

**Town of Needham
Board of Selectmen
Minutes for April 7, 2018
Center at the Heights
300 Hillside Avenue**

10:00 a.m. Call to Order:

A meeting of the Board of Selectmen was convened by Chair Marianne B. Cooley. Those present were Daniel P. Matthews, John A. Bulian, Maurice P. Handel, Matthew D. Borrelli, and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick.

10:00 a.m. Informational Session on Public Safety Building Project:

Ms. Cooley gave a brief history saying the Town has been working on the Police and Fire Safety project for over a decade, with an anticipated override to come before voters in the fall 2018. She said notice of a Planning Board zoning hearing was sent to some residents on March 30, 2018, acknowledging the Board of Selectmen could have held a neighborhood meeting sooner. She noted the Board of Selectmen have held many public meetings for neighbors mainly about the fire stations, recognizing many people in town are not fully aware of the scope of the project.

Ms. Cooley stated a \$69,000,000 override is expected, with Needham paying 100% of the project and comprising a police station and two fire stations. She commented there are many moving parts of the plan, but separate and related, is the communications system replacement project. Ms. Cooley explained the current communication system consists of an antenna on the cupola of the downtown station, the Tower Hill water tank, the Birds Hill water tank, and on private sites at North Hill, Walker School, and on Second Avenue in Needham. She said coverage is inconsistent and failing due, in part, to growth in Needham. Ms. Cooley stated in order to replace the current system the Board of Selectmen made a request to the Planning Board for zoning changes supporting public safety communications on town owned property. She said the request is for the Town to have the ability, within the wireless communications overlay district at the RTS, to have a tower up to 199 ft. high. She said for other municipal property outside of the wireless communications overlay district, the request would allow the Town to put up structures up to 120 ft. high on municipal property for public safety communications. Ms. Cooley said a feasibility study was completed culminating in a recommendation noting the Board of Selectmen, at this time, is not seeking a permit for siting of the towers. Ms. Cooley said requests for zoning is a multistep process, reiterating the first request is for zoning supporting the Town's ability to put a network in place on town property for public safety. She said another request in early 2019 will be for specific siting locations.

Ms. Cooley said many residents are concerned the Town will lease capacity on towers to cellular carriers but, she said, that is not something that has been supported by the Board of Selectmen in the past, nor in the future. A series of

photographs was shown indicating what a 120 ft. high monopole would look like at current sites. A schedule of key dates and a series of design photographs was shown.

Mr. Matthews emphasized points made by Ms. Cooley reiterating two fire stations and police headquarters built in the 1930's are badly out of date. He said an average fire truck today is twice the size of a fire truck of the 1930's, noting difficulty maneuvering in or out of each station. He commented many issues including building code standards, operational and technological needs, laws, staffing needs, and the number of emergency calls handled today are significantly different from when the buildings were built in the 1930's. The goal, he said, is to replace two fire stations and police headquarters, ultimately lasting for 50 years because public construction is enormously expensive. He stated within the project is the communication system built into each building and connected to infrastructure. He said the current system does not cover Needham entirely, and the hazards are known to public safety staff, which the Town is trying to address. Mr. Matthews commented doing the project "al la carte" would be more costly and take longer to complete. He said the plan as described is the best recommendation from the consultants, PPBC, Police Chief, and Fire Chief. He said he believes the Town is on the right track, but the project has a long way to go with zoning hearings, a vote by Town Meeting, and a vote by residents whether or not to provide funding. He said he is hopeful folks recognize the Board of Selectmen is doing what is best for the Town, and that the Board is here to listen to residents.

Ms. Cooley commented many questions have been received as to the safety of microwaves. She noted the option put forward is already in place in many communities across the world and is believed safe. She asked for comment from the Board of Health.

Stephen Epstein, MD, Needham Board of Health commented, like many residents, he questioned the safety of microwave. He said he has no doubt the public safety benefits from the system will far outweigh any risk from microwave. However, he commented, the Board of Health will look at the system and report any findings to the public.

Ms. Cooley invited public comment.

Resident, Birds Hill Avenue said she needs to understand the risk facing the public before agreeing with Dr. Epstein that the benefits outweigh the risks.

Resident, Birds Hill neighborhood pointed out medical research continues evolving. He commented there are several links on the CDC website saying some of the research is inconclusive, but important to realize that does not mean it will be the case in the future. He stated all factors need consideration, noting good public safety communication is important for Needham. He said the key question is whether the system is appropriate for residential areas.

Amy Brown 176 Hillcrest Avenue asked who the consultants are on the project, examples from the police and fire departments as to the communication challenges faced over the last year, and alternative options considered. Ms. Brown asked the size of the monopole base and about the system used in other towns.

Dennis Condon, Fire Chief commented the biggest issue with the current network is the number of weak connection areas due to topography (Fire Station 2/Temple Beth Shalom/Needham Crossing/Charles River Street). He said Fire Station 2 often does not have connectivity to Fire Station 1. Chief Condon said if communication is poor during emergency situations, someone could lose their life.

Ms. Cooley added the current system is strung on telephone poles, creating communication outage issues if lines go down during a storm.

Michael Centola, 12 Hoover Road clarified it is not that people can't contact 911, but rather that the police and fire cannot communicate with each other during an emergency.

Bjorn Steffensen, 11 Dunster Road said he heard about the project a week ago and is disappointed with the Town's communication, especially since the project has been worked on for over 10 years. He asked how many trees will be cut down, clarification on safety issues, and the location of each pole/tower. Mr. Steffensen asked for a study on the effect on property values. He said it appears the Town is rushing to make a decision.

Ms. Cooley commented no trees are planned to be cut, acknowledging exact siting has not been determined. She said, as far as understood, no data suggests these towers have any impact on property values.

Resident, commented he appreciates the work of the Board of Selectmen. He stated distance affects potential health issues. He concurred with another speaker and the importance of reconsidering siting in other areas or the industrial park.

Steve Mortimer, 58 Dunster Road supports a better communication system, but not siting locations at water towers. He said the Board of Selectmen should not be given zoning flexibility while there are open questions. He commented if cost and jurisdictional control are an issue and going to be born by the perceived risk of safety or esthetics by neighbors, and a study cannot be cited as to safety or affect home values, then the cost will be born by all the neighbors and the decision will not be reversible once it is made.

Courtney Olson, 147 Thornton Road said the process has been rushed, noting her father, an electrical engineer, got cancer. She said she will never be convinced it will not be a public health issue for residents in surrounding areas. She reiterated the police and fire departments need to communicate, but the Town cannot sacrifice

the potential health and well being of people surrounding the towers so that other people are safe. She said there is a lot to consider.

Paul Alpert, 116 Pine Street, member of the Planning Board explained his understanding of the process saying the Planning Board will hold a public hearing on Monday, April 9, 2018 in Powers Hall. He said the Board is not required to vote that evening, but could vote at its next meeting on April 24, 2018 in order for zoning articles to be considered at Town Meeting. He commented options for the Planning Board to consider include voting to amend the language of the warrant article, voting not send it to Town Meeting, or making amendments. Mr. Alpert invited residents to attend the Planning Board hearing.

Hannah Denton, Birds Hill neighborhood asked the current and proposed power output, as well as the frequency. She asked whether the system continually emits power or only when being used.

George Kent, PPBC Chairman explained the system will be 11 GHz or 18 GHz at 120 ft. above the ground. He said by the time any microwave signal reaches ground level, it is 1,000 to 10,000 times less than the value at the microwave. He commented on current FCC regulations and, nationally, the system is considered the best and safest for communications, and used by about all public safety operations. Mr. Kent clarified the towers will be 2ft. - 3ft. in diameter.

Ms. Cooley said no lights are required on the towers/poles.

Chris Jantzen, 55 Dunster Road suggested the issue is being rushed, recognizing good work has been done. He commented on the decline in property values and for the least restrictive alternative imposing the least amount of effect on people. He said the least restrictive alternative is renting space on towers along Route 128.

Ms. Cooley commented on the schedule and timing of the project.

Judy Strimish, resident said the argument that there is no risk to her is invalid as her bedroom is near the top of the tower. She said she feels vulnerable, and changing zoning without talking to residents first is not good.

Michael Ruddy, resident said two network components exist (microwave network and access network). He stated the “dead spots” are in the access network i.e. the communication systems for personnel. He said his concern is the microwave network and 11 GHz to 18 GHz is a tremendously high frequency. Discussion ensued on the current copper network used by the Town and sites already being connected by a fixed line. He asked if current fixed line providers (RCN, Comcast, or Verizon) were contacted and solicited for a quotation.

Ms. Cooley said it is a great question and she will get the information.

Ken Wegner, 27 Dartmouth Avenue asked if the signal at fire station is so poor, why isn't there a tower at that location? He suggested a giant sequoia tree as a disguise.

Sandy Smith, 193 Hillcrest Avenue noted her work in the technology industry, saying communication towers simply do not belong in residential neighborhoods, and there are alternatives. She asked for zoning regulations to explicitly state "excluding residential areas from consideration."

Resident, 24 Dartmouth Avenue suggested finding sites not in residential areas, and the issue will go away.

Peter Pingitore, 146 Hillcrest Road said overwhelming sentiment is towers should not be located in residential areas. He asked what does the current cell tower overlay district look like. He commented the Town is looking to acquire a property on Lincoln Street for more parking spaces, suggesting tax money should be used to acquire property, perhaps, in Needham Crossing to site the cell towers. He commented Tower Hill and Birds Hill are suffering the consequences of allowing amendments to by-laws for development of Needham Crossing. He said incremental industrialization and urbanization of the neighborhoods must be considered, urging the Selectmen site the towers somewhere other than in residential districts.

Resident, Dartmouth Avenue agreed with a previous speaker that too much is unknown, including health risks and property values, reiterating the towers should not be located in residential areas.

Felix Zemel, 14 Donna Road supports public safety and communications. He is concerned about the health risks, and said it is scary to hear the towers may be in densely populated areas. Mr. Zemel said placing towers in neighborhoods must be reconsidered, especially considering new construction standards require commercial buildings provide bi-directional amplification.

Ben Ostrowski, 56 Morningside Road said the Town is on a slippery slope of opening itself up to unknowns in the future. He announced he drafted 2 petitions asking folks for signatures and to attend the hearing on Monday, April 9, 2018 and tell the Planning Board not to push the project forward.

Gray Brown, 176 Hillcrest Road commented buildings can be built with 50 years of foresight, but technology continually changes, suggesting microwaves may not be used in 5 years

Steve Mortimer, 58 Dunster Road requested residents receive the feasibility study before considering zoning requirements.

Carl Saslow, 155 Hillcrest Road referred to the timing of the zoning meeting and site selection, asking will the zoning process going forward restrict any siting decisions that might be made later in terms of height, if it were determined a higher tower would do a better job?

Ms. Cooley said Mr. Saslow is correct in that the zoning process sets the parameters for what is permitted to be designed.

John Cross, 123 Pine Grove Street commented he has not heard a commitment to publish information about possible alternatives. He asked if the Town considered alternatives to owning their own network?

Ms. Cooley said that information will be made available.

Gregg Duthaler, 40 Dunster Road thanked the Board for their service and supports a strong safety communication system for Needham. He commented he works at a major consumer electronics company, noting technology is adopted as fast as possible to deliver value to customers. He said high GHz are not in homes for a reason and should not be in a residential neighborhood. He stated he is a strong advocate of technological progress, but is not comfortable with the proposed technology. He agreed with Ms. Smith's suggestion to consider different innovative solutions. He said a better option must be found.

Allyson Brierley, 165 Hillcrest Road said children in the neighborhood continually climb the fences around the water tower. She commented basic safety must be considered. She supports towers in nonresidential neighborhoods.

Laurie Hutcheson, 384 Hillcrest Road asked if the Board could consider a temporary alternative so that the schedule is not delayed, and to allow more time to consider the communication aspect of the project?

Ms. Cooley thanked residents for attending and for their comments.

Mr. Matthews spoke about the process, schedule, and design, including a communication system. He said current zoning regulations have height limits on the kinds of towers allowable, although there is some ambiguity with what limits apply to municipal and commercial use. He stated the request the Board of Selectmen made to the Planning Board is to advance to Town Meeting zoning to increase height limits for municipal uses only, not commercial. Mr. Matthews commented different boards and committees are involved in the project, but Town Meeting ultimately controls changes to by-laws and appropriation for the project. He noted beyond Town Meeting, citizens will vote for an override, noting the project will not move forward without general consensus in Town as to how to proceed. Mr. Matthews said questions asked today must be resolved. He continued discussing the process, commenting on an upcoming Planning Board meeting on Monday, April 9, 2018, and what will happen if the request makes its way to Town

Meeting where a 2/3's vote is required for passage, and the role of the PPBC. Mr. Matthews commented on the effect on the schedule and a suggestion for postponing the project. He said the Board of Selectmen must carefully consider comments by residents in order to earn the support of the public, or find changes supported by the public to meet the goal.

Mr. Bulian said alternatives need to be considered, as it too fast, too soon, and the public needs to be comfortable with the project.

Mr. Handel agreed alternatives must be considered. Mr. Handel said his preference would be to establish a communications network that will work to meet the safety needs of the Town, but avoid placing towers in residential neighborhoods.

Mr. Borrelli agreed with Mr. Bulian. He said it is not fair on neighbors to move forward until all options are understood.

Ms. Cooley thanked residents for their comments, closing the meeting at approximately 12 noon.

A list of all documents used at this Board of Selectmen meeting are available at:
<http://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=99&Type=&ADID=>

Submitted by:
Mary Hunt, Recording Secretary