NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

February 25, 2025

The Needham Planning Board meeting, held virtually using Zoom, was called to order by Natasha Espada, Chairman, on Tuesday, February 25, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. with Messrs. Crocker, Alpert, Block and McCullen, Planner, Ms. Newman and Assistant Planner, Ms. Clee.

Ms. Espada noted this is an open meeting that is being held in a hybrid manner per state guidelines. She reviewed the rules of conduct for all meetings. This meeting does not include any public hearings and public comment will not be allowed. If any votes are taken at the meeting the vote will be conducted by roll call.

Discussion and Vote to submit to the Select Board Zoning By-Law and Zoning map change to Floodplain district.

Town Counsel Christopher Heep reported he received a notice from the federal government with updates to the mapping of the flood plains in town. New maps were sent and the town is required to update their flood plain maps. The requirements on how to regulate flood plains have changed. There is a notice to update the terms of the By-law in order to be consistent. The town has until July to comply. He noted there are professional staff at the state who are responsible for evaluating zoning amendments for consistency with federal law. Ms. Newman submitted the map to the state and asked for suggestions on what needed to be done to bring it into compliance. He included a list in the packet. The existing flood plain zoning is on the books. Ms. Newman stated she fixed discrepancies but did not update the packet. A public hearing has been scheduled for Thursday, 3/27/25. The Board needs to vote to send the Article to the Select Board so they can refer it back at their 3/11/25 meeting so the Planning Board can hold the public hearing on 3/27/25.

Upon a motion made by Mr. McCullen, and seconded by Mr. Alpert, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:
VOTED: to send the Article to the Select Board for referral back to the Planning Board.

Minutes

Upon a motion made by Mr. McCullen, and seconded by Mr. Block, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:
VOTED: to approve the minutes of 1/21/25.

Upon a motion made by Mr. McCullen, and seconded by Mr. Block, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:
VOTED: to approve the minutes of 2/4/25.

Correspondence

Ms. Espada noted the following correspondence for the record: a memo from Nathan Carlucci, the MBTA Communities Compliance Coordinator, noting approval of the Action Plan submitted on 1/24/25 and an email from David Hruska, dated 2/2/25, including an article on the housing crisis.

Report from Planning Director and Board members

Ms. Newman noted she had submitted the Action Plan to the state, it was approved and the town is now in compliance. It is on the Warrant for the Annual Town Meeting. The Floodplain zoning is being coordinated with DCR. Now that it is voted she will send it to DCR to look at to make sure all is accomplished so they can do a preapproval. Mr. Block stated, with regard to Wrentham, a determination was made by the Office of the Auditor. Mr. Alpert noted the Attorney General said the next day the Auditor was wrong. Mr. Block asked what the significance is. Mr. Alpert stated he is not up on this, but he had a talk with Ron Ruth and they agreed it was an unfunded mandate. He looked up unfunded mandates and it is not clear. Mr. Alpert noted the Wrentham Case cites a case he took a quick look at. It seems the only recourse towns have for unfunded mandates is to go to the Superior Court to get a court order for the Commonwealth to pay for it. Then it is a town by town decision to fund the mandate. He is not sure how much that would cost. Mr. Block is not sure if a developer has the option to compel the state to pay for infrastructure if it was required. Mr. Alpert does not think a private party can.

Mr. Alpert noted there was a meeting last night of the Town Manager Search Committee in Executive Session. They had multiple resumes, some excellent. There is an excellent consultant coordinating this. He knew a lot of applicants personally which was good. The Committee chose a number of applicants to interview. That will be done on one day. At the end of the day, the members will determine which to send to the Select Board. The Committee wants to send 3, 4 or 5, then it will become public at that point. Ms. Espada asked if there was a diverse pool and was informed it was very diverse. Mr. Block asked, as the Planning Board representative on the Committee, what criteria is most important to Mr. Alpert. Mr. Alpert stated he is not really looking at it from the Planning Board point of view. It has in the Needham Charter criteria that is strict. The applicants need at least a Bachelors degree in town governance and preferably a Masters degree and have extensive experience already in town government. The Town needs someone with experience. Mr. Block asked Mr. Alpert what experience is most important to him. Mr. Alpert feels someone who has already been a Town Manager in a relatively large size town. He is looking for another Kate Fitzpatrick. Is the person a politically motivated person or focused on just getting the job done.

Ms. Espada noted the 3/4/25 meeting has been canceled and stated there are a lot of upcoming meetings. Mr. Crocker noted the Large House Committee had its 4th meeting. They have analyzed 15 houses and filled out a survey form on observations of the houses. Ms. Clee is putting together a matrix to pull all responses together. The working group is meeting Thursday to review. Monday the group will try to figure out how to measure houses for bulk. All the houses were visited separately and the members will talk about it Monday night. Mr. Block would like a summary of the research conducted by other towns for dimensional regulations. Mr. McCullen asked if there has been more conversation toward looking at a fiscal impact analysis. Mr. Crocker stated that is a line on the agenda. They are forming another working group to look at the fiscal analysis. Mr. McCullen asked if that would include an external consultant. Ms. Newman stated the group will discuss that and make a decision. Mr. Alpert asked if Mr. Crocker was trying for something for the Fall Town Meeting. Mr. Crocker stated that is the goal but he would let the facts dictate when they can effectively bring something to Town Meeting. Mr. Alpert stated, if looking for a fiscal impact, he feels they would reasonably be looking at May 2026. He commented the 4/1/25 meeting will be his last meeting. Mr. McCullen asked if the members had thought about what the statement would be for the May Town Meeting with regard to Large Houses. Mr. Crocker stated that is also a line item for the Large House Committee. They will need a report ready for the May Town Meeting. There will be a summary of what they are looking at and how they are looking at it.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Crocker, and seconded by Mr. Block, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:
VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

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Artie Crocker, Vice-Chairman and Clerk