



Large House Review (LHR) Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, June 23, 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
Jeanne McKnight Planning Board Member / Planning Board Designee
Chris Cotter At Large appointed by the Planning Board
Moe Handel Design Review Board Member / Design Review Board Designee (Co-Chair)
Rob Dangel 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
Marianne Cooley Select Board Member / Select Board Designee
Heidi Frail Select Board Member / Select Board Designee
Tina Burgos Finance Committee Member / Finance Committee Designee
Ed Quinlan At Large appointed by the Planning Board

1. Approval of meeting minutes.

Upon motion duly made by Moe Handel and seconded by Oscar Mertz, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes of June 2, 2025; and June 9, 2025, as amended. By roll call, the motion passed unanimously.

2. Debrief from Community Meeting

The Committee discussed the community meeting. There seemed to be emphasis on not disrupting housing value. There were some concerns raised regarding large houses. There was nothing heard that conflicted with the issues being addressed by this Committee. There was some concern expressed regarding setbacks and lack of privacy. It will be important to speak to the data gathered in order to show what is needed for the Town. The online discussion centered a lot regarding trees and negative externalities of new larger houses. The spacing and feeling regarding privacy and light pollution was also discussed.

3. Review of survey results

Paul McGovern stated that it appears there were between 1,100-1,200 individual responses. 50% of those respondents have lived in Needham for more than 20 years. The responses to each survey question were reviewed. Individual comments included those regarding a loss of affordable or starter homes and concern that teardown practices eliminate smaller, older homes which once served as affordable starter or retirement homes. Residents emphasized that large homes may price out young families, middle income buyers, and downsizing seniors. There were a lot of comments regarding the negative environmental impacts including concern of flooding and poor drainage, loss of mature trees, and negative effects on stormwater management. Another common theme was the neighborhood character anesthetic, which many residents believing that new, large homes are out of place and overshadow neighboring homes creating a cookie cutter appearance. There were many comments regarding the perceived displacement of socioeconomic diversity and concern that Town policies favor developers and high income buyers. There were mixed views on property rights and market forces, with some residents strongly defending homeowner rights to maximize their property values and build as large as the bylaw allows, with others advocating for more stringent regulations to protect neighborhood quality and livability.

Keith Anderson, 156 Fair Oaks Park, asked if the data has been made public. Alex Clee stated that she will pass along where the information can be found on the website. Keith Anderson stated that he believes there will be more vocal and concerned citizens coming to upcoming Committee public engagement sessions.

Jeanne McKnight stated that the comments mentioned potential historic districts and garages being prominent on larger houses.

4. Selection of appropriate regulatory tools

There was discussion regarding potential items to consider for regulatory tools, including: the FAR ratio, changing the definition, and setting a potential limit; including the garage; rules for minimum setbacks; height (33'); and lot coverage.

There was discussion regarding counting basements in the FAR and potential unintentional consequences.

Joe Mathews stated that he would like the basement to count in the FAR calculation.

Upon motion duly made by Paul McGovern and seconded by Moe Handel, it was voted to continue to use and examine the existing criteria for setbacks, lot coverage and height; and to use a revised definition of FAR to include the garage, first floor, second floor, third floor (built out or not, anything greater than 5 feet tall), and exposed basement at 25% (garage is included if it is in basement). By roll call: Crocker – aye; Paulson – aye; McGovern – aye; Mertz – aye; Matthews – nay; McKnight – aye; Cotter – aye; Handel – aye; Dangel – aye.

5. Special permit requirement?

Oscar Mertz explained that Needham may face issues in terms of determining how to deal with bulk. An out clause, or opportunity to allow for space outside of these reductions, may need to be considered. A special permit process could be inserted which would allow for additional public and abutter comment periods along with various requirements.

There was agreement to continue to consider this option.

6. Modeling framework

Oscar Mertz stated that the intention is to create 3D comparisons to show an existing house and potential changes. These will show three different reductions that shrink the FAR, coverage, and height. This will demonstrate investigation as to how the parameters can be used while showing the visual differences of those changes.

7. Update on RFP & Consultant

Lee Newman stated that the RFP for the modeling was submitted, and no responses were received. The RFP was put out again with responses due on Friday.

The group reviewed correspondence received.

Upon motion duly made by Moe Handel and seconded by Oscar Mertz, it was voted to adjourn at 8:52 p.m. By roll call, the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude