NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

May 1, 2021

The Needham Planning Board Virtual Meeting using Zoom was remotely called to order by Jeanne McKnight, Chairman, on Saturday, May 1, 2021, at 11:00 a.m. with Messrs. Alpert, Jacobs and Block, as well as Planning Director, Ms. Newman and Assistant Planner, Ms. Clee.

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.

Discussion of Annual and Special Town Meeting warrant articles.

Ms. McKnight noted the Special Town Meeting starts today. Article 12 requests $60,000 for planning studies. The Select Board has voted in favor. The Finance Committee voted not in favor by a vote of 5 to 4. Mr. Alpert stated he heard the Finance Committee members wanted the Planning Board to go in front of them to explain the need for the funds rather than give a blank check. The Finance Committee wants tighter control. Ms. McKnight was pleased there was strong support from the Select Board. Mr. Block suggested having a discussion. He feels Barry Pollack would require debate on Article 12. If he is successful on the Town Meeting floor, what happens? Ms. Newman stated the Board would not have the money to do the studies. Mr. Jacobs added they would not have the money until, and unless, they go to the Finance Committee and get approval for each expenditure. Ms. Newman stated that approval may take one or 2 months.

Mr. Alpert suggested he could approach Town Moderator Michael Fee to see, if Article 12 is defeated, if he can open up the budget under the Omnibus Article to amend the line item on the general budget to increase expenses by $60,000 or maybe approach someone on the Finance Committee. Ms. Newman suggested he could possibly speak with Select Board member Marianne Cooley. Ms. Newman noted the $60,000 was intended to cover planning studies over several years. If it is in the budget, the Board would need to use it this fiscal year. Mr. Alpert asked how much Ms. Newman would need this year. Ms. Newman noted she would need $25,000 to $30,000 to be comfortable. Mr. Jacobs stated they could always go to the Finance Committee during the year and ask for more if necessary.

Mr. Alpert would say that Article 12 was for funding for multiple years. This amount is for this fiscal year. Mr. Alpert will try to get to Town Meeting early to speak with Mr. Fee or Ms. Cooley. Ms. McKnight stated, if she speaks under Article 12 to support the appropriation in light of the Finance Committee's negative recommendation, she will say that having the money in the budget does not give the flexibility of multi-year. The Board has projects they need the money for that they have identified. Mr. Alpert noted the Board did this in 2015 for $45,000 at the suggestion of the Finance Committee. Ms. Newman added it was in response to what the Finance Committee wanted them to do. It took 5 years to spend it. There was another allocation in 2020 for $60,000. She noted there is one more Article. Article 10 is for $50,000 for a continuation of the small repair grant for low-income homeowners. This is a grant and not a loan. It has the support of all. She assumes the Select Board will speak to that.

Ms. McKnight noted the proposed Barry Pollack amendment to Article 5, the Highway Commercial 1 re-zoning article on the Annual Town Meeting warrant. This new amendment would change the open space from 25% to 30% and reduce FAR allowable by Special Permit from 1.35 to 1.0. Ms. McKnight read the wording of the new amendment. This differs from his earlier proposal with regard to by-right FAR and special-permit FAR. She noted the big thing is the reduction in the maximum FAR. Mr. Alpert asked what FAR can be approved under the new Barry Pollack amendment and was informed there would be a 1.0 limit on everything. Mr. Block noted Mr. Pollack has said on social media that he is encouraging people to vote to refer the HC-1 Article back to sponsor. He would expect protests on Article 5. He noted the Board considered a 20 to 25% increase in open space.

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 the amendment.

Ms. Newman will be available throughout the continuation of this meeting if there are any questions. She noted the Board meeting will continue through Town Meeting. Mr. Jacobs will not be attending but will also be available.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Alpert and seconded by Mr. Block, it was by a roll call vote of the four members present unanimously:
VOTED: to continue this meeting through the end of the Special Town Meeting and automatically adjourn when Town Meeting adjourns.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

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Paul Alpert, Vice-Chairman and Clerk