

NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

October 24, 2022

The Needham Planning Board meeting, held virtually using Zoom, was called to order by Adam Block, Chairman, on Monday, October 24, 2022, at 12:15 p.m., with Messrs. Alpert and Crocker and Mmes. McKnight and Espada, as well as Assistant Planner, Ms. Clee.

Mr. Block took a roll call attendance of the Board members and staff. He noted this is an open meeting that is being held remotely per state guidelines. He reviewed the rules of conduct for all meetings. All supporting materials, including the agenda, are posted on the town's website.

Discussion of Special Town Meeting warrant articles

Mr. Block noted the Planning Board has Article 9 on the warrant. They are allowed 5 minutes for a presentation. He has previously recorded an 8-minute presentation and today's will be more streamlined. Mr. Crocker noted he and Mr. Block went to visit a microbrewery. He is glad Mr. Block has maps with his presentation. He feels the maps will help. Mr. Block thanked Ms. McKnight for drafting the original language.

Mr. Alpert stated, on the town's Town Meeting website, the Select Board has posted a lot more information on the proposals for Article 11. He stated Marianne Cooley asked that he not bring his amendments to Town Meeting. She will speak on how it would not be conservation restricted at this time. She sent an email to Town Moderator Michael Fee requesting more than 5 minutes and he has asked that he be able to speak.

Mr. Alpert stated one major concern is the developer and the Select Board are agreeing to only 4 units or 5% being affordable. He may be happier if the Planning Board did not take a position as a Board. Mr. Block stated, if a position is taken, he would like it to be unanimous. This is a very simple purchase that ultimately protects 34 acres and creates a buffer for Whitman. He understands Mr. Alpert's reservations and is fine with that. Mr. Alpert noted the Board has taken a position of encouraging more multi-family units to allow seniors to be able to stay and young families to be able to afford housing in Needham.

Ms. McKnight spoke with Town Counsel on the percent of affordability. It would be a condo form of ownership and would decrease the amount the town would pay and more for Northland to pay. Town Counsel could not find any regulation as to affordable number of units for home ownership. There is no requirement. He broached with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and found the 25% is not hard and fast. He asked the lowest number the DHCD would approve, and they would not answer. They will decide what would be required once a developer comes back for the Site Eligibility Letter. There are limits on developers' profits. It is a condition of closing based on the project eligibility letter. There would be no age limit on the units, and they will market them with one bedroom on the first floor and 2 bedrooms on the second floor.

Mr. Block has not had an opportunity to look into this. The Board would have a role in the process with comments to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) when it comes before them or, if it fails, the developer would need to come to the Planning Board for subdivision control. Ms. McKnight stated she is in favor of this. She discovered what she calls the Bluebird Meadow. It is beautiful and gives access to the Charles River. Development alternatives would be like Heather Lane and Heather Lane Extension, where the Planning Board sought an easement that went down to the water, but the developer did not want to give that and the Conservation Commission did not insist on it. If this does not pass a developer may not give an easement to the river. The 2 parcels by the road would retain their trees and it would enhance the beauty of the road. The town needs more housing options for empty nesters that are accessible.

Mr. Block asked if the Board was going to take a vote on a position. Ms. McKnight is in favor. Mr. Crocker stated he still has questions. He would not vote in favor of a position. Mr. Alpert is comfortable taking a position on this article. They are voting on the funds to purchase if Northland can get their permits. He would propose a limited proposal to say the Planning Board is in favor of the Town being able to obtain 34 acres of open space land for \$2.5 million and tied into that is the Planning Board's stated objectives for the Town of encouraging multi-family housing geared toward seniors and young families. Mr. Crocker agrees with all Mr. Alpert said and also a percentage of affordable housing.

Ms. Espada agrees with Mr. Alpert. Finding out about this at the last minute has her disappointed with the process. She asked if members of other boards were part of this. She noted if it is not approved there may not be another chance to get land for the Town. The process did not give other boards a chance to participate. Mr. Block noted neither the developer nor the Select Board are required to come before them. The timing is difficult as the owners are looking to sell. Ms. McKnight stated the Select Board will not know what the percentage is that DHCD would require. It could end up being more than 4 affordable units. She gives credit to the sellers. The father was an environmental official with the state. The fact the family agreed to this is a credit to the family and the Town is working this out. She is glad they brought the documents out for the Board members to see. Mr. Crocker feels it is important for the Board, when taking a position, to have a process. He does not feel it is right to take a position as they have not been able to have a process. Ms. Espada is disappointed with the process. She would take a position as Mr. Alpert said and she agrees with Ms. McKnight that this is a rare opportunity to get land for the town. It will be a bonus and good for the town. The other part needs more investigation, and she does not know what that is.

A motion was made to vote to support Article 11 as the Planning Board is in favor of the Town having the ability to purchase 34 acres of open space land at the price of \$2.5 million. Mr. Crocker noted the problem is buying the land is not the only thing going on. He wants to be able to look into it further. Mr. Block stated he is not convinced the Planning Board has a role to play in the development process. Mr. Alpert stated there is one limited place when comments go to the ZBA. If the vote is not going to be unanimous, he withdraws the motion. Ms. McKnight suggested the Planning Board speak in support of Article 11 at the Special Town Meeting as the Planning Board is in favor of giving the Town the opportunity of purchasing 34 acres of land for \$2.5 million and furthermore, if a notice is presented to postpone action to a later Special Town Meeting, the Planning Board supports that motion. Mr. Alpert disagreed. It would not be postponed. He feels that is encouraging a referral. Mr. Crocker stated he cannot approve. He is ok with the second part to postpone to a Special Town Meeting so they can learn more.

Ms. Espada would like the town to buy land but encourage a better ratio of affordable housing and more participation. Ms. McKnight withdrew her motion as there was no second. She added the Planning Board hopes, in the process of seeking a site eligibility letter from DCHD, a higher affordable percentage would be approved of at least 10%. Mr. Alpert noted they cannot open up that discussion. It is not in front of Town Meeting tonight. That would be in front of the ZBA.

Report from Planning Director and Board members

Mr. Block noted Ms. McKnight and Ms. Espada have a meeting with the Housing Plan Working Group on Thursday at 7:15 p.m. via zoom.

Correspondence

Mr. Block noted a letter from Robert Onofrey, of 49 Pine Street, to Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick, regarding the Castle Farm development proposal and his opposition of the development.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Alpert, and seconded by Ms. Espada, it was by a roll call vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to stand in recess at 1:25 p.m. until the end of Town Meeting at 11:30 p.m. tonight at which time the meeting will be automatically adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

Jeanne S. McKnight, Vice-Chairman and Clerk