

Minutes
LARGE HOUSE REVIEW STUDY COMMITTEE
Wednesday March 16, 2016 8:00 AM
Charles River Room, Public Services Administration Room
500 Dedham Avenue, Needham

Members Present: Elizabeth Grimes, Krista McFadden, Mark Gluesing, Gary Kaufman, Jeanne McKnight, Gary Lesanto, Jeff Heller, Marianne Cooley, Imogene Hatch, Lindsay Acomb and Jeff Kristeller; and Lee Newman, David Roche, Karen Sunnarborg, Alexandra Clee, staff.

Not Present: Jon Schneider

The meeting was opened by Committee Chairperson, Elizabeth Grimes, at approximately 8:10 a.m. Ms. Grimes noted a copy of an article from the Needham Times published on March 3, 2016. Ms. Grimes asked if there were comments or questions on the minutes from the February 26, 2016 meeting. Ms. McKnight suggested a few revisions. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the February 26, 2016 meetings of the Large House Review Study Committee, including the suggested revisions.

Ms. Grimes asked Mr. Gluesing to review the strategies that the working group has been studying. Mr. Gluesing noted the packets that the committee has had for a few weeks. He did a quick review of the current approach.

Ms. Hatch stated that she thinks it is important for the Committee to keep in mind that the effects of increasing lot coverage town wide can be substantial in terms of the town's overall impervious surface. For example, on a 10,000 square foot lot, the increase of 25% to 28%, that about 300 square feet additional per lot. If 100 houses a year are being rebuilt, if every one utilized that extra lot coverage, it would be an increase in an acre in impervious surface. It is a balancing act that the Committee should consider. The water bans in effect in the summer is directly related to the town's water resources.

Ms. McKnight asked if there are any controls about paving. She said there could be an offset by increasing lot coverage and decreasing paving, but since there isn't control over it, that wouldn't work. Ms. Hatch agreed and added that driveways are the biggest influence on the impervious area of an average single family house lot. Ms. Newman said we don't have anything in our By-Law regarding paving; Newton has an open space standard in its By-Law that talks about how much paved surface that are allowed. Mr. Roche explained that the Town has conducted a study of the soils town wide. Mr. Kristeller said that the point about drainage is important and that there are easy things that could be done, like recharge systems; but it's not the Committee's charge. He does think lot coverage should be increased for zoning purposes to allow flexibility for a master on the first floor.

Mr. Lesanto added that he supports the increase in lot coverage for a different reason. He thinks it could also be used to include stairs to basement in the garage, as opposed to a bulkhead. He

thinks drainage should be dealt with by focusing on drainage, like recharge systems. Ms. McFadden agrees that the flexibility of lot coverage is a good thing looking forward, not knowing what future trends would be.

Mr. Gluesing said that he did go back and look at houses on the original list the group looked at after Ms. Hatch mentioned this previously. He said that some houses didn't even go up to the 25% lot coverage, so he doesn't think everyone will be increasing the lot coverage by all that would be allowed. Ms. Hatch said she thinks the subjects are related and worth thinking about.

Ms. Cooley said that the impact is actually more than an acre. If you look at the house that is being knocked down, it is generally much smaller than a house at 25% lot coverage. She added that the issue should be framed slightly differently for the stormwater conversation.

Mr. Kaufman said he thinks most people would not build a first floor master. Additionally with a first floor master, people would be able to age in place, which could have a benefit on the schools.

Ms. McKnight asked Mr. Roche if there is currently a rule that says we cannot increase runoff from a residential property (she knows we do for commercial property). She inquired, if there is not such a rule, how quickly the town will have such a rule in place. Mr. Roche said the town does not have a rule; it falls back on Mass General Law which says that a person cannot willfully direct water onto someone else's property. He added this is impossible; all properties disperse water onto each other. It's usually applied to new grading or drainage patterns on a lot, like regarding or mounding. He asks builders to grab the roof water, and he has not had any push back from any builder, and it's being done on most of the properties. It would not take much to put a residential stormwater by-law in place; he thinks the town wants to just have an official calculation regarding roof size and type of drainage system.

Ms. Grimes asked Mr. Roche if he is in favor of the lot coverage increase. He said in other towns, lot coverage is considered all impervious surface, including driveways, tennis courts, etc. at about 35% lot coverage. He said he sees both sides. The lots are already maximized. Needham's lots at 10,000 square feet is already small.

Ms. McKnight said that she can see support for increasing lot coverage for houses with the argument that we will have the tools in place at some later time to control for drainage later, so she is comfortable. Mr. Roche said that maybe the residential drainage by-law can include a provision to calculate the impervious coverage and design the recharge system accordingly. Mr. Kristeller said it is important for the town to get focused on this issue.

Mr. Kristeller also commented that the tree issue that the Committee looked at a while back is also an important issue. Ms. Grimes said that members of the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen are working with the Tree Warden, Conservation Director and Building Department on the issue of tree removal and a possible tree regulation. Mr. Lesanto asked about what the tree regulations would look like, who would enforce them etc. Ms. Grimes said they are down that far yet. Mr. Roche said he talked to the Tree Warden and have some thoughts about how it could be worked into the process.

Mr. Gluesing said that they thought about measuring height that way because of the mounding and controlling some of the water pathways that are created by it.

Ms. Grimes said that she wants to get a feel for the group's feeling on the approach. She added that they will be having public meetings, including one for builders and realtors. Mr. Kristeller said that he is comfortable with going forward with everything they've discussed. Mr. Lesanto said he thinks they are ready. Ms. McKnight asked for clarification about the front setback averaging. Mr. Kaufman said he liked Ms. Cooley's suggested that the builders and realtors meeting happen before the public meeting. Ms. Grimes agreed that it is important and Mr. Gluesing said he's interested in getting some feedback.

Ms. Hatch asked what the outreach process will be for the meetings. Ms. Newman said that for the community meeting, it is a memo to every Board member, to every town meeting member, a notice in the paper, notice to League of Women voters, etc. For the builder meeting, the building department would help create a list.

The Committee discussed dates of the community meetings. They group decided that the Builder/Realtor/Professional meeting will be on April 5, 2016 at 8:00 a.m. The next Committee meeting will be on April 27, 2016. The Community Meeting will be held June 1, 2016 in the evening.

Ms. Grimes introduced Ms. McKnight who wrote a memo regarding non-conforming houses with regard to setbacks. Ms. McKnight said that if the house that is on the property is already non-conforming with respect to setback, that, with a finding from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) that the new house is not more detrimental to the neighborhood than the old house, the new house can be built. She presented a case from Gloucester, MA. So, it's continuing the nonconformity, even if it's bigger. If the Board finds that it is more detrimental to the neighborhood, then it can't be built. She added that she believes the cases presented in the memo apply. Mr. Gluesing said that if a house is much bigger, set at the same nonconforming setback, it would seem likely that it would be found more detrimental.

Ms. Acomb asked what the next step is after this public meeting. Will there be another meeting in the fall. Ms. Grimes said the next step will be to write the zoning and then review it and have a meeting around it in the fall. Ms. Acomb asked if the Committee will look at additions and renovations. Ms. Newman said yes, the Committee will need to decide if new construction will still be separated out or not. Mr. Roche said he would like new construction to be the same as additions. Ms. Newman said separating it out could add incentive to put on an addition.

Mr. Heller asked if the data about increased cost as previously discussed will be available. Ms. Grimes said she will work on it and make it available in advance of the next meeting.

Wrap up – The next meeting was scheduled for April 27, 2016, with the presentation for Builders, Realtors and other professionals scheduled for April 5, 2016. The working group will work on the presentation. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:20 a.m.