



Large House Review (LHR) Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 6, 2025
7:00 p.m.

Committee Members Present:

Artie Crocker Planning Board Member / Planning Board Designee
Jeanne McKnight Planning Board Member / Planning Board Designee
Heidi Frail Select Board Member / Select Board Designee
Marianne Cooley Select Board Member / Select Board Designee
Moe Handel Design Review Board Member / Design Review Board Designee
Nik Ligris Zoning Board of Appeals Member / Zoning Board of Appeals Designee
Bill Paulson Real Estate Broker appointed by the Planning Board
Paul McGovern Developer appointed by the Planning Board
Oscar Mertz Architect appointed by the Planning Board
Chris Cotter At Large appointed by the Planning Board
Rob Dangle At Large appointed by the Planning Board
Joe Matthews At Large appointed by the Planning Board
Ed Quinlan At Large appointed by the Planning Board
Tina Burgos Finance Committee Member / Finance Committee Designee

Staff Present:

Lee Newman, Director of Planning & Community Development
Alex Clee, Assistant Planner

Committee Members Absent:

1. Elect a Permanent Chair or Co-Chairs

Upon motion duly made by Nik Ligris and seconded by Paul McGovern, it was voted to nominate Artie Crocker and Moe Handel as Co-Chairs of the Large House Review Committee. By roll call, the motion passed unanimously.

2. Establish meeting dates

This was not directly addressed at this time.

3. Approval of meeting minutes

Hearing no significant changes, the Committee agreed to place the meeting minutes of December 30, 2024, on file.

4. Discuss the referral from Town Meeting Article 44

a. Does Needham's Current Definition provide adequate clarity?

46 The Committee discussed the Town's definition of FAR and if it is consistent with other nearby
47 towns. There was discussion regarding how the bulk of the structure is considered within the
48 FAR definition. The consideration is how to control the bulk, as the FAR requirements are not.
49 People are using more square footage than is considered within the FAR calculation. The
50 Committee noted that it should discuss how each lot should be built on for size.

51
52 There was discussion regarding creating working group or subcommittees to discuss the many
53 topics that the Committee is charged with. A goal of October for a potential draft bylaw was
54 discussed. It was noted that the recommendations would go to the Planning Board for further
55 refinement. The Committee could make a few feasible recommendations for the Planning Board
56 to discuss.

57
58 There was discussion regarding houses being built up relative to neighboring properties. This
59 could be an additional consideration after the group discusses height and FAR. The control
60 mechanisms need to be reviewed in terms of how they affect each site.

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62 **b. Does Article 44 address the clarity issue, if the current definition does not?**

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64 This was discussed as part of the previous agenda item.

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66 **c. What would it take to meet Town Meetings referral deadline?**

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68 There is a lot of work that the Committee will need to do in order to meet the referral deadline. It
69 will likely not have a full bylaw recommendation by May. The Committee discussed being able
70 to report on where it is in the process to Town Meeting in May.

71
72 **d. Assuming that the definition is changed, what are the appropriate F.A.R. for**
73 **standard and small lots?**

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75 This was discussed as part of other agenda items.

76
77 **5. Is there agreement on meeting the intent and reporting schedule implicit in the referral**
78 **from Town Meeting?**

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80 The intent is that the Committee has to have something to report on in May. This will likely be a
81 report of the status of the process.

82
83 **6. Analyze Survey Results. Review the Charge from the Planning Board**

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85 The Committee discussed the survey results. There was discussion regarding creating a Design
86 Review Board for some of the very large houses being proposed in Town. There may also be a
87 role for the ZBA in this process.

88
89 Nik Ligris stated that he believes FAR, and setbacks need to be considered. He would like the
90 Committee to propose options to the Planning Board regarding making FAR more conservative

and making setbacks paralleled on various size lots. The Committee will not be able to solve for every issue but could make some overall improvements.

Heidi Frail stated that she would like to see the FAR definition tightened to what the Committee believes it should be and determine what FAR should apply to. After making those decisions, the Committee could discuss if FAR allowance and setbacks need to be considered. Reality needs to reflect what is chosen.

Moe Handel stated that there is a concern with scale of a house not reflecting the surrounding scale and this is a reflection of FAR. The architectural impact on the surrounding neighborhood needs to be considered in the definition of FAR.

Joe Matthews stated that the draft bylaw text will discuss the FAR, setbacks, and height, but there could be a later clause to discuss any special circumstances such as manipulating the land. Items could likely be added into the bylaw in the future.

Regarding the survey results, the highest priority issues are size (volume) of house versus lot, too tall or too close compared to neighboring homes, too close to other homes, loss of smaller starter homes or homes for downsizing, and reduction in green space/loss of trees. The highest priority solutions are changing what counts toward FAR, changing the FAR limit, the process for measuring height, and looking at what part of a lot is buildable and should count toward a permit. The highest priority action items include summarizing outstanding issues still evident following the 2017 bylaw amendment, summarizing other town bylaws, and analyzing alternative zoning restrictions to address ongoing concerns.

Marianne Cooley explained that other towns with smaller lots seem to have larger setbacks from the street and sidelines.

The group discussed studying the number of teardowns that occurred pre and post the 2017 bylaw amendment. The development that has happened within this time period should also be considered, either using site walks or the spreadsheet calculations.

7. Define which issues in the Planning Board Charge can be addressed over what period of time

This was discussed as part of other agenda items.

8. If there is agreement that the “Large House Committee” should address the FAR definition in Article 44, agree on what material should be discussed at the next meeting-e.g. Mr. Quinlan’s spread sheet along with adjusting the FAR to provide for continuity while the other planning board charges are explored

The Committee reviewed Mr. Quinlan’s spreadsheet regarding FAR rules/tests. Mr. Quinlan explained that FAR seems central to all of the group’s discussions and so he created a formula to review FAR “tests.”

137 It was noted that the intention of the introduction of the FAR was to allow for more bedrooms on
138 smaller lots. In order to do this, it meant reducing setbacks and increasing the FAR. The FAR
139 values could be changed for various floors but only considering floors one and two will likely
140 lead to three or four floor structures.

141
142 The Committee discussed how to determine what the “bulk” on a lot should be. The simplest
143 way to do this seems to be using FAR. FAR’s definition is essentially bulk of a building. Mr.
144 Handel stated that the footprint and the height are the critical items to determine the bulk. The
145 group discussed measuring actual structures to determine what the FAR is and see if the delta has
146 increased over time. Feedback from developers could be sought once the suggested
147 recommendations are known in order to realistically consider any impacts. There was a
148 suggestion to review a chart of how other comparable towns (such as Lexington, Wellesley,
149 Concord, Winchester, etc.) handle the FAR calculation.

150
151 Marianne Cooley suggested that the Committee could focus on finding lots less than 10,000 s.f.
152 that have been developed within the last two years in various parts of Town in order to create
153 examples for review.

154
155 The Committee agreed to meet on the first Monday of each month, with the next meeting to be
156 February 3, 2025. There was agreement to form a small working group to discuss nonconforming
157 lots.

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159 Upon motion duly made by Oscar Mertz and seconded by Jeanne McKnight, it was voted to
160 adjourn at 8:50 p.m. By roll call, the motion passed unanimously.

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162 ***Next Public Meeting – February 3, 2025, at 7:00pm, location TBD***

163
164 *Respectfully submitted,*
165 *Kristan Patenaude*