

NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

October 4, 2020

The Planning Board Virtual Meeting using Zoom was remotely called to order by Jeanne McKnight, Chairman, on Sunday, October 4, 2020, at 11:30 a.m. with Messrs. Jacobs, Alpert, Owens and Block, as well as Planning Director, Ms. Newman and Assistant Planner, Ms. Clee.

Ms. McKnight noted they are preparing for the Special Town Meeting. There is a seating chart provided with the location of the seats. Ms. Newman will be available by conference call as will Mr. Jacobs. She has not heard of any amendments proposed to the zoning articles. Mr. Owens stated he is not aware of any requests for adding an affordable unit requirement for the assisted living or memory care units. Ms. McKnight noted that can be addressed during the special permit process. Ms. McKnight noted she wants to have the 2 articles considered together. Ms. Newman stated the Chair needs to ask the Moderator to discuss the articles together and vote separately. Ms. Newman spoke to him about it.

Mr. Alpert stated Mr. Block feels the Finance Committee seemed to focus more on the developers than the zoning article. Mr. Block should deflect those questions. He could say this is a zoning article and the developer may apply for a special permit, but there are no guarantees of issuance. Mr. Block stated that is correct. The Finance Committee referred more to the developers than the Article itself. The By-Law change has been on 5 Planning Board meeting agendas since May so there has been ample opportunity for input and questions. Mr. Owens understood the recommendation from the Finance Committee is that the 2 Articles be adopted. He does not anticipate questions.

Mr. Block noted the Article 17 resolution. It is a Citizen's Petition dealing with racism in town. He hears it will be referred back to the Select Board and part of the text refers to systemic racism with regard to zoning. Mr. Jacobs stated he understands the Select Board's request was only partially stated by Mr. Block. They want questions referred to the Select Board with the understanding the Select Board will bring it back to the next Town Meeting in May. Ms. McKnight fears the vote to refer back would be perceived as a negative vote and feels they should just support the article. Mr. Owens stated the reference to planning is that there is a certain segment of opinion that the whole issue of single-family housing zoning is racist. Personally, he feels it is an extreme position and he does not believe the best way to establish racial equity and tolerance is through zoning. He feels the hidden agenda is they really want to defund the police. Some things are not given a proper airing and a proper vetting. The town needs to think about the consequences and trust the Select Board to have a broad outreach to all parts of town.

Mr. Jacobs asked if the Planning Board wants to take a position on Article 17. He doubts the Board wants to take a position now. If it is referred back he wants to be able to study it. Mr. Alpert agreed with Mr. Jacobs. There is a meeting scheduled for 10/15/20 for the Chairs and Vice-Chairs to meet. They could bring up the zoning portion of this so the Select Board should consult with them. His understanding is this is just a resolution for the Planning Board to look at. Mr. Block suggested the Planning Board take a position that they unanimously oppose any form of racial discrimination and support an effort to ensure equity throughout the town. Mr. Alpert disagreed the Planning Board should take any position today. He does not feel they should speak as a Board. Ms. McKnight agreed.

Ms. McKnight noted they should discuss Articles 11 and 12. CPA funds are being requested for the Baptist Church porch and cornice and for the Unitarian Church bell tower. This is supported by the CPA and Select Board. The Finance Committee has come out against both. They are questioning if this is the proper use of CPA funds. It came out they would only support CPA funding for historic preservation of buildings if open to the general public. Both churches do welcome the general public. She feels the Board should support both articles. The historic structures are on the state and local lists of historic buildings and rooms are used for community uses and that will continue. Both are the fabric of the center of the town. Mr. Block stated the Finance Committee opposes using CPA funds for private uses on private land.

Mr. Alpert noted he is the Planning Board representative on the CPA Committee. He recused himself on the Baptist Church Article. They were discussing use of CPA funds in general. Selectman Moe Handel's presentation was carefully worded. He disagrees with the Finance Committee's position. The statute is clear CPA funds can be used for private building renovation that meets the definition of historic and the Planning Board should support the use of CPA funds that meet the definition for CPA purposes. He feels the Board should support these 2 Articles.

Mr. Owens stated the Planning Board should not take a position. They have not discussed this at all. He would not volunteer a position. Mr. Alpert agreed. It is too rushed. Mr. Jacobs agreed.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Jacobs, and seconded by Mr. Alpert, it was by a roll call vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: at 12:25 p.m. to continue to the Special Town Meeting at Memorial Field site and reconvene.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

Paul Alpert, Vice-Chairman and Clerk