



Large House Review (LHR) Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, August 4, 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
Oscar Mertz Architect appointed by the Planning Board
Joe Matthews At Large appointed by the Planning Board
Moe Handel Design Review Board Member / Design Review Board Designee (Co-Chair)
Heidi Frail Select Board Member / Select Board Designee
Ed Quinlan At Large appointed by the Planning Board
Marianne Cooley Select Board Member / Select Board Designee
Paul McGovern Developer appointed by the Planning Board
Chris Cotter At Large appointed by the Planning Board
Jeanne McKnight Planning Board Member / Planning Board Designee

Staff Present:

Alex Clee, Assistant Planner

Committee Members Absent:

Nik Ligris Zoning Board of Appeals Member / Zoning Board of Appeals Designee
Rob Dangel At Large appointed by the Planning Board

1. Welcome and Introductions

Introductions of Committee members present were made.

2. Approval of meeting minutes

Upon motion duly made by Moe Handel and seconded by Heidi Frail, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes of July 21, 2025, as amended. By roll call, the motion passed unanimously.

3. Update on RFP & Consultant; establish fiscal analysis working group – *The Committee took up this agenda item*

Heidi Frail noted that the background for the RFP mentions that many smaller existing houses on small lots are being torn down and replaced with very large expensive new homes. It goes on to talk about the economics of the renovations or replacements. She explained that it was not the affordability of houses that prompted this but rather the aesthetics and massing of homes. While there was an impact on affordability and accessibility, the primary reason this was brought to the Town's attention was the aesthetics and a feeling of crowding in the neighborhood. The point of this RFP is to review the economic impact, and she suggested divorcing the RFP a bit from the

social aspect. Artie Crocker agreed that the RFP is a fiscal impact study, but he does not see anything written that is incorrect. Marianne Cooley agreed with Heidi Frail that nothing the group is reviewing deals with affordability, and it would be misguided to believe that any changes made would impact affordability. Jeanne McKnight suggested listing the visual impact first in the paragraph.

Alex Clee, Assistant Planner, stated that the RFP is already out and changing the wording may not be possible at this time. Heidi Frail stated that she would like the fiscal impact to be completed agnostically. She would like wording to be more neutral in the future. Joe Matthews stated that he is skeptical of the exercise. It is unclear if someone who is good at both house evaluations and municipal finance will be found. Staff would like to create a working group for this RFP review.

4. Modeling presentation

Oscar Mertz introduced Steve Watchorn, Raymond Design Associates, Inc. (RDA), consultant on the project. Oscar Mertz explained that three sample houses on varying lot sizes between 7,500 sf and 10,000 sf were selected for the study. The study reviewed three levels of house “bulk” reduction for each sample house. The study was able to adjust the limits for selected dimensional controls including FAR, lot coverage, and height. The reduction studies used 3D modeling to visualize the various levels of change. The presentation for this evening is considered in progress and includes two of the three houses being studied. This study and presentation are the work of RDA, the Town’s consultant.

Marianne Cooley stated that she would have liked to see a picture or massing of the original house that was torn down in order to compare it to the large house. Oscar Mertz stated that he believes this could be added.

Mark Gluesing, 48 Mackintosh Avenue, stated that he tried to sketch a new house within the proposed models created. The last reduction led to smaller bedrooms and only 2.5 bathrooms, but the models could contain the houses.

Joe Matthews stated that he would like the dimensional calculations for the stock houses to be included, as those stock houses used are not from Needham. Heidi Frail stated that what is next to the houses is not as important as the changes to the houses themselves. Oscar Mertz suggested including one smaller house and one larger house on either side for comparison.

Oscar Mertz explained that this is an approach to modeling how houses would change. The Committee can extract from this how to measure FAR and lot coverage from certain reductions. This leads to an FAR which is flexible but still reduces the bulk. Those control mechanisms allow for an extraction of a modified FAR and lot coverage range. This exercise will allow the Committee to see how these changes look on three houses on different sized lots. This allows for a sliding set of controls.

90 Moe Handel stated that what he liked about the Wellesley system was that it provides an escape
91 valve for someone who needs an exception, and it gives the affected homes around the lot in
92 question the opportunity to participate in a public hearing on the project.

93
94 The Committee discussed that there were approximately two more public hearings before a
95 recommendation is supposed to be made to the Planning Board. There will also be a public
96 meeting in September. It is unclear when there will be information available from the fiscal
97 analysis. The Committee discussed having additional meetings with other towns to hear how
98 they handle this topic.

99
100 There was discussion regarding counting the garages in the FAR and the model showing
101 reductions in the garages. Marianne Cooley stated that she is concerned with height and
102 mounding on the lots, as this does not seem to have been solved for yet.

103
104 The Committee agreed to potentially add a meeting on August 25th if the financial analysis
105 information is available for review.

106
107 Upon motion duly made by Heidi Frail and seconded by Moe Handel, it was voted to adjourn at
108 8:56 p.m. By roll call, the motion passed unanimously.

109
110 *Respectfully submitted,*
111 *Kristan Patenaude*