



Large House Review (LHR) Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, May 21, 2025
7:00 p.m.

Committee Members Present:

Artie Crocker Planning Board Member / Planning Board Designee (Co-Chair)
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
Joe Matthews At Large appointed by the Planning Board
Ed Quinlan At Large appointed by the Planning Board
Marianne Cooley Select Board Member / Select Board Designee
Jeanne McKnight Planning Board Member / Planning Board Designee
Heidi Frail Select Board Member / Select Board Designee
Tina Burgos Finance Committee Member / Finance Committee Designee
Chris Cotter At Large appointed by the Planning Board

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
Moe Handel Design Review Board Member / Design Review Board Designee (Co-Chair)
Rob Dangel At Large appointed by the Planning Board

1. Approval of meeting minutes.
None at this time.

2. Report to the Planning Board

Paul McGovern explained that there was a meeting with the Planning Board during which there was discussion regarding the dimensional regulations that are up for consideration. There was also discussion regarding the upcoming schedule and items required.

3. Share Identified LHR Group Member Goals from the April 7 meeting survey.

Joe Matthews reviewed the goals from the April 7 survey. These include preservation of the character of neighborhoods, smaller houses, improving communication in terms of feedback from residents, and understanding the issues at hand.

4. Review of Survey Results of Conforming Lots.

Oscar Mertz explained that this survey was intended to review the conforming, 10,000+ s.f., versus non-conforming, 7,000-10,000 s.f., lots. A set of properties that were increasingly on

larger lots, 10,000 s.f. and up were considered. 8 out of 17 of the lots in the survey were considered too big, either bulky or too tall. For a few more houses deemed “50/50”, the gable fronts were perceptively read as tall and marginally impacted the survey results. Finally, four lots were considered okay, and these all happened to be houses that were “under-building” or NOT building to maximum FAR allowable on their lots.

The Committee reviewed the survey results for each lot and discussed the results. There was discussion regarding what contributed to the perceived bulk of each house on the lot, such as how the gables present to the street and third garages.

Regarding the value of houses, it was noted that smaller houses are being built in Wellesley and being sold for higher amounts than in Needham. Based on this data, a potential cap on house size will likely not impact value and sale of new houses in Needham. There is value to build houses that fit into a neighborhood. The Committee discussed inviting builders to a future meeting to hear their thoughts and reactions.

Joe Matthews explained that the lot sizes from 10,000 s.f. to 10,800 s.f. were at the FAR limit and relatively close to the lot area limit as well. Also, if nothing else is changed and the FAR is counted for the first, second, third floors, and the garage, there may not be a large impact other than making the resulting houses somewhat smaller.

5. Review and Discussion: Schedule of Large House Review Committee through year end.

The Committee discussed its upcoming schedule.

6. Review and Discussion: Draft agenda for June 9 Community meeting, community survey, and outreach protocol.

Oscar Mertz suggested a high level introduction regarding the mission of the Committee and then a breakout into smaller table groups that are moderated by Committee members to receive feedback on certain prompts. This can then be reported back to the larger group, with a follow up discussion.

The Committee discussed how it would create a survey ahead of the meeting in order to be discussed before and after the community meeting.

7. Update on RFPs.

Lee Newman explained that the intention is to hire a consultant by the beginning of June. Staff is also looking into a fiscal impact study.

Upon motion duly made by Heidi Frail and seconded by Oscar Mertz, it was voted to adjourn at 9:17 p.m. By roll call, the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude