



Large House Review (LHR) Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 18, 2024
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

Staff Present:

Lee Newman, Director of Planning & Community Development
Joe Prondak, Building Commissioner

Committee Members Absent:

Tina Burgos Finance Committee Member / Finance Committee Designee

1. Welcome and Introductions

Artie Crocker opened the meeting at 7:00pm. Committee member and Staff introductions were made.

2. Review of the Mission/Charge of the LHR Committee

The Committee reviewed its mission/charge.

3. Review of the Scope of Work and Timeline

The Committee reviewed its scope of work.

4. Overview of the Current Regulatory Framework

Lee Newman reviewed the current regulatory framework in the Single Residence B District as it relates to the dimensional standards. Much of this work came out of the Large House Study Committee in 2017. There was one set of rules created for new construction and another set of

rules for what was defined as not being new construction in order to give protections to some existing structures and allow them to be expanded in a way that was not available for new construction circumstances. New construction was defined as any structure that was built on a vacant lot or any construction where more than 50% of a building shell was demolished. There was a look back rule which stated that a demolition could be reviewed if it occurred within the previous two years. In the Single Residence B District and the General Residence District, for non-new construction, the lot size is 10,000 s.f., minimum frontage 80', and front setbacks 20'. An additional provision was introduced in 2017 that required that the garage be set back further than the front façade of the building. The side setback in both districts was 14', a provision added that, if the building was more than 32 linear feet along that sideline, an additional 2' setback would be needed, with the goal of trying to break up the massing. The rear setback was set at 10' for both districts. Maximum floor area ratio (FAR) was set for lots of less than 12,000 s.f. at 0.38 and for lots of 12,000 s.f. or more at 0.36. Lot coverage standards were created for both districts, and they varied as a function of lot size, with higher percentages for smaller lots. The range in Single Residence B District is between 25%-30% and in the General Residence District between 30%-35%. The reason for the greater percentage of coverage in the General Residence District was because that district also accommodates two-family dwellings.

There is not much distinction between the new construction and the existing houses. The rear setback was increased for the new construction. An existing nonconforming structure relative to the side setback is allowed to include an addition so that the side yard setback for a lot created before January 9, 1986, can be at 10' and 12.5' from lots created after 1986. This was designed to encourage people to put additions on nonconforming structures as of right. Under the existing zoning, FAR includes the first and second floors, with an additional allowance of 600 s.f. onto the garage. There was interest in how to enable market demand to happen in a way that was respectful to the existing neighborhood context by making adjustments to the massing on the buildings. There were also adjustments made as to how the height of buildings was measured. Two standards were introduced in 2017, such as measuring from the average grade and from a single point at the center line from the street. A maximum height of 41' was introduced.

The Committee discussed potential concerns. There is a concern regarding the overall massing and height of certain houses in terms of their neighborhoods. Marianne Cooley stated that she believes that smaller nonconforming lots that used to hold two or three bedroom houses and now hold 4+ bedroom houses that have built out the lots in terms of dimensional requirements are causing concerns. Heidi Frail expressed concern about not labeling the requirements well enough to ensure that what is in the regulations is being built. She suggested that the FAR could include everything within a house to match what is actually being built. There was discussion regarding simplifying the regulations to make them more easily understandable.

There was discussion regarding determining and reducing the visual bulk of a house, as it presents to the street and neighborhood. The group discussed the size of houses built in Needham and why smaller homes are not often built.

Joe Matthews stated that he drafted a report of other town's bylaws which, he will send to the Committee. Other bylaws seem to state that any space intended to be occupied should count as square footage. He previously proposed that any space with a ceiling space over 5' should be

included in the square footage. A definition for the counted space should be determined. Also, the appropriate size of the house should be considered. The Committee may want to consider reducing the 35' maximum height, but it is unclear what impacts this may have.

There was discussion regarding preserving the starter stock in Town.

The Committee discussed creating small working groups at a future meeting.

5. Questions and Comments

As discussed during the meeting.

6. Schedule and Next Steps

The Committee discussed a future meeting date and agreed on January 6, 2025, at 7pm, location TBD.

Upon motion duly made by Oscar Mertz and seconded by Moe Handel, it was voted to adjourn at 8:56 p.m. By roll call, the motion passed unanimously.

Next Public Meeting – January 6, 2025, at 7:00pm, location TBD