

NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

March 19, 2020

The Planning Board virtual meeting using Zoom, was remotely called to order by Martin Jacobs, Chairman, on Tuesday, March 19, 2020, at 8:32 a.m. with Messrs. Owens, Alpert and Eisenhut and Ms. McKnight, as well as Planning Director, Ms. Newman and Assistant Planner, Ms. Clee.

Endorsement of ANR Plan – Jason Koshnitsky and Alina Kirzner, Petitioners (Property located at 142 Hunnewell Street, Needham, MA).

Ms. Newman stated this is a lot line adjustment between 2 properties. Lot 2B will be incorporated into the house at 142 Hunnewell Street. Both lots have the required frontage on a way and meet all lot and setback requirements. Lot G1 will be combined with 2B and Lot G2 will be combined with 2A.

Upon a motion made by Ms. McKnight, and seconded by Mr. Alpert, it was by the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to endorse subdivision approval not required.

Request to Extend Action Deadline on ANR Plan – 766 Chestnut Street, LLC, Petitioner (Property located at 766 Chestnut Street, Needham, MA).

Ms. Newman noted a letter from Attorney Robert Smart, representative for the applicant, requesting an extension to the first meeting in May and extending the action deadline to 5/31/20.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Eisenhut, and seconded by Mr. Alpert, it was by the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to extend the action deadline to 5/31/20.

Review and Approval of Highway Commercial 1 Zoning work plan.

Mr. Jacobs noted there is a problem with the work plan schedule, which was premised on Engineering doing new traffic counts. There will be no traffic counts done now until the traffic returns to normal. Ms. Newman stated she contracted with a company to prepare the scope of work. All new counts were to be required. She was working out the final details of that scope when the Corona Virus happened. New counts would be no good at this time. There were some counts done earlier for 2 of the locations, which were the intersection of Highland and Gould and the intersection of Gould and Central. She asked if it would make sense to delay this to get more comprehensive information. Furthermore, the assumption embedded does not allow housing as a permitted use. She asked if the Board wants to take housing off the table or add it as a variable. Ms. Newman noted the Board could move forward with the schedule with no new counts and rely on the existing counts out there.

She noted the Town will be going to remote zoom meetings. The Planning Department is scrambling to put together pieces to accept applications, post meetings and establish the review process. She asked what the Board views as priorities. Children's Hospital will be coming in. There will also be the Avery Square rehab with zoning changes, potential office on Highland Avenue and a subdivision proposed by Attorney Robert Smart off Dedham Avenue.

Mr. Owens noted no one knows when or how this will end. Theoretically the current traffic counts are ok with him. He feels the Board needs to have a conversation with the Finance Committee. If the Board decides to delay because we believe we will be able to get accurate counts later there is a lot of risk. A theoretical analysis may not be satisfactory for the Finance Committee, which would be a dilemma. Mr. Alpert stated the traffic study needs to be

delayed into the Fall. There will not be anything approximate to what would be normal traffic until September or October. He feels the Board should deal with this in the Fall. Mr. Eisenhut agreed.

Ms. McKnight stated the Board needs an updated traffic study. As compared with the prior counts, there will be traffic changes reflecting completion of the Add-A-Lane. She asked if there is any idea when the traffic will be impacted by the Highland Avenue project. She is concerned if that would be a factor. If that is not a factor she does not see why the decision to engage a traffic consultant cannot be put off until May. She believes the dates could be shifted with the traffic and the study could be done at the end of September. She stated the timing works if everything is just pushed off. She feels the traffic studies should be done.

Ms. Newman stated the estimate to do the work came in higher than expected. Some study locations do not feel necessary. She will put in a request for the funds on the Special Town Meeting Warrant so the money will be there when it can go forward. Originally the consultant was asked to model at 1.35 FAR with a split between office and research and development. Another example could have housing with a mixed use. She would like to finalize next steps.

Mr. Jacobs asked if anyone wanted to remove residential housing as a use. Mr. Owens stated he would need more information on that. He wants a firmer grasp on where that is going politically. He continues to believe this is not a site for residential. He knows some Town Meeting members and a couple of Select Board members keep raising this issue. The Planning Board decided years ago this was not an appropriate site for residential. He feels it is a big mistake to go the residential road.

Ms. Newman stated she would like to make sure Mr. Owens is looking at the entire site. One option could be for the housing to be located on the Channel 5 site closer to the MBTA right of way and the residential neighborhoods. Mr. Owens has thought about that. He sees no reason to believe Channel 5 is going anywhere and residential on that site would have to exit at Gould and Highland or Gould and Central. He does not want to put on that extra traffic burden. Mr. Jacobs stated the scope of work currently includes a residential option and asked if the Board wants to keep that included. Mr. Eisenhut stated the study should include the option. It may show it would increase traffic.

A motion was made to say the study should include residential. Ms. McKnight noted it should say “zoning would likely not include housing due to the traffic impact which is to be studied.” Mr. Alpert stated this is the scope of work for the GBI traffic study and not for Town Meeting. He is open to Mr. Owen’s opinion but is keeping an open mind.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Eisenhut, and seconded by Mr. Alpert, it was by four of the five members present (Mr. Owens voted in the negative):

VOTED: to say “the zoning would likely not include housing due to the traffic impact which is to be studied.”

Mr. Jacobs noted the schedule presented would be revised.

Report from Planning Director and Board members.

Ms. Newman gave a recap of where the department is. She noted the Children’s Hospital meeting scheduled for 4/15 will probably be held remotely. Ms. McKnight gave an update on the Legislature’s vote regarding Town Meetings and allowing the Town Moderator to postpone Town Meeting.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Alpert, and seconded by Ms. McKnight, it was by the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

Jeanne S. McKnight, Vice-Chairman and Clerk