

ARTICLE 6: AMEND ZONING BY-LAW – RETAINING WALLS

To see if the Town will vote to amend the Needham Zoning By-Law, as follows:

- (a) Amend Section 1.3 Definitions, by adding the following term and definition in the appropriate alphabetical location as follows:

“Retaining Wall - A wall or terraced combination of walls used at a grade change to hold soil and other earth material at a higher position. Retaining walls may be attached to or independent from other structures. The exposed side of a retaining wall shall be known as a “face”. The area between a lower wall and a successive higher wall shall be known as a “terrace.”

- (b) Amend Section 1.3 Definitions, by revising the existing definition of the term “Structure”, so that the entire definition shall now read as follows: (new language underlined):

“Structure – anything constructed or erected, the use of which requires a fixed location on the ground or attached to something located on the ground including an artificial or a constructed swimming pool having a depth of water of two (2) feet or more or a water surface area of at least one hundred (100) square feet when filled to capacity, but excluding a fence, boundary wall, retaining wall, public utility pole, public utility supporting device or a structure with less than one hundred square foot ground coverage and a height of less than eight (8) feet.”

- (c) Amend Section 6, Special Regulations, by inserting a new Subsection 6.11, Retaining Walls, to read as follows:

“6.11 Retaining Walls

6.11.1 Purpose and Intent

The Town of Needham adopts this section to accomplish and ensure the following:

- (a) To allow for the review of retaining walls of a size that may impact surrounding buildings, land, and uses;
- (b) To require the construction of retaining walls in a manner consistent with engineering and construction best practices; and
- (c) To lessen the impact of large retaining walls on abutting properties and the public by encouraging the use of landscaping and aesthetically pleasing design elements.

6.11.2 Applicability

The regulations and requirements contained herein shall apply to all retaining walls erected in the Town of Needham.

6.11.3 General Provisions

- (a) Determining Retaining Wall Height - The height of a retaining wall shall be the distance from the grade at the base of the face of the wall to the top of the finished wall. Terraced walls shall be measured in the same manner.

- (b) Walls Within Yard Setbacks – No retaining wall shall be built within the required yard setback except a retaining wall (i) with a face not greater than four (4) feet in height at any point and a length that does not exceed forty (40) percent of the lot’s perimeter, or (ii) as allowed by a Special Permit issued in accordance with Subsection 6.11.5 of this Section. Notwithstanding the above, retaining walls may graduate in height from four (4) to seven (7) in height when providing access to a garage or egress entry doors at the basement level, measured from the basement or garage floor to the top of the wall. The wall is limited to seven (7) feet in height for not more than 25% of the length of the wall.
- (c) Walls Outside Yard Setbacks. No retaining wall with a face greater than twelve (12) feet in height shall be built except as allowed by Special Permit issued in accordance with Subsection 6.11.5 of this Section.
- (d) Fall Protection - All retaining walls over four (4) feet in height shall be required to provide fall protection if so determined by the Building Inspector. Fall protection systems may include, but shall not be limited to, permanent landscaping or fencing as approved by the Building Inspector.
- (e) Terracing - Terracing of retaining walls is allowed and encouraged. In a terraced retaining wall system, if two (2) retaining walls are separated by a distance at least one times (1x) the height of the higher of the two (2) walls, the walls shall be considered as separate walls; if two (2) retaining walls are separated by a distance less than one times (1x) the height of the higher of the two (2) walls, the walls shall be considered as a single wall.
- (f) Nonconforming Retaining Walls - Retaining walls legally constructed prior to the adoption of these regulations shall be allowed to remain in their existing state; however, significant changes or alterations to such walls shall be made in conformity with these regulations. The repair and routine maintenance, as determined by the Building Inspector, of nonconforming retaining walls shall be allowed without requiring conformity with these regulations.

6.11.4 Design Review and Permitting

- (a) Design Review - Design Review shall be required for all retaining walls requiring a special permit. The Design Review Board shall review retaining walls in accordance with Section 7.7, Design Review, and shall consider such requests under those criteria contained in Subsection 7.7.4, Design Criteria, of Section 7.7. The Design Review Board shall submit an advisory recommendation to the applicant and the permit granting authority prior to the issuance of a special permit.
- (b) Permitting - A building permit shall be required, consistent with the requirements of the Town of Needham Building Department, for all retaining walls that retain four (4) or more feet of unbalanced fill.

6.11.5 Special Permit Provisions

The Board of Appeals shall consider requests for special permits in accordance with this Section and Section 7.5 of the Zoning Bylaw and a Special Permit for a retaining wall may be issued provided the Board of Appeals finds:

- (a) That the retaining wall will not cause an increase of water flow off the property;
- (b) That the requested retaining wall will not adversely impact adjacent property or the public;
- (c) That the report of the Design Review Board has been received and considered.
- (d) Amend Section 7.7 Design Review, Subsection 7.7.2, Design Review Board, Subparagraph 7.7.2.2, Authority and Specific Powers, by revising the first paragraph, so that the entire paragraph shall now read as follows: (new language underlined):

“The Design Review Board shall review requests for site plan review and approval submitted in accordance with Section 7.4 Site Plan Review and requests for special permits in accordance with Section 4.2.5 Planned Residential Development, Section 4.2.4 Flexible Development and Section 6.11 Retaining Walls and, for a minor project that only involves a change in the exterior façade of a building in the Center Business District, shall review and may approve such façade change.”

- (e) Amend Section 7.7 Design Review, Subsection 7.7.2, Design Review Board, Subparagraph 7.7.2.2, Authority and Specific Powers, by adding a new sentence at the end of the fourth paragraph, so that the entire paragraph shall now read as follows: (new language underlined):

“It shall evaluate such requests based on Subsection 7.7.4 Design Criteria below. Its findings and recommendations, along with any suggested restrictions and conditions, shall be transmitted to the applicant and Planning Board, acting as a special permit granting authority for “Major Projects” under Site Plan Review, Planned Residential Developments and Flexible Developments and to the applicant and Board of Appeals, acting as a special permit granting authority, under Section 6.11 Retaining Walls. Such advisory reports of the Design Review Board shall be transmitted to the Building Inspector and applicant in all other instances as described in the two paragraphs above for “Minor Projects” under Site Plan Review, building permits in all non-residential districts and sign permits. For a minor project that only involves a change in the exterior of a building in the Center Business District, the Design Review Board shall be the review and approval entity for such façade changes.”

Or take any other action relative thereto.