

NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

May 20, 2025

The Needham Planning Board meeting, held in the Highland Room at Needham Town Hall, and virtually using Zoom, was called to order by Natasha Espada, Chairman, on Monday, May 20, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. with Messrs. Block, McCullen, Crocker and Greenberg, Planner, Ms. Newman and Assistant Planner, Ms. Clee.

Ms. Espada noted this is an open meeting that is being held in a hybrid manner per state guidelines. She reviewed the rules of conduct for all meetings. This meeting includes two public hearings, and public comment will be allowed. If any votes are taken at the meeting the vote will be conducted by roll call.

Reorganization and Committee Appointments

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. Greenberg, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to nominate Mr. Crocker as Chairman and Mr. McCullen as Vice-Chairman.

Mr. Crocker took over as the Chairman of the meeting.

Public Hearing:

7:00 p.m. – Scenic Road Act: Peter Giannacopoulos, 11 Edgewater Drive, Needham, MA, Petitioner (Property located at the corner of Edgewater and South Street (11 Edgewater Drive, Assessor’s Map 201, Parcel 48). Regarding request to remove four (4) existing trees along South Street at the corner of Edgewater and South Street, and to replace them with six (6) new trees.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. McCullen, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to waive the reading of the public hearing notice.

Peter Giannacopoulos, owner, worked with Tree Warden Ed Olsen and Arborist Michael Logan to see what the town would like to see. The town proposed 6 trees, and he added another 20 arborvitae so his house and the scenic road are an improvement. Ms. Newman noted the Tree Warden approved the plan and recommended certain species. Mr. Crocker stated Building Commissioner Joseph Prondak had no comment, Police Chief John Schlittler had no comment and Engineering had no comment.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. McCullen, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to close the hearing.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. McCullen, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to approve the plan as submitted tonight.

Mr. Crocker asked the Board members about their committee assignments and if they intend to stay on the committees. Mr. Block will stay on the Council of Economic Advisors and the Community Preservation Committee. Mr. McCullen is on the Mobility and Planning Coordination Committee, Mr. Crocker is on Envision and the Tree Committee, Ms. Espada is on the Stephen Palmer Committee and Mr. Crocker is on the Large House Committee along with Planning Board designee

Jeanne McKnight. Mr. Crocker noted the first Large House meeting is 6/9/25 with a public hearing with questions and answers.

Minutes

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. McCullen, it was by a vote of four of the five members present (Mr. Greenberg abstained):

VOTED: to move passage and adoption of the minutes of 3/27/25, 4/1/25 and 4/15/25 as drafted and presented in the packet tonight.

Public Hearing:

7:15 p.m. – Amendment to Major Project Site Plan Review No. 2013-02: Town of Needham, 1471 Highland Avenue, Needham, Massachusetts, Petitioner (Property located at 1407 Central Avenue, Needham, Massachusetts). Regarding proposal for a new building addition of approximately 12,400 square feet, as well as the renovation of roughly 1,800 square feet within the existing storage garage to create a dedicated tire maintenance bay.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. McCullen, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to waive the reading of the public hearing notice.

Tyler Cofelice, Senior Project Manager with Weston & Sampson Engineering, Inc., gave the project background. They were hired to do an existing conditions and master plan for 470 Dedham Avenue. Several deficiencies were identified such as no sprinklers and poor ventilation and it is undersized for storage area requirements. The site is plagued with flooding. There is a phased renovation plan with the first phase relocating from 470 Dedham Avenue to the Jack Cogswell site. The wetlands have been reflagged. The proposal is to renovate the far east bay to a tire maintenance bay and just off that bay they will add a 12,000 square foot pre-engineered metal building with storage, maintenance garages and supporting offices, a break room and parts room. A covered exterior wash pad will be off the southern end. There will be pretty significant ledge removal. There is a large swathe of natural and forested trees between Central Avenue and the building to be kept in place. The proposed dumpster location is in the rear.

Mr. Cofelice noted there is a proposed generator and sound wall. One goal is to have a fully electric net zero building. There will be ground source heat pumps. A maximum of 4 wells with a test well done this summer are being proposed. Proposed roof top solar will be on the addition and the existing building. There will be a sewer line extension with a gravity drain to the corner of Central Avenue to the entry to a pump station. The grade comes up from Central Avenue to the building so the building will not be able to be seen from the intersection. There will be 4 bay doors with one being a drive through. Stormwater management is being proposed and has been reviewed with the Conservation Commission. There will be 2 systems – one on the left and the existing basin is being expanded. Eleven trees will be removed with the wetland buffer area and will be replaced 2 to one with 22 additional trees in the wetland buffer zone.

Mr. Cofelice noted there will be 6 full-time employees and 3 divisional vehicles. There are 12 parking spaces planned and some spaces have been set aside for temporary parking for a total of 18 spaces for the facility. He noted a traffic study has been submitted along with a sound study on the noise from the proposed generator. The building will act as a buffer as well as the sound wall. Mr. Crocker asked how the sound study was performed. Mr. Cofelice noted the sound engineer put sensors out in the field to get the background noise then modeled the site building and topography. Sound levels were established at these locations. Mr. Crocker asked what the wall was going to be made from. Mr. Cofelice noted it will be a simple sound wall, 10 feet high, supported by vertical high beams with sound attenuating panels in between. Mr. Crocker asked the height of the generator and was informed 8 feet. He asked if there was going to be anything on the building to attenuate the sound reflection. There will be nothing above the standard building materials. Fencing is being proposed along the top of the ledge wall and sound attenuating panels could be added. Mr. McCullen asked if the generator was for emergency power only with monthly testing. He wants to make sure the testing happens during the daytime. Mr. Sargent stated the testing will be done during the daytime, once a week for 15 or 20 minutes.

Mr. Colefice stated there is a drive through bay to prevent the noise from trucks backing up. He showed the photometric plan. There will be no pole mounted light but only wall mounted lights pointed straight down with 0 candle at the property line. There were updated traffic counts done in February. There are 14,000 cars per day with 1,300 peak per hour. He anticipates 32 trips added daily. The employees will work 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Mr. Greenberg asked, with increased operations, did the applicant consider additional vendors or third parking trips. Mr. Colefice stated he did not increase vendor trips but believes they would be relatively rare. Mr. Sargent noted there are tire deliveries once per month. The Recycling Transfer Station (RTS) is a major user of the mechanics. They will not be making trips to Dedham Avenue but would be crossing from lot to lot. This will take traffic off of Central Avenue. Mr. McCullen noted the estimated trips to the current facility is 32. He asked where that number comes from and if it was from other parts of Needham. Mr. Colefice stated the fleet managers provided a total number of repair trips, so they counted each coming and going from this facility. Trips were included in the traffic counts. He noted this is all off season storage and will be adding 32 trips to the existing. Mr. Block asked what the total was and was informed that was not estimated but employees may go get a piece of equipment there.

Mr. McCullen commented this is a highly trafficked area. He has some concerns, which is why he is nitpicking. Mr. Sargent noted the idea is to get employees and vehicles to be repaired in early by around 7:00 a.m. Mr. McCullen asked if there could be an agreement no vehicles during the day and if they are not there by 7:00 a.m. it would be the next day. Mr. Sargent noted it would be ok for the vehicles to be dropped off the night before. Mr. McCullen stated the Newman School drop off is 8:30 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. and pick up is 3:10 p.m. to 3:25 pm. Mr. Colefice stated there are zoning regulations. The proposed site is in the Single-Family Resident A District, the Wireless Communication Facility Towers Overlay District, Photovoltaic District and the Temporary Towers Overlay District. Municipal use is permitted by right and this meets all dimensional requirements. He reviewed the requested relief. Of the 4 waivers requested 2 were previously approved for the Cogswell Building – minimum parking and bike racks. They are requesting relief from the landscape requirement for trees and trees for parking. Ms. Espada asked if the trees had gone through the town arborist. Mr. Sargent noted they went through the Conservation Commission, but he believes the Tree Warden was consulted.

Mr. Colefice noted the comments from the Health and Human Services Department and the Engineering Department. He brought the written comments and reviewed the comments and responses regarding sound, the water separator, lighting, dumpster permit, dust control and pest control. They are finalizing the permit for geothermal wells through the Department of Health. There is a question about the Town doing public outreach for educational purposes. Mr. Crocker asked what is being done in the wash bay to maintain it. Mr. Colefice stated the wash bay is under a cantilevered roof to prevent stormwater and rainwater going into a sump that will collect and treat, then to a catch basin that is hooded with the overflow going into the building to a floor drain system that goes out to the sewer. Mr. Crocker asked if there will be any demolition or construction on Central Avenue. There will be a low-pressure storm main routed down Central Avenue. Mr. Crocker asked what time of day the construction is and how much of the road is being dug up. Mr. Sargent stated this will be coordinated with the DPW to be done outside of rush hours. Mr. Colefice stated there was a water main extension done recently. He feels it will be the same.

Mr. Block stated he wants to be clear on the environmental mitigations. In terms of conditions there should be sound attenuation, a finding and representation on traffic and additional mitigation if needed. The facility will handle all the town's vehicles and there will be an oil and gasoline separator. He asked what other environmental mitigations are being proposed. Mr. Colefice noted the project is meeting all Massachusetts stormwater regulations. Motor oil is stored within the facility in a fluid storage room. Double walled tanks provide secondary containment, and any 55-gallon drums will be on spill pallets. Mr. Sargent noted it will be similar to what is being done now at 470 Dedham Avenue. Mr. Block would like the applicants to email the Planning Director with a list of all environmental mitigations. He feels he would like to include in the list of conditions stormwater and non-stormwater, like oil changes or antifreeze spills.

Mr. Crocker asked what is being allowed to flow back into the wetlands and was informed treated stormwater, roof runoff and parking lot runoff. Mr. Greenberg asked who would pump it out. Mr. Sargent does not know who the Town contracts with. Mr. Colefice noted there is regular maintenance for the water separators. Mr. McCullen noted the Claxton Field tennis courts and skate park and commented traffic growth should be expected. The applicant said the traffic counts are

less than in 2016. The tennis courts and field use will increase that. He feels that statement should not be made as they do not know the impact of Claxton and the field use. They need to make sure holistically this does not create a burden on the residents, employees and all who travel through the town. Mr. Sargent will go back to the traffic engineer and flesh it out. Ms. Espada asked the applicant to clarify where vehicles enter and where the main entrance is now. Mr. Sargent noted there really is not one as the building is not currently staffed.

Ms. Espada noted there is a connector between the 2 buildings and she wondered if the connector could be eliminated and the building moved in so there is more of a buffer between residential. It sounds like there is an 85-foot buffer now. Mr. Sargent stated services are in the connector and it cannot be eliminated. Ms. Espada asked if the color of the building would be the same as the rest of the building and was informed it would be. She noted the color is aged and will not be able to be matched. She suggested making it a shade different. Mr. Crocker stated he would like to see where the trees are going. Mr. Colefice showed the landscape plan. Mr. Crocker asked if it was possible to add trees as a buffer for the closest house. Mr. Colefice noted there are trees and the wall that acts as a screen. The buffer area is maybe 25 feet.

The meeting was opened for public comment. Walter Hollop, of 301 Marked Tree Road, asked if trucks would go exclusively down Central Avenue or Marked Tree Road. Mr. Sargent noted that is a question for the Fleet Maintenance. He sees a lot of trucks coming down Marked Tree. He leaves for work at 7:00 a.m. and he has a hard time getting out onto Central Avenue due to traffic from Dover. He asked how long construction would be and was informed 19 months. Mr. Hollop asked how loud the construction would be and what the workday would be. Mr. Sargent stated the work cannot begin before 7:00 a.m. Work will be from 7:00 a.m. and stop at 3:30 p.m. Mr. Colefice noted there will be some ledge blasting and some hammering. There will be a survey of existing houses prior to blasting. Mr. Hollop asked if there would be any work on weekends and was informed that was very unlikely but there may be a rare Saturday if they are expecting snow or something like that. The town has a policy that work cannot begin before 7:00 a.m. Yuangang Gu, of 309 Marked Tree Road, asked if this facility was for tires only or for general maintenance and if it was for all vehicles. He was informed it will be general maintenance for all town vehicles. Mr. Gu stated the report has no traffic for Marked Tree Road. Mr. Crocker asked where the report was done. Mr. Colefice noted the estimate is around 12 heavy trucks per day. Mr. Sargent noted the majority of vehicles are RTS and will not go on Central Avenue. Mr. Gu would like the traffic to be split so it does not all come from one direction. He commented that big trucks make a lot of noise. Mr. Sargent will look into this. Mr. Gu noted they did not talk about the generator last time and he wanted to make sure it was only for backup. Mr. Crocker stated it is only for backup and will be tested once per week. Mr. Gu would not be able to hear it at 33 decibals. Mr. Gu stated there is a site next to this building and he asked why not use that area. Mr. Sargent stated the DPW Master Plan is online. This is a phased project that is explained online.

Holly Clarke, of 1652 Central Avenue, appreciates that the Board has talked about Central Avenue as it exists now. It is satiated now, and it is fair to say trucks are not the same as cars. She stated there were promises from the Town when the Jack Cogswell building was put there that it would only be for storage and there would not be any people or any more traffic. It is hard to see that promise changed or reneged on. That is what happened. When the master plan was done in 2014 there was a traffic study done of what would happen if the DPW was put here. She was surprised that was not built on. She appreciates the need for a fuller traffic study done now. The site line distances were discussed but never changed because it was only supposed to be storage. It would be prudent to build on that. Mr. Sargent stated cars cannot pull out onto Central Avenue from the Cogswell building. Cars must turn and go to the RTS. Ms. Clarke stated the RTS driveway is the driveway they said does not have the site distance. This was written into the reports the experts hired by the Town did. Mr. Sargent stated if it was that big of a problem they would be talking about the RTS entrance.

Ms. Clarke noted an accident study done back then talked about Central and Marked Tree. At 7:00 a.m. traffic is already backed up on Central Avenue. Rush hours in the afternoon begin when Newman School lets out and does not stop. The traffic study done talked about the RTS busy hours as being right at 7:30 a.m. and the end of the day. She feels there should be a condition requiring when trucks can come and go. They need to look at what could be done at Marked Tree. This area is just saturated and they need to see what can be done. More study needs to be done before going forward. She appreciates the environmental study that was done. She wants the construction management plan to be explicit in when construction can happen. She feels 32 vehicles is optimistic.

Ken Buckley, of 221 Warren Street, noted this was a great presentation. He stated the Town is here for approval of a variance to the rules. Approval of the site should have been done before the whole plan was done. He understands another location was possible or available. There will be new traffic with pickle ball, ball fields and a skate park. It will be worse once the ball fields are open. He heard 32 vehicles is the increase. Trucks are slower and he feels there will be a lot of safety issues. He noted there is another exit trucks can use with better site line. He asked if there was the possibility of another site. Mr. Crocker stated not for this Board. Mr. Block noted the process is for the Town or developer to decide which site is the best then come to the Planning Board. Mr. Buckley stated this is a single-family residence zone if you take away the overlay. He feels there should have been more consideration given to the other site.

Mr. Gu asked how he can follow this. Mr. Crocker stated there would be another meeting where the Board would approve an order of conditions. Mr. Gu asked if there is detail for the 32 number of large or small trucks. He asked if they could get this number for the previous year or 3 years on how many fixes the town has done per year and how many trucks are coming from the RTS directly. Ms. Espada asked if the detail traffic report study and application additional information is in the packet online. Mr. Colefice stated of the 32 additional trips 10 would be large trucks. Mr. Sargent can supplement the information from the maintenance loop. Mr. Gu asked if there is a lot of sound who do they complain to. Mr. Crocker stated the Building Department who will then come to the Planning Board. Mr. Gu commented that would be too late. Mr. Block feels the hearing may need to be continued for additional information.

Mr. Sargent stated part of the study process was to do disparate sites or one main campus site. They determined no site was big enough to handle all of DPW which is why it is split up the way it is. Ms. Espada feels there needs to be additional information about operations and how trucks move around the site and around the town and construction with drilling and how houses adjacent will be monitored. Mr. Sargent stated that is similar to what they did with the Cogswell Building. Ms. Espada wants to make sure the team reviews the 2014 study to look at Holly Clarke's concerns. Mr. McCullen is very concerned with the ingress and egress and what it does with Claxton and the skate park at 7:30 a.m. when people are doing RTS runs and afternoons. When sports teams start there will be a lot of parent traffic there and he has concerns. He would like that followed up. Ms. Espada asked, when doing the study, did the applicant take into account the changes at Claxton and the new day care center at 1688 Central Avenue and was informed they did not.

Mr. Block stated he would like the specific information the Board is looking at. Ms. Espada would like information on traffic impacts with the projects. Mr. Crocker would like to see the paths the vehicles are taking, what size vehicles, if they take different routes and how the trucks move around town. Mr. Colefice can show detail. Mr. Greenburg would like them to look at vendor trips also.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. McCullen, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to continue the hearing to 6/17/25 at 7:45 p.m.

Ms. Newman would need the information by 6/3/25 in order to do an internal review if necessary.

Discussion: Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital-Needham (BIDN) to discuss the possibility of a revision to the Hospital's approved parking plan through the addition of a valet-only parking lot on property located at 14 and 20 Oak Street.

John Fogerty, President of Beth Israel Deaconess (BID) Hospital, noted many hospitals have closed in the last 5 years since Covid, which has had significant impacts on BID Needham. They are growing vibrant, and parking is more of a challenge. This is a short-term strategy so patients can find a parking spot. Two buildings will be demolished, and the valet parking spots will be expanded. He feels this will provide minimum traffic disruption. Evans Huber, Attorney for the applicant, noted the proposed lot is on the other side of Chestnut Street. There are 2 residential structures not being used. Those will be demolished and replaced with a valet parking lot between Oak Street and Freeman Place. Freeman Place dead ends at the railroad so there is no through traffic. Nathan Turner, of Margulies Peruzzi, Architects, stated there is limited ability to park at 14 and 20 Oak Street. The project is using best practices for drive aisles and clearances. It would be a valet lot and not patients accessing their vehicles. This is only for patients and visitors.

Peter Dane, of Dane & Company, Inc., noted the front door is manned now by a parking company that assists patients. This lot will be adjunct. When the main lot fills, they will ferry cars over with professional attendants. Mr. Turner feels this could improve the Oak Street sidewalk conditions. Mr. Crocker clarified there is no entrance from Oak Street to the lot and was told there is no entrance. Mr. Block recognizes the important role the hospital plays as a community asset in town and the growth. There are 152 parking spaces on site and the hospital is looking to add 52 new spaces. He asked what the actual demand for parking is. Mr. Fogerty stated he has no figure. He just knows by sight that parking is incredibly tight. He feels the hospital would need to do more down the road. The demand is on the higher range of what he quoted. Mr. Block asked if the site is large enough to be future proofed by creating a second story. Mr. Dane stated the site is too small. He feels the demand currently is about 200. The 154 spaces are adequate on some days.

Mr. McCullen asked where people currently park if over capacity. Mr. Dane noted there are 3 spaces in the lot they can overload. Mr. Fogerty noted the volunteers can park on site and some OR staff. Employees park post site. Most are shuttled from Dedham or the church down the street. There is also another lot in Westwood. The employee parking is ok. They police the lots to make sure no one is parking there. Ms. Espada noted the 2 lots the hospital owns and commented people walk down the street to the center of town. What is the thought on the pedestrian experience if removing those houses? Mr. Huber stated this was designed so there is no entrance on Oak Street. Ms. Espada asked what the buffer is between the parking and the sidewalk. Mr. Huber stated the applicant is asking for substantial relief. This has been designed to maximize the number of cars. Mr. Dane noted it is important to remember that 100% of that stretch of Oak Street has cars parking along the perimeter of the street.

Mr. Crocker asked what width would be needed to add a vegetative buffer. Mr. Huber noted the applicant has come to the Board for comments. He asked how strict is the Board going to hold to the drive aisles? If double parking is not needed vegetation could be added. Ms. Espada understands the need for parking, but they do not need to make that street a parking lot. There needs to be the pedestrian experience and there needs to be a planting buffer to the sidewalk like at Sudbury Farms. Mr. Huber noted there are a row of spaces perpendicular to Oak Street and then dotted lines for parallel parking. There could be 8 feet of buffer, but those spaces would be lost. The hospital does not see this as a long-term permanent solution. Mr. Fogerty stated the hospital is trying to maximize the parking they can get. There is a cost to use this lot in this way. If you take out spaces, it impacts their ability to do this. They are trying to balance patient care with access. It is not a perfect solution but would help with pain points. Mr. McCullen appreciates with BID does for the town and they need to find a solution. The town needs to look at parking in general holistically. He asked if BID pays for permits in the municipal lots and how many. Mr. Fogerty stated they do have some spaces in the town lot. He does not know the number but it is not significant. He has a good relationship with the town and does not believe there is a problem.

Mr. Crocker commented if this is not permanent, he feels a buffer should be put between the parking and Oak Street. Mr. Fogerty stated they may do more back there some day but this lot would not be part of it. Eventually they will need a much more substantial parking area. The hospital is continuing to grow. The plan is to not have an acre of flat parking. Ms. Espada understands why they want to do this but they need to take into account the people walking. Mr. McCullen noted, for full disclosure, he lives near here and his kids walk down there. Mr. Block feels this is a reasonable use with a number of parking spaces. Mr. Huber noted it was designed to meet requirements for a drive aisle width. If spaces are moved away from Oak Street a waiver would probably be needed from drive aisle width. He asked if the Board would have flexibility from the width? Mr. Crocker has no problem if there are no safety issues. All agreed. Mr. Block asked what other relief is being requested. Mr. Huber noted handicap, bike racks, setback on the Freeman Street side and landscaping. Mr. Block does not have a problem with that relief. Mr. Crocker agreed.

Report from Planning Director and Board members

Ms. Newman noted the Large House Study Committee meets tomorrow night. They did a review of a number of houses on conforming lots. They will be reviewing that and planning the agenda for the 6/9/25 community meeting. That will involve a presentation of what the committee has done so far and will have an open microphone and a questionnaire. She has put together requests for proposal quotes to assist the Committee with modeling. She expects to get those back by the end of the month. She discussed the scope and adding the analysis of what the fiscal impact to the Town's revenue side would be. She is going to set up a meeting to discuss that scope. There will be a Chair and Vice-Chair meeting at Town Hall for the

Large House Committee that will include the Finance Committee and Planning Board to review the scope. Mr. Crocker noted the Tree Committee is having a public hearing on 6/4/25. Ms. Newman noted the MBTA Communities Act. She is filing the documents with the state, so they are in compliance. She has reached out to DCR to get the Flood Plain Certification done and is closing out the grant under HONE.

Mr. McCullen commented on Envision. The Select Board had decided to hold a public hearing but put a hold on it prior to the meeting. Over 300 people were there and over 85 online. The majority opined about the feeling of the process and where they were. Envision met yesterday and went over the download of the hearing, where they want to go and to look at objectives. The Select Board has opinions and Business owners have opinions. They have a full committee now. They will meet again to see where the objectives are and move on from there. It will be a pilot, and no one knows how big or small that would be. There will be a significant amount of engagement with a reboot.

Correspondence

Mr. Crocker noted an email from Chris Deleo, dated 4/30/25, with his opinion regarding the audit.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. McCullen, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to adjourn at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

Justin McCullen, Vice-Chairman and Clerk