

NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

January 7, 2020

The regular meeting of the Planning Board held in the Charles River Room, Public Services Administration Building, was called to order by Martin Jacobs, Chairman, on Tuesday, January 7, 2020, at 7:04 p.m. with Mr. Owens and Ms. McKnight, as well as Planning Director, Ms. Newman, Assistant Planner, Ms. Clee and Recording Secretary, Ms. Kalinowski. Mr. Alpert arrived at 7:10 p.m.

Mr. Jacobs informed the Board members he has asked former member Bruce Eisenhut to seek the appointment to fill the spot for the short term that has been left vacant by Ms. Grimes' resignation. Mr. Eisenhut has agreed and will go through the necessary process.

Highway Commercial 1 rezoning: discussion of next steps.

Mr. Jacobs noted a couple of members of the Finance Committee who are at the meeting. He explained that the article failed at Town Meeting. He understands the Finance Committee was split. Mr. Alpert arrived at 7:10 p.m. Mr. Jacobs stated he wants to see what can be done for the Finance Committee to support this. He noted the Board is on a path to bring it back in the Spring but may decide not to after speaking with the Finance Committee. He noted the Planning Board had a meeting and explained they had the Planning Director put together a list of concerns that had been brought up. They include too much height, density, traffic, too many cars, access only off Gould Street, no residential, there should be a park, the uses were not thought out, there was no specific development proposal at the Special Town Meeting, the study came too late, the visuals were ineffective and it should have been said what is allowed now by right. He noted that whole area of town is under pressure between the Northland project in Newton, possible developments at the former Acapulco's site and a site across from the Temple as well as road improvements.

Tom Jacob, of the Finance Committee, stated the big issue is the traffic study and its brevity. The traffic presentation did not go well. His concern with the Finance Committee was it was not clear what the financial impact would be. It appeared incomplete. Dick Reilly, of the Finance Committee, stated it was primarily a process issue and not substantive. They received the necessary information too late. Mr. Jacob stated information comes too late and there is no time to update and question. Hopefully with additional funds they will get the information in a timely manner. He is also concerned there is no plan to address traffic if the study shows failures.

Ms. McKnight stated the traffic study recommended certain improvements. Is the concern the study did not say how much it would cost? Mr. Jacob did not think the study was thorough enough. He hopes the new study will clarify those. Ms. McKnight asked if it would have helped if the Board had described that they would require contribution to the cost of traffic improvements. Mr. Jacob stated he feels some Town Meeting members would want guarantees, which the Planning Board could not give. Mr. Reilly stated there was less skepticism on the Finance Committee level than the Town Meeting level.

Mr. Jacob stated he appreciates the Planning Board inviting them. He thinks having the studies done and giving the Finance Committee time to chew on it would be good. He thinks this meeting is a good first step. He feels something that was lost was if nothing was done it puts the town at a disadvantage. The Board should describe what happens if nothing is done and that the town would have less control. He feels the trust gap may be bridged a bit if there was an estimate of what the cost is were put out there.

Mr. Owens stated it was interesting hearing where the breakdown was with the Finance Committee so he can understand the process and information. The Board cannot guarantee anything. They need to balance the project versus the economics. He appreciates Mr. Jacob and Mr. Reilly coming to the meeting. Mr. Jacobs reviewed the by-law amendment schedule. Adam Block, President of the Needham Heights Neighborhood Association, stated the community meeting is an opportunity for the Finance Committee to participate and partner. He invited the Finance Committee members to attend. Mr. Jacob asked if the Planning Board could put together a schedule of

when the reports would get to the Finance Committee. Ms. Newman anticipates having the reports available at the public hearing in March.

Mr. Block stated the Needham Heights Neighborhood Association will email their membership. He called both newspapers for notification of the meeting. He will also get other suggestions of where to post notices. He drafted a letter to Town Meeting members and others in the neighborhood. Ms. Newman informed him the Town Clerk emails all Town Meeting members. Mr. Owens feels it would be better for the Heights Association to have the meeting and invite the Planning Board. Ms. McKnight agreed. She can send a notice to the League of Women Voters. She noted if there are wetlands at the immediate corner of Highland Avenue and Gould Street could it be developed. The Board needs to know if the Conservation Commission would deem it wetlands.

Minutes

The changes were given to Assistant Planner Alex Clee.

Correspondence

Mr. Jacobs noted the following correspondence for the record: a notice sent to the Select Board regarding the vacancy; a copy of a 12/2/19 Needham Times article regarding Children's Hospital; a Wicked Local article, dated 1/2/20, regarding the Indoor Skydiving facility and a Needham Times article on the Planning Board to send the zoning proposal back by Trevor Ballantyne.

Report from Planning Director and Board members.

Ms. Newman noted there are 2 projects pending. She met with Attorney Roy Cramer. He has a developer that wants to do assisted living, memory care and independent living at the Carters site. He will be looking for some zoning changes. The developer would like to add a 4th floor to a portion of the building in the back for 10 independent living units. She feels it is a nice, sensible project. There will be minimal changes to the building itself.

She noted the other project has a developer looking to demolish a one story building across from the Temple next to the condos and build a 3 story medical office building with underground parking. Mr. Jacobs stated he received communication from a Town Meeting member urging the Planning Board to expand the traffic study area all the way down to Central Avenue and down Central Avenue. Mr. Alpert stated he is in favor of that. Traffic is bad on Central Avenue going over the river into Newton. Mr. Owens asked how far the traffic study went for the Sunita Williams School.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Alpert, and seconded by Mr. Jacobs, it was by the four members present unanimously:
VOTED: to approve the nomination of Jeanne McKnight as Vice-Chairman.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Alpert, and seconded by Ms. McKnight, it was by the four members present unanimously:
VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

Jeanne S. McKnight, Vice-Chairman and Clerk