earlier report that was presented to the Working Group. Ms. Gregory was also part of the Subgroup.

In regard to the recommendation regarding changing zoning requirements to limit the construction of homes that are too large for their lots, due largely to teardown activity, Ms. Espada suggested that the Working Group needs to decide as a group whether to recommend this. Teardowns have changed the diversity and dynamics of neighborhoods, but others have voiced their opposition to further limitations as constraining the amount of equity an owner can receive upon sale.

Ms. McKnight provided a summary of the work that was undertaken by the Large House Study Review Committee several years ago. This Committee had a diverse representation of members from the community, including real estate and design professionals, which undertook a comprehensive review of Needham's demolition and replacement activity as well as zoning provisions in other communities. The

results involved a compromise that focused on ways incentivize better design including the additional of porches, bay windows and other architectural features, also with adjusted setbacks. Ms. McKnight indicated that there were intentions to study the effects of the zoning changes, however, with COVID-19, this research was stalled. Ms. McKnight added that while the zoning changes would unlikely have an effect on the number of teardowns, the effort tried to make them look better.

Ms. McKnight asked if there were any further questions or comments. Ms. Cooper asked about the expectations for the deliverables due by August 17th from the Subgroups. Ms. Sunnarborg replied that if the Subgroups wanted to further weigh-in on the spreadsheet of specific actions, including any additional narrative on their recommendations, this information would be due by the 17th. Ms. McKnight added that the recent report from the Housing Development and Preservation Subgroup might be considered their final report unless they had more information to present. She suggested that the Zoning Subgroup had some more work to do.

Ms. Espada indicated that the Capacity Building Subgroup will take a close look at the spreadsheet on actions. Mr. Mertz mentioned that the spreadsheet is meant to summarize all actions to be included in the Housing Plan.

Nest Steps – Ms. Newman restated the revised schedule.

Other Business – Ms. McKnight said that she had recently received an updated zoning map and asked if others would also like to receive one. The changes to the map included the rezoning of the Muzi site and Avery Square Overlay District. Mr. Mertz added that the former map had an incorrect scale which was hopefully adjusted.

9:20 p.m. **Motion: Mr. Cosgrove moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ms. Spector. Unanimous: 9-0.**