

NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

April 21, 2021

The Needham Planning Board Virtual Meeting using Zoom was remotely called to order by Jeanne McKnight, Chairman, on Wednesday, April 21, 2021, at 5:30 p.m. with Messrs. Alpert, Jacobs and Block, as well as Planning Director, Ms. Newman, and Community Housing Specialist, Ms. Sunnarborg.

Ms. McKnight took a roll call attendance of the Board members and staff. She noted this is an open meeting that is being held remotely because of Governor Baker's executive order on March 12, 2020 due to the COVID Virus. All attendees are present by video conference. She reviewed the rules of conduct for Zoom meetings. She noted this meeting does not include any public hearings so there will be no opportunity for public comment. She stated all supporting materials for this meeting are posted on the website www.needhamma.gov. If any votes are taken at the meeting the vote will be conducted by roll call.

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

VOTED: to automatically continue the meeting to 8:00 p.m. this evening with the same zoom ID number if any technical difficulties arise that keep the Planning Board from continuing this meeting tonight and to authorize the Vice-Chairman to continue the meeting if the Chairman has technical difficulties.

Discussion of Town Meeting articles, including possible amendments.

Ms. Newman informed the Board she received an email from Stephen Frail today, with suggestions, that is not part of the agenda packet. He would like to offer an additional motion to amend to address general energy building standards. Ms. McKnight stated people had proposed amendments to the proposed Article 5 for the Highway Commercial 1 (HWC1) zone. The Board had encouraged people to consult with the Planning Board in advance if there were proposed amendments. The Articles have been reviewed by Town Counsel and this meeting was scheduled to discuss the proposed amendments. She noted there are 4 amendments. The first 2 are from Equal Justice Needham (EJN). Ms. McKnight disclosed she has been active in this group but is not advocating for these amendments. Both of these amendments relate to multi-family housing. Ms. McKnight noted the third amendment is from Barry Pollack. He has strong opinions of the proposed Article 5 and came up with an amendment. The last one came yesterday from Stephen Frail, who is a Town Meeting member. He wants to strengthen the special permit criteria and environmental sustainability.

Ms. McKnight noted the first amendment from EJN is supplemented by a 3-page statement in support. The amendment suggests deleting subsection 2 of 3.2.7.2 (m) under item 2, to remove the cap of no more than 240 dwelling units. Mr. Alpert stated he would like to hear what Ms. Sunnarborg has to say regarding this. Ms. Sunnarborg stated, on the face of it, it makes sense to eliminate the cap. The cap came from the Mixed-Use Overlay District. It made sense in that district. She doubts there will be a proposal for full multi-family. The location is better oriented to mixed-use and commercial, so it is likely that a developer would look beyond just housing. Mr. Block stated there is not enough capacity on this site for a multi-family development larger than 240 units. The Board is trying to balance uses on this site. Mr. Jacobs stated balance is what the Board sought here, but any number of units would be arbitrary; they should let the market decide.

Ms. Newman noted the 240 number and unit size mix was derived to minimize the impact on the school system in the Mixed-Use District and then it was applied here. Mr. Alpert noted the town redistricts as schools get overwhelmed with students. The big picture needs to be looked at. The Board is reconsidering where it wants to go. It started as industrial zoned and a commercial parcel. Then there was a recommendation from the Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) and the Economic Advisor to the Town that Gould Street be rezoned from Highland Avenue down to the park for better aesthetic use and to be more amendable. The original proposal had no residential. There was positive feedback from people in town and some Select Board members. With community meetings there were some that wanted all residential. They felt it is mostly a residential area and there would be

less traffic and noise from residential development. The Board tried to reach a compromise but added a cap to take all into account. If it was all residential there may be push back by the Select Board. The question is what does the Board see for this site. He agrees with Mr. Jacobs that they could let the market decide. There are a lot of uses allowed here. There is a question of the marketplace, and they may not see research and development here.

Mr. Block would like to see the Town, through executive responsibility and as leaders, develop some form of equitable housing program. The Board cannot be expected to do that for just this site. This site is driven in general toward commercial. He does not support an unlimited amount of housing. This is a good plan with good vision. Some housing should be allowed due to feedback, but it does not change the vision for this site. Mr. Jacobs stated the Board has undertaken studies and there has been a lot of discussion. The possibility of no cap was never discussed. He asked if there was any idea how many residential units could be put there. He does not know and it has never been studied. Ms. McKnight stated it was an unknown number. She feels it would be unlikely it would be all housing, but it is hard to predict.

Mr. Block stated that is outside the scope of the framework. The goals were clear – to improve the gateway and enhance the aesthetics and to enable a greater level of public control over development. The goals remain valid, and the framework is good. Ms. McKnight stated she is inclined toward what Mr. Jacobs said. A lot of care has been put into the evaluations of what the Board proposed. She has confidence in the study done by Judy Barrett and can say with confidence the impact on the school system. Eliot School is the one school that is almost at capacity. Redistricting is not an easy thing to do. She is confident in the fiscal impact reports and the effect on schools. She is opposed to eliminating the cap.

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

VOTED: to oppose removal of the cap on the number of housing units.

Ms. McKnight stated the second amendment by EJM is standards for the affordable housing homeownership project. The income of the household would be at 80% of median income. Those units are priced for affordable costs of 70% of median income. She asked Ms. Sunnarborg to comment. Ms. Sunnarborg stated the standards required are from the state as part of the Local Initiative Program (LIP) guidelines. If homeownership, the units are priced at the state formula, which is going to be required. There is a 70% marketing window required across the state. Ms. McKnight asked if the units are not countable if not sold under this formula. Ms. Sunnarborg noted all units need to be approved by the state.

Mr. Alpert stated he does not support this. He is very sympathetic to the goals stated by the proponent of the amendment. Analysis has already started as to where affordable housing is and is not with a view toward changing the By-Laws as a whole with regard to affordable housing. He does not want parcel by parcel but to do it as a proposal after Town Meeting and rewrite the Affordable Housing By-Law to include all zoning districts in town that allow affordable housing. They should examine these criteria, vet them and get guidance by Ms. Sunnarborg to examine on a town wide basis.

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

VOTED: to not support this amendment and invite the proponents to come back to examine on a town wide basis.

Ms. McKnight noted the third amendment is by Barry Pollack. The amendment would increase the open space requirement from 25% to 30%. It also reduces the base FAR to 0.8 to encourage Mixed-Use Development with the addition of 0.3 FAR for a total 1.1 FAR with the extra 0.3 split evenly between housing and an indoor sports center of some kind. This is a reduction from 1.35 to 0.8. The Board's goal is to enhance public control over development and special permits. This would not allow the Board much control over development. A discussion ensued. A motion was made to oppose the motion in this form. Mr. Alpert stated he regrets Mr. Pollack did not separate this into 2 motions. He would have had more sympathy for an increase in green space and may have approved that, but it is together.

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

VOTED: to oppose this amendment.

Ms. McKnight noted the 4th amendment came in at 4:38 p.m. today. There has been no time to consider it.

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

VOTED: to, at this time, take no position but it could be discussed at a subsequent meeting.

Report of the Planning Director and Board members

Ms. Newman noted the Board has been invited to the Select Board meeting next Tuesday. The Planning Board could have a meeting before or after if needed to discuss Mr. Frail's amendment. It would be posted as a Planning Board meeting. Mr. Block stated the Board voted to close the hearing for 100 West Street last night. He asked if anything further needed to be done for Ms. Newman to prepare a decision and asked what the process was. Ms. Newman reviewed the process and stated she understands the framework and will begin preparing a draft decision. She is comfortable putting together the framework. Mr. Jacobs stated he will be available for Town Meeting but not in person. Ms. Newman noted she had a conversation with George Giunta Jr., and he posted a video for a Citizen's Petition Article. She has also worked on funding for consultants.

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

VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

Paul Alpert, Vice-Chairman and Clerk