



Large House Review (LHR) Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, March 31, 2025
7:00 p.m.

Committee Members Present:

Artie Crocker Planning Board Member / Planning Board Designee (Co-Chair)
Moe Handel Design Review Board Member / Design Review Board Designee (Co-Chair)
Jeanne McKnight Planning Board Member / Planning Board Designee
Heidi Frail Select Board Member / Select Board 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 Dangel 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:

Nik Ligris Zoning Board of Appeals Member / Zoning Board of Appeals Designee
Marianne Cooley Select Board Member / Select Board Designee

1. Approval of meeting minutes.

Upon motion duly made by Moe Handel and seconded by Jeanne McKnight, it was voted to approve the March 30, 2025 meeting minutes. By roll call, the motion passed unanimously.

2. Report of Working Group on work program accomplishments from the past month.

It was noted that a new group of conforming lots will be presented at the next meeting. A second tour and survey will then be completed.

3. Presentation of the Wellesley Large House Review Program by Tom Taylor, Wellesley Planning Board member.

Mr. Mertz introduced the Chair of the Wellesley Planning Board, Tom Taylor. He reviewed the baseline mansionization ordinance for the city of Los Angeles, which regulates the scale of new construction in single-family residential neighborhoods. The ordinance encourages the retention of existing homes and limits the size, height, and mass of new houses in order to encourage greater compatibility.

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47 Tom Taylor explained that the Large House Review was created in 2007 due to concerns with
48 the size of homes being built and the impact on neighborhoods. This included a definition of
49 TLAG (Total Living Area + Garage) and its applicability. The review was updated in 2010 to
50 redefine it to include finished area above ground. The changes at that time added attic
51 space/mass if tall enough to be useful space, added a basement fraction if the basement was more
52 than 25% above ground, and added drainage as a review standard. In 2017, the TLAG definition
53 was adjusted to eliminate the 600 s.f. garage exemption. He asked if Wellesley could use the
54 FAR ratio or another calculation to set a limit in order to avoid subjectivity, but it seems that
55 Town Meeting wanted to allow property owners the opportunity to plead for unique situations if
56 the result was deemed to meet the standards and “character.” There are five districts in Wellesley
57 that are applicable to the Large House Review.

58
59 For each Large House Review, the Planning Board assesses six broad criteria: preservation of
60 landscape, scale of buildings, lighting, open space, drainage, and circulation. Applicants are
61 expected to consider how their projects will impact the six criteria and discuss how they have
62 designed the dwelling and site to minimize negative impacts on surroundings.

63
64 TLAG is a metric to try to gauge the mass of a structure and visual impact on a neighborhood. It
65 includes first floor living space/volume, garage space, second floor living space/volume, third
66 floor/attic volume (if 5’ or more headroom), and a basement proportional to the amount of house
67 exposed. The Building Inspector is a starting point for the analysis. If on a non-conforming lot,
68 this is forwarded to the ZBA for review/approval of a Special Permit finding or variance. If the
69 request is on a conforming lot and includes a one unit dwelling in the Single Residence and
70 General Residence districts, or a two-unit dwelling or townhouse in General Residence and is
71 above the TLAG threshold for the zoning district, then it will be sent to the Planning Board for a
72 Large House Review (LHR).

73
74 LHR also requires Design Review Board hearings, a Wetlands Commission review and Order of
75 Conditions, if applicable, and a ZBA Special Permit or variance, if applicable. Waivers can be
76 allowed for one or more of the criteria. LHR can be triggered if additions within three years of
77 construction take the TLAG over the threshold. Building height must be not more than 36’ from
78 the lower of either the average grade prior or the average grade new. There is no dispensation to
79 encroach setbacks or other zoning rules. The Tree bylaw calculations and required payments are
80 not applied to LHR applications. LHR reviews trees in the entire property, not the “tree yard”
81 (perimeter). Replacement Diameter at breast height (DBH) is generally expected, but the Board
82 can approve a project with less, and discussion often focuses on saving high-value trees.
83 Accessory dwelling unit (ADU) square footage is not exempted from TLAG applicability.
84 Regarding drainage, there is a general expectation, but it is not specifically codified, that the
85 house will capture and recirculate all or most of building and driveway stormwater.

86
87 Mr. Matthews noted that Needham has 70-80 teardowns per year. There could be 20-40 LHRs.
88 He asked how long the review process takes. Mr. Taylor stated that there are five employees in
89 the Planning Department and approximately half of all reviews are LHRs. Each typically runs 2-
90 3 meetings. These reviews can drag on for multiple meetings. Neighbors generally participate in
91 each meeting. The Planning Board meets 2-3 times per month.

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93
94 4. Oscar Mertz to share some details from Wellesley Large House examples.
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96 Mr. Mertz reviewed some Wellesley Large House examples. The Needham Large House list was
97 reviewed using the Wellesley calculation.
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99 5. Questions and Answers with Tom Taylor.
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101 Mr. Taylor explained that he believes the Wellesley LHR calculation is a bit complicated which
102 can cause issues to arise. Overall, though, it is considered a positive thing by the Town. A
103 concern of Wellesley is that there are no starter homes or smaller homes to downsize into.
104

105 Mr. Crocker asked if environmental impacts are considered in the LHR process. Mr. Taylor
106 noted that this does come up, but most applicants choose appropriate materials and seem
107 cognizant of this.
108

109 Mr. Crocker noted that he believes Needham needs a light bylaw.
110

111 There was discussion regarding taking Wellesley's calculation and adapting it to fit Needham.
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113 Mr. Mathews noted that this Committee was formed in May 2024, and it should be working
114 toward a time deadline. The group could work towards draft language to be considered for fall
115 Town Meeting. Ms. Frail expressed concern with the public hearing process and there being
116 enough public input prior to Town Meeting. There should be a schedule with goals that the
117 Committee is working toward. Mr. Crocker agreed that October does not seem practical. The
118 Committee needs to gather enough data to justify any conclusions.
119

120 There was discussion regarding finding another town comparable to Needham to have a
121 discussion on the process with.
122

123 6. May 2025 meeting schedule.
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125 The Committee agreed to meet on Wednesday, May 21st.
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127 Upon motion duly made by Heidi Frail and seconded by Oscar Mertz, it was voted to adjourn at
128 9:02 p.m. By roll call, the motion passed unanimously.
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130 *Respectfully submitted,*
131 *Kristan Patenaude*