

**Large House Study Review Committee
Public Meeting
June 1, 2016**

Questionnaire Results

In analyzing the results of the Large House Study Review Committee Questionnaire, the following general conclusions became apparent:

- *General results:* The technical nature of the material, the “yes or no or pro and con” format for answering questions, and the limited ability to complete the Questionnaire online (Alex did make the document available in Word on the Town’s website at some point) resulted in most respondents not addressing the individual questions but providing comments, some of which were quite lengthy as you will see in the results below. It is clear that many did not understand the ideas that were proposed for review. We initially planned to focus the Questionnaire on those who attended the June 1st meeting and were present for the presentation that described the ideas for zoning changes. Despite some narrative description in the Questionnaire, many respondents had an inadequate grasp of these zoning changes, which was apparent from comments. While the Questionnaire was never intended as a scientific analysis of community perspectives on the issue, the results were nevertheless disappointing. It may be useful to reissue a much shorter and simpler survey via Survey Monkey as one of the respondents suggested although it is still unlikely that it would result in reliable results that can be generalized to reflect overall community concerns.
- *Higher response from long-term owners:* Of those who indicated the length of time they have lived in Needham, 40% have been here for at least 30 years. This is not surprising since they have been witness to the substantial changes that have occurred over at least three decades and are likely living in the older smaller homes or those with additions. They were also more likely to be retired with more time to complete the Questionnaire.
- *Support for more effective regulation:* With the exception of four (4) respondents, all others indicated that the Town needed to take stronger action to better regulate teardown/replacement activity. The reasons were most typically based on concerns related to eroding housing and socio-economic diversity and community character as well as the aesthetic and environmental impacts of new houses.
- *Trees and run-off:* There were a great many comments related to the issues of tree loss and storm water run-off, which respondents suggested the Committee should address as they present serious problems for abutters in particular and neighborhoods in general.
- *Rear yard setback:* There was strong opposition to reducing the rear yard setback.
- *Setback regulations for new construction and additions:* There was overwhelming support for requiring the same setback requirements for new homes as additions with only three (3) respondents favoring different regulations to encourage more home renovation activity.

- *Special permit provisions:* There were 27 respondents in favor of providing an opportunity to apply for a special permit in unique cases, only a bit more than the 17 who opposed offering this relief valve.
- *Building massing:* There were relatively few responses to the lot coverage and FAR ideas, but comments suggest that there is some support for introducing FAR calculations. It appears from the comments that the nuance of combining the lot coverage increase to FAR to allow greater design flexibility was unclear. Many remarks opposed increases in lot coverage. Additionally, there was some push-back on the basic program as being too big by quite a few respondents and that the Committee should revisit the elements that are excluded in the FAR calculations. There were also a number of suggestions for reducing the FAR calculations for smaller lots.
- *Building height:* While responses indicated that there was a need to regulate building height, it is unclear if respondents understood what was being proposed in the Questionnaire from the comments and questions raised. Suggestions for regulating height were all over the place.
- *Final comments:* Respondents were most interested in venting their concerns with significant comments from almost all returned surveys. Many didn't bother with the individual ideas but went straight to the comments section. We received many observations regarding the complex nature of the ideas presented and the format of the Questionnaire, including the lack of electronic access. There were also some remarks related to enforcing current bylaws and conditions to reduce negative impacts on abutters during construction.

Total number of responses: 56

I have lived in Needham for _____ years.

Time Period	# Responses	# Responses
Less than 5 years	6	12.0
5 to 9.9 years	5	10.0
10 to 14.9 years	7	14.0
15 to 19.9 years	2	4.0
20 to 24.9 years	4	8.0
25 to 29.9 years	6	12.0
More than 30 years	20	40.0
Total	50	100.0

(Note: Not all respondents provided this information.)

I am particularly interested in this issue because:

I'm concerned about the changing nature of town with our limited diversity being quickly eroded. I would like to see a moratorium on teardowns or an annual limit. The aesthetic integrity of our beautiful town is at significant risk.

I see a loss of architectural and economic diversity.

Because I'm raising my family here.

I don't like the changes when I walk through my neighborhood.

Needham is becoming a town for only the affluent.

I wish there was more of a vision for the future. I'd like to see better citizen representation. I have been disturbed by what's going on as have my neighbors and friends. There are many cases of abutters experiencing serious negative impacts.

I live next door to a likely teardown.

Large homes are being built on lots too small to accommodate them. The middle class is being squeezed out of town.

Builders are incentivized to build houses that maximize short-term profit, but will fail to meet long-term community needs.

Lack of architectural integrity and sizes of replacement houses.

My husband and I have been saving for years to improve our home and now we are facing limited and strictly regulated options. I also worry about the value of my home decreasing. I'm worried that your responses are from a vocal minority as the majority of my neighbors, friends, and children's friends have done significant work to rebuild their homes. However, since they are done, the issue is no longer a concern and they won't be writing to the Committee. New regs actually make their homes more valuable if people can't make similar improvements in the future.

I wish Needham would try harder to be a diverse community. Tearing down homes that a working or middle class person can afford and building homes for the wealthy affects our town on many levels. The rights of teardown abutters are being ignored.

I love this community and have worked here for 4 years but can't afford to continue living in this community if small house options are torn down (this respondent is a renter).

I am not happy with changes in Needham.

I'm concerned that only anti-teardown voices are being heard.

Teardowns are reducing affordable housing in Needham and also impacting drainage, trees, etc.

The ugly houses.

Can have a significant impact on property values.

My health and well-being have been adversely impacted by the teardowns of 6 houses on my street in the last 2-3 years.

I'm renovating/rebuilding my own house and have observed other teardown and rebuild projects in the neighborhood.

Our street is overrun with McMansions (Livingston Circle).

At the rate of home replacement, in 10-20 years most middle-income folks will be excluded from Needham.

I think that the tearing down and rebuilding of large expensive homes is changing the look and socio-economic make-up of this town.

I grew up in Needham and have seen the changes over my lifetime.

I am worried that Needham is losing its character and diversity.

I think it's important for there to be a cohesive plan to maintain the character of the town with desirable affordability and variety in its housing stock.

The main reason we moved to Needham and bought the home we purchased is because we loved the family feel of the town and our neighborhood. The massive houses being built, when smaller homes are torn down, alter the down-to-earth character of the neighborhood.

I live across the street from the Rockwood Lane project and have suffered through it for almost 2 years. I think our neighborhoods are being spoiled by builders who are not designing homes to fit into the neighborhoods, but it's the neighbors who have to live with the results for years to come.

The value of my house has been negatively impacted by the large-scale houses being built in my neighborhood. Also, I'm an architect.

The character of my neighborhood is important to me and why I moved to Needham. Since we moved, in, 2 homes far taller and larger than other homes have gone up. Massive homes that dwarf others nearby change the neighborhood and town where I am raising my family.

I have seen how great this building has been to rejuvenate the town, local businesses, and attractiveness of neighborhoods.

For all of the reasons discussed in the public meetings.

Large houses have caused detrimental effects to our neighborhood.

Because 2 of the 3 lots adjacent to our home have new construction. We have lost privacy, trees and sunlight due to the size and height of the new homes.

Loss of tree cover.

We are allowing only very high income people to live in Needham.

It saddens and alarms me to see perfectly good homes torn down that are affordable to working class/middle class families and replaced by huge million dollar + homes filling the lots and at times out of scale with the neighborhood.

The teardown rate is stunning. It blocks young families from town. Seems like developers and real estate agents are running the show.

Huge numbers of small house teardowns are being replaced by huge houses that reduce affordability for young families and change the character of the town.

I care about what happens in this town and how things are done.

Do you believe that there is a need for the Town to better control tear down and replacement activity through zoning?

Yes 45

No 4

Explain below.

Much of the debate seems focused on aesthetics and taste. If Needham needs more affordable housing, we should encourage that development. Focusing on house size seems arbitrary and short-sighted. Many homes in Needham are simply outdated.

Current teardown and replacement activity has a large number of negative impacts – social, economic, aesthetic, and functional.

There have been teardowns on my street.

The fabric of Needham is changing, as beautiful old trees are being replaced by monstrous houses that only the rich can afford.

See slide 2/issues slide for reasons for controlling teardown activity.

It is critical that the economic engine that drives our community – desirable residential housing – be supported.

Yes, property owners have rights, but the Town has the right to determine the scale of homes that are built in order to preserve Needham as a community that is welcoming to all.

Needham has lost its charm and grace. Need an immediate moratorium on teardowns until new regulations are passed. The Town's Committee has more work to do as stronger regulations are required than the ones proposed. The basic house program is too big for small lots.

Town governance inactivity.

I don't agree with the halt to large homes in the desire to "maintain the feel of the town." I bought my home, which was old and needed work, with the goal to someday be able to afford to improve it. Now I'm worried that future regulations will limit what I can do. I do recognize that an issue with all the new homes involves changes to the grading and thus changes regarding run-off. I would be in

support of incentives or deregulation to reduce the costs of making homes greener and environmentally friendlier and thus more likely to be included in new development. Promote use of pervious concrete for driveways and patios, incentives for rain collection systems, passive heating and cooling design options for the home, etc.

The present zoning encourages “garage houses” that do not fit into or conform to other homes on the street making them giant eyesores that often rob abutting properties of views, sunshine, etc.

I believe teardowns are rampant because they are profitable and can only be controlled through thoughtful zoning.

The character of the town is changing; streets are becoming canyons; rain run-off problems are serious; and there has been a significant loss of large, old growth trees.

I would like to see an end to taking down mature trees. I’d like to see homes respect the setbacks of their neighbors.

It’s very hard to regulate the character of the town through zoning, and good taste is in the eye of the beholder.

New regulations are required so that houses built in the near future will be smaller than the ones being built at present. Huge houses bring more people to Needham and the consequences are more traffic, overcrowded schools, less green space, and higher taxes.

Current zoning requirements insufficiently protect abutters (e.g., storm water run-off).

The map shown on the website shows only 2 teardowns on my street over 5 years (Livingston Circle), but I count at least 5. Is anyone really keeping score? Our neighborhood is flooded with large houses and many kids. Behind our house they have just erected an 8,000+ square foot monstrosity which dwarfs even the other McMansions.

Large houses disrupt neighborhoods during construction with police details not provided, streets blocked, sites with open holes existing for months before construction, etc. They have no open space (to kick a soccer ball, etc.) and require the Town to provide far more services.

Only through laws will this phenomenon be curtailed. Virtually all will attempt to maximize their profit. The various boards involved with teardowns must be willing and able to say no.

Have to see what has been happening in town regarding teardowns. 289 Harris put me over the edge.

Too many of the new houses are so big that they “dwarf” other nearby houses. Houses are 3 stories high and go as close to all perimeters as they can. Residents are losing their privacy and the aesthetic that they were looking for when they moved to Needham.

The large houses built on small lots are aesthetically unattractive. They do not fit with the style and spirit of the neighborhoods. New construction is necessary in certain situations, but the final house should not overreach the footprint of the original house by so much. Also, the number of trees builders cut down is alarming, some older than the original house and offering shade and environmental support. The price tag associated with the new construction makes Needham a less economically diverse town.

The town needs to find a way to balance the teardown and new construction activity with the Town’s best interests. We need to encourage various housing options (different sizes and types) to ensure we have a vibrant and diverse community that is open to individuals and families at different stages of life.

Too many houses are being built that are out of scale and out of character with neighborhoods.

There needs to be better control regarding teardown and replacement activity through zoning, which should apply to both new construction and renovation.

From the reports I’ve seen, the median size of new homes is far greater than the median size of homes from a decade or two ago. It seems that if left to developers and realtors, teardowns will continue to be replaced by houses that are as large as possible in a majority of cases with limited concern for how these homes fit into existing neighborhoods.

Right now it seems people or developers can build any size home they want on a lot, regardless of whether it creates drainage problems for neighbors, dwarfs the size of neighboring homes, occupies a substantial amount of the lot, or comes intrusively close to abutters. This reduces the value of the nearby homes and changes the character of the town.

Even though I believe more regulations are necessary (especially related to noise) when I review the Rockwood Lane decisions and count how many times the Board chose to waive requirements, I am not terribly confident that requirements are enforceable or effective.

Right now this is totally unchecked, and the result is tall homes oversized for the lots which are creating drainage problems for neighborhoods and altering the character of the town and neighborhoods. Need to limit height and increase setbacks so homes fit the character of the town and neighborhoods.

There are already controls in place that are suitable to govern this process and adding further restrictions would only limit Needham's potential for growth, business development, and ability to be as attractive a place to live in as surrounding communities.

Bylaws are needed to control actual building and conditions for neighbors.

Developers should not be allowed to clear all of the mature trees from a lot. Needham needs tree protections similar to Newton's.

We have less diversity of home size/value as a result of teardown/rebuild activity. The impact is that families in 1,500 sq. ft. homes have no incentive to remodel and improve their home because the odds are good the home will be demolished. When the time comes to sell, the houses are in such a state of disrepair that they are hard to sell to anyone other than a builder. I'm not sure how to change this trajectory, but futzing with setbacks won't help one iota. If the town wants diversity in housing, it needs to find a way to incentivize homeowners to invest in older/smaller homes.

There seems to be little "control" beyond the zoning laws for some pretty awful structures being built today on too small lots. Since many elected townsperson also are involved in the real estate industry (so I am told) we need an independent zoning board to intervene.

Whole streets have been rebuilt. Smaller houses no longer "fit" and owners have no option but to sell to developers. Feel like the Town's oversight is often a rubberstamp of current developers. Grading around houses is not checked causing water issues for neighborhoods and damage to streets due to construction and is never fixed by builders. House designs are boringly similar; in 20 years the town will look depressing in its sameness. Big new houses are causing a strain on all infrastructure.

The number of McMansions that have gone up in recent years is staggering; most of these million dollar + homes have the same look and often take up most of their lot. Needham is becoming a Levittown for the rich.

Please check all of the following more specific zoning changes that you support. If you do not support a particular idea, provide a brief comment explaining why in the space provided below the section. If you need more space, insert your comments at the end of this questionnaire.

(Note: Many respondents did not address each of these ideas, providing some comments instead.)

Setbacks:

The following zoning changes are being offered for review related to building setbacks:

- Front, side and rear yard setback in the Single Residence B and General Residence districts:
Measure the required setback for the structure to the foundation wall/face of framing as opposed to the roof overhang for ease of zoning code enforcement. The required setback

standard for the district should be adjusted to accommodate the newly revised measurement standard.

20 responses

- Encourage the placement of decorative elements (not including living space) within 2 feet of the front, side and rear elevations of the structure by exempting out from the required setback the desired element to promote greater architectural interest and variety. Allow for the placement of safety items as required by the building code such as basement exits within the noted setbacks. Adjust the required setback to accommodate these new elements (bay windows, fireplaces, gutters, overhangs, bulk heads, or similar elements).

22 responses

- Front yard setback: Increase the front yard setback and include measurement standards which respect the front yard setback of existing structures found along either side of the subject lot and if so adjusted, then adjust the rear yard setback accordingly. Specifically, change the front setback from 20 to 25 feet. In the case of a corner lot, the averaging requirement would only be required along one of the frontage streets to be selected at the discretion of the applicant.

23 responses

- Front yard setback: As an alternative to the above, change the front setback requirement from 20 feet to an average of 150 feet on each side of the lot, using whichever is greater.

19 responses

- Front yard setback: Establish a story and setback limit for front loading garages so as to reduce the massing effect of the structure at the front lot line. Specifically, limit 2-car garages between 25 and 35 feet of the front lot line to 1½ stories (a half story above the garage), requiring garages with a full story above the garage to be set back to 35 feet.

27 responses

- Front and side setbacks: Allow a portion of a covered landing or porch of up to 50 square feet in front and 25 square feet in side setbacks (porches within front and side setbacks now must be uncovered with a maximum of 50 and 25 square feet, respectively). The porch area is not limited to 50 square feet if the additional area is beyond the required setback.

22 responses

- Side yard setback: Continue requirement of a staggered side yard setback to break up the massing of the structure and avoid long unbroken walls along a property line. Expand requirement to include all facades in excess of 32 linear feet at the side lot line irrespective of their placement. Specifically:

18 responses

- Increase the side setback for a conforming lot from 12.5/14 feet to 14/16 feet. Allow 32 feet of structure at the 14 foot setback line, the rest to be offset 2 feet to the 16 foot setback line.

9 responses

- Increase the side setback for a nonconforming lot from 10 feet to 12 feet. Allow 32 feet of structure at the 12 foot setback line, the rest to be offset 2 feet to the 14 foot setback line.

6 responses

- Rear yard setback: Decrease the rear setback requirement from 20 to 15 feet.
1 (if it allows the front to match the rest of the street) and 5 other responses

Do you think that these same setback requirements should be applied to residential additions as well as residential reconstruction?

- Yes
39 responses

- No
3 responses

Do you think that there should be an opportunity for property owners to apply for a Special Permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals when topography or other unique site conditions makes it difficult to meet setback requirements?

- Yes
27 responses

- No
18 responses

Comments:

Rear yard setbacks should be increased not decreased.

Retain current backyard setbacks; create neighborhood associations to sign-off on new development; and increase communication between developers and neighborhoods.

Stop building “garage-mahals.”

Each lot is different – let the architect-owners determine the front yard setback.

Why would you want houses in a straight line? If a neighbor’s house is set back too far or not far enough, the negative effect is exacerbated by averaging the front setback.

Most of the proposed changes are in the right direction.

Why do we need front-loading garages? Make the side yard the same as conforming for the non-conforming lots. Do not decrease the rear yard setback.

There is too much room for interpretation. This could be a slippery slope.

Support setback suggestions only if less generous FAR requirements are put in place; otherwise it’s just “lipstick on a pig”. The front yard setback suggestion for front-loading garages is the only recommendation I fully and enthusiastically support. BRAVO! Decreases in rear setback are too urban. Side setback changes are too modest without reducing FAR caps. People know the constraints before they purchase the property.

I like the idea of averaging the front yard setback, but it seems like a lot of trouble just to differentiate between 25 and 35 feet. A new house is likely to have an imposing front façade even if placed in line with surrounding houses. I think additions in particular should have relaxed requirements, though I don’t have specific suggestions. I think a goal of this process should be to incentivize the reuse of the existing housing stock over teardowns. I don’t think the provision for front-loading garages goes far enough toward minimizing that aesthetically unpleasing element that dominates the front façade of new homes. I would like to see a limit on the fraction of the frontage that includes the garage.

There is no need to increase the front yard setback as many houses are only set back to 20 feet. The requirement regarding front-loading garages will be unfair to all non-conforming lots as is increasing the side setback for these lots.

My neighbors at 57 Pilgrim had to remove a 10" overhang because it was in violation. Then 3 huge houses were built nearby. Need greater front yard setback requirements.

Builders should be incentivized to provide architectural detail.

I would rather have a small front yard and larger back yard. Also as a corner home, I'd be facing increased setbacks on 2 sides of my lot. As a blanket rule, the front yard setback options concern me since my home does not have a similar size/shape and makes my lot more difficult to build on. I guess I don't understand the rule on front-loading garages. It's not that attractive, but if that meets the setback requirements, where's the harm? In regard to additions, while some dislike the McMansion style, still others dislike the Frankenhomes style of adding a large, unwieldy addition to a "classic" home. In regard to the special permit, I think it would be best not to have overbearing regulations to avoid all the extra work and time that a special permit may require, but isn't this always a possibility? If not, it should be.

I would like the front setback increased to more than 25 feet. Regarding the rear setback, 20 feet is already inadequate.

Make it impossible to build another home similar to the one squeezed into the lot on the corner of Emerson and High Rock.

Each plan should be looked at in regard to the size of the house next to it so as not to adversely affect it. No way should the Town decrease the rear yard setback.

I care less about setbacks and more about house square footage and affordability. I prefer backyards in any case.

In regard to the special permit, there needs to be some flexibility because every lot is different.

I think that zoning regs should be the same for all home construction activities, otherwise builders will just find loopholes to categorize an extensive rebuild as a renovation instead of a teardown. Therefore, I do not favor changing the setbacks because they will penalize those who wish to add on instead of tear down. These regs would have prohibited the renovation we did on our house, which is now 1,800 square feet of living space on a 7,841 plot. That's an FAR of 23% and lot coverage of 12%, exactly the kind of environmentally responsible building you should be encouraging. The backyards of new builds are already horribly small – dark strips that run behind looming 3-story houses. Why would you reduce that, even when off-setting with the front setback? I suggest that setbacks should be tied to building height – a 35 foot structure needs to be set back farther than a 25 foot one – similar to what is proposed for garages. That will address the biggest setback issue, height disparity between side-by-side houses, and have less impact on small home renovations.

Very opposed to reducing the rear yard setback.

Without a complete understanding of how each of the setback proposals would look, not sure I could reasonably be able to make appropriate comments. In general, I would be reluctant to make any changes to existing setback requirements.

Measure the setbacks to the roof overhang. Do not allow decorative elements/covered porches within setbacks. The front setback should be 35 feet. All garages should be set back 35 feet and 1½ stories tall. Increase side setbacks for conforming lots to 16/18 feet and non-conforming lots to 14/16 feet. The rear setback should remain at 20 feet.

Underground rock (ledge) may limit placement options on a lot and a special permit process would be helpful.

Require consent from abutters.

Why do non-conforming lots get a special break? Very opposed to decreasing the rear yard setback. There may be times that the ZBA must say no if a special permit process is established.

Much of the new construction I have seen already does not have a backyard, and the rear setback should not be further decreased. In fact, it should be increased to encourage builders to build a house that fits the property.

I am opposed to the proposal to reduce the rear setback. If a goal is for the rebuilt home to not intrude on neighbors, by allowing the new home to be closer to the back of the lot, you'd be working against the stated goal.

New construction is already taking up more lot space than it should. Not sure why anyone in the design world would consider this a "plus."

All these sound good. I'm a little worried about decreasing the rear yard setback if we are also excluding exterior features from the setback rules.

Keep front yard setback at 20 feet subject to increase based on buildings located within 150 feet (not to exceed 35 feet). How reducing the rear yard setback reduces negative impacts on abutters and neighborhoods is not clear to me.

Disagree with rear yard setback proposal. I would ask that it be kept at 20 feet. If you reduce the setback, then the goal of not having new construction encroach on neighbors would be defeated.

I do not support increases in the setbacks as well as the averaging option that would add complexity and limit someone who is building a new home based on when their neighbor's house was built, which may be a potential teardown itself.

Definitely opposed to decreasing the rear setback and increasing the front yard setbacks. I would prefer to see the 12.5 foot setback put into place for all properties.

I moved to my 1,660 sq. ft. garrison colonial house built on a 6,534 sq. ft. lot in 2000 with the intent of building a garage or large shed. I had 22 feet on one side to build a 12-foot garage. Then the side setback was increased to 12.5 feet. Now if you increase the side setback to 14, what can I build? New construction that replaces old unappealing homes should not only be approved but encouraged. Proposed changes to setbacks will decrease the value of Needham houses, especially small houses built on small lots. Many people are buying small houses when they start their family and have a limited budget, keeping in mind the idea of replacing it with a larger house when they get into better financial shape. These new setback changes not only scare away buyers but put current residents that need to do some house reconstruction into an unfair situation.

Increasing the setbacks and changing the grade standard for measuring building height are great ideas, except for the smallest lots in town. Maybe volume should be part of the measure. I wouldn't care if my neighbor built a 10,000 sq. ft. ranch house because it wouldn't block my view of the sky, but a 2.5-story building built on the setback would block my view. So really the setback doesn't address that issue as much as a volume measure would. Maybe a standard that says for lots of XX size and houses of XX height, the setbacks are YY, but for houses shorter than XX, they get an additional foot to build dimensionally for every foot (or whatever) that they reduce the house height. Again, it's not clear what problem is being addressed.

Garages are the first thing you see in new homes. They are often positioned in front of the houses, jutting out multiple feet. They are ugly and ruin the character of the neighborhood. Houses are massive – no back yards would change the character of the town.

The Zoning Board must have the authority/responsibility to ensure that new building and its size fit within the character of the block. See 89 Fair Oaks Park where that did not happen. It is a subjective standard, but there can be guidelines. Very opposed to reducing rear yard setback and increasing side yard setbacks.

Building Massing:

- Increase lot coverage (the footprint of the house as a percentage of lot area) from the current 25% limit to 28% to allow additional design flexibility. Furthermore, exclude from lot coverage such features as covered porches and landings (unless habitable space is above), decks, bulkheads, fireplaces, and bay windows.
11 responses
- Add Floor Area Ratio (FAR) calculations (floor area divided by the lot area) to zoning on a sliding scale based on the size of the lot as provided below. The floor area counted will be defined as gross finished habitable area on the first and second floors plus a maximum additional 600 square foot allowance for garage space.
13 responses

Comments:

Recommendations are dependent on lot size but totally ignorant of location. Lots near the Town Center are smaller and would be “punished” by this requirement.

The new limits are a step in the right direction - except the relaxed lot coverage limit - but don't address the problem of every developer building right up to the limit.

Do not increase lot coverage. FAR for 10,000-10,999 lot is too big, 2,800 is large enough.

FAR is desirable but suggested numbers are too generous. It's an inappropriate assumption that small lots can or should support a 12-room house. There ought to be a variety of housing units as there are a variety of lot sizes.

I agree with the imposition of the FAR limit, but don't agree with the categorical exclusion of basements and attics, especially if third floors are fully habitable owing to their ceiling height and presence of windows and if there are bathrooms. I'm not clear why lot sizes 7,501 to 10,999 don't adhere to the pattern of an additional 0.01 per 1,000 square feet.

The FAR is not needed as it will severely limit the size of houses that people want to live in and decrease the values of older homes. It will financially hurt those people most in need of selling their homes for maximum value. It will decrease tax revenues and hurt the school system. Don't mess with all the good things now happening in our town!

I don't know enough about the technicalities to comment.

Garage space should be included in FAR as should porches.

The FAR requirements are incremental and do not significantly reduce the problem of building massing. I did not see “attic” space counted. Most new houses don't have attics, they have 3rd floors with play space.

FAR seems reasonable, but I don't like that it will bring down the value of my house.

Absolutely no increase in lot coverage should be passed as house footprints are already too large. As to FAR, many new homes have finished third floors and basements and this space should be included.

FAR should be based on all habitable space including unfinished areas that can be renovated in the future. A more complicated calculation would be fairer.

Do not increase lot coverage as this creates other problems.

Lot coverage is an issue, both for water run-off and overall green space.

Very opposed to increasing lot coverage and most concerned with small lots in the FAR calculations as they are too high. Small lots shouldn't be 40% house. The biggest problem is huge houses on small lots.

I think the sliding scale approach looks reasonable, but I would need to be sure I understand the impact of proposals to comment.

Lot coverage should be 25% or less. FAR calculations are a good idea but allowable house size should be less for all lot sizes.

I support FAR's assuming the garage (600 square feet of allowance) is not included in the SF in the table. The house behind us on 86 Livingston Circle is over 8,000 sq. ft. on property of 15,300 sq. ft. Wish the FAR rule had been applied. Do not understand the FAR table but generally favor a limited FAR.

Something is not right on the FAR table. A 5,000 sq. ft. house on a 15,000 sq. ft. lot is a very big house on a not too large lot. Picture this house with only 80 feet of frontage. Also, a 3,000 sq. ft. house on a 7,500 sq. ft. lot will look huge and very tight. Considering setbacks, 3,000 sq. ft. is about all you can get.

Many houses that are now being built cover more than 25% of their lot.

Two-car garages are certainly nice but not necessary. Let the house fit the lot!

Do not increase lot coverage. Habitable 3rd stories should be counted in the FAR to control height to some extent. FAR's are too generous. I really think we need to pursue a staged process to building approvals, similar to Wellesley. The first stage would be for up to a certain square footage or FAR and then there would be additional steps for a larger structure.

We support increasing the footprint percentage to 28%, including overhangs, as long as setbacks are strictly enforced with little or no provision for a setback variance.

Lot coverage should remain the same if not be reduced slightly. Also it will create problems with increased water run-off during and after storms. It seems contrary to the initiative and resident feedback at the June meeting to increase it.

I'm not familiar enough with these factors to comment, but these sound like good ideas.

Increasing lot coverage will increase run-off (storm) from properties – again, seems contrary to the goal. There are so many exclusions from the FAR calculation, this doesn't seem like it helps in capping the size of a house.

I am not responding to this because I think it fails to address the more fundamental issue. If the Committee is proposing to increase the allowable coverage of land area, it would seem contrary to its mission, which I thought was to respond to the requests by residents to reduce the allowable coverage of land area.

I do not support adding the FAR restriction. It is an unnecessary limitation on people who are already working within reasonable guidelines. If implemented it should definitely not include basements or attics.

I don't support the increase in lot coverage but think the proposed FAR calculations look good.

I'm not qualified to comment on these FAR numbers, but I think the FAR concept is the better way to go, and the garage should be included, especially in the smaller lots. Will the homeowner then be free to add a swimming pool, a tennis court, an outside living room, etc., etc.?

The developers are putting in large 3rd floors for bedrooms and play spaces. These add considerable mass to a house and should be counted in the FAR calculation.

An attic increases the mass of the building. It makes no sense to exclude it from Far calculations, especially since developers are creating living spaces in them. Our neighbor advertises his house at over 5,500 square feet for his 15,000 square foot lot. I am sure he includes his 3rd floor in these figures, and the house is huge. Also, why exclude porches?

Building Height:

The following 2 options for measuring height have been suggested, the choice being up to the applicant:

- Measure height from the average existing grade or average new grade, whichever is lower. Height limit is still 35 feet. This approach works best on lots that are relatively level or that slope up from the front.

11 responses

Or

- Measure height from a single point in the street centerline as the average of the highest 1/3 of the properties street frontage. The height limit would be 32 feet when using this alternative. This approach works best on lots that slope down from the street front, which are at a disadvantage when measuring from average existing grade.

12 responses

Comments:

Imposing a height limit is an excellent idea.

We clearly need additional regulations to address grading and storm water run-off, among other things. The shorter the better.

The height situation has been completely abused. These seem like modest improvements. Mounding is a real problem. I think that a special permit should be required for changes in grade.

Reduce the 32-foot limit (to 30 feet or less) so that the latter approach is only desirable on severely sloping properties.

I appreciate the concerns for mounding changing the finished grade of the home, but worry about how the height measurement would work with my home on a corner lot. My lot slopes downward from the front of my house, but the side of my house is about 4 feet lower.

Why is storm run-off not being addressed? Why are inconsistent grade changes permitted at all?

One of the issues that needs to be addressed is the removal of ledge rock to increase the foundation of new homes. Several of my neighbors in Bird's Hill experienced water seeping into their basements for the first time after a recent McMansion was built that involved the removal of ledge rock. There needs to be more attention paid to this issue, pre and post inspections, compensation for the affected homes, etc. Also make it impossible to build another home similar to the 5-story home on Wachusett Rd.

If this solves the current water run-off problem, I'm for it.

Why can't it depend on whether the street is sloped?

I'm not sure which one is more effective, but people need to work off existing grade, not finished.

This is incredibly confusing.

The critical issue here is the impact of the water flow. You might consider option 1 or 2 depending on the actual lot's grade.

Height limit should be 32 feet.

Don't understand, but we are opposed to liberalizing the building height in any way. Keep the houses at reasonable scales in keeping with existing houses.

Determine on a case-by-case basis.

The 35 limit is too high. Why not consider the height of other houses in the neighborhood? This would help new construction be in the spirit of the neighborhood. Because of the grade and lack of limitations, the house across from me towers over its neighbors. Perhaps an additional stipulation that the house be within a certain percentage of its lower neighbor would help.

We support that the height of houses should be measured from the lowest point on the originally existing lot and kept at 35 feet, unless adjacent houses have a greater height, in which case the new house should be allowed to reach the height of the highest adjacent house. Further, lots should not be allowed to be raised thereby creating water run-off to abutting properties.

35 feet is better than what we have today, but still not enough of a limitation from my perspective. I understand the average height of a 2½ story home in Needham is about 28 feet. Even 35 feet measured from the lower of the average existing or new grade is too high. I'd prefer to see it more like 31.5 feet to 32 feet.

It's hard to visualize how these might work. But generally, I like any plan to reduce building height to be more in keeping with surrounding houses.

The first "option" is better than the existing bylaws, but the average allowable height should be reduced. I do not agree with the conclusion that properties that are downhill of the street are disadvantaged in any way. I live on such a lot. If I were to take advantage of such a provision, it would "negatively impact" my backyard neighbor.

Neither. I suggest reducing the 35 foot proposal by 10% to 31.5 feet with measurements taken from the lower of the existing and proposed grades. It seems to me that the Committee is failing to address one of the biggest objections – namely the height of new homes that is dwarfing existing homes nearby. I would request that this get greater attention as it seems like a huge missed opportunity for the Committee.

49 Wachusett Road is an example of unregulated – or rather insufficiently regulated – development. Neighbors should have been alerted/consulted before development began. This home is unsightly, to say the least.

Homes are being built up and over their neighbors like a castle.

"Average new grade" assumes the builder has altered the grade to benefit the buyers of the new house but probably floods out the neighboring lots. This is a bad practice. Builders should be responsible for adjacent house lot flooding for a period (1 year?) after sale of the property.

Mainly I am trusting the work of the Committee and give thanks that the work has been done with care and diligence.

I'm concerned that these options will not be adhered to.

Height limits need to be in accordance with the neighborhood in keeping with the tallest and lowest homes. Dirt mounding should have limits as well.

Please insert below any additional comments that you would like the Large House Study Review Committee to take into consideration with respect to potential zoning changes.

Issues related to run-off and other common sense rules make sense. The fact is that many of Needham's homes are ill-suited to residents of today and tomorrow. Focusing on teardowns is "red meat" for nostalgia, but doesn't really address environmental or affordability concerns, which should be the focus.

The proposed changes are good, but fail to address such important issues as storm water run-off and loss of trees. They're also not aggressive enough on the issue of cost and variety of housing stock. Adopt a moratorium on teardowns until the final rules are in place. Teardowns are changing not just

the architecture but the human landscape of the town. The older housing that is being replaced is not just smaller and cheaper on average, it's more diverse to accommodate a larger range of people – young families, retirees, etc. (at varied income levels). Baseline house is better than the current maximum limit but still huge. To preserve diversity we should have other design categories with much more stringent FAR limits. Permits for projects in the maximum FAR category should not be issued until the lower categories were filled. This adds complexity, but how else can we preserve diversity in the current economic environment?

This is a very bad questionnaire as it offers no alternatives. Yes or no questions are not helpful.

Builders should be required to preserve as many trees as possible. The lot on the corner of Webster and Harris is disgraceful.

I disagree STRONGLY with the premise that a 4-bedroom, etc. house is appropriate for every lot in Needham. It has the great potential to harm abutters, hurts diversity, compounds storm water problems, and causes a loss of vegetation which impacts privacy, sound control, attractiveness and environmental health. The residents are speaking loud and clear that they are unhappy with the mass and scale of new structures and asking for real and meaningful changes. Just read the Letter from the Editor from a member of your Committee which I found to be childish and entirely untrue of the citizens' concerns. It is exactly why so many citizens feel that they cannot be heard and that the "Study" Committee may be unfairly biased by self-interested members. (She goes on considerably longer about this.)

I am supportive of these changes in general but feel that they don't go quite far enough, especially with regard to encouraging builders to diminish the prominence of attached garages (front-loading ones in particular). Using the 10,000 square foot example, my estimation is an architect could design a building with 7,600 square feet of livable space plus a 2-car attached garage. The height limit does not seem to preclude that, and the exclusion of basements and attics doesn't either.

The Town needs to come up with a plan for preserving/restoring the stock of homes that are affordable by middle-class families. Otherwise, we risk becoming an elitist community like some of our neighbors.

These proposed regulations are "too little too late". Please stop "lenient building" which is biased to contractors, real estate agents and Town coffers. Wellesley's regs are a great model with more appropriately sized homes replacing teardowns. Also seniors do not want to pay "runaway taxes" because new homes are pushing up market values and tax payments.

Make this content simpler. I suspect you are getting far less input from residents than you would like. Please consider soliciting more input after simplifying. Also Town leadership should establish a vision of what they would like town housing stock to look like in 2066 and compare it to a description of the housing stock today. Then ask how do we get from today to what we want in 2066? Are the market forces and proposed regulations getting us there? Do we really want FAR to double or triple on all lots over the next 50 years? I don't think so. The proposed regulations do not meaningfully address this.

From an aesthetic point of view, the monotony of new residential construction stems from the lack of variety of siding stemming from an over-reliance of Hardie board and its ken. I would say that in new construction and façade-changing renovation, no 2 contiguous houses should have these materials.

I think there are legitimate concerns about storm run-off. The town maybe should require or provide incentives for people to include French drains, rain collection systems, porous concrete driveways/patios or other means to address this in a way that is affordable and likely to be done by someone working on their home. I think people complaining about the "new monstrosities" are ridiculous. What one person thinks is attractive another may find hideous. While there are some beautiful

homes that I would be sad to see town down, they are not mine and I want autonomy with my home.

Making tighter restrictions on “too big for the lot” home may make it possible for families to purchase smaller “starter” homes on which they are currently being outbid by builders. I want to see new Needham residents of all income levels, not just those who can afford \$1.5 million and up. (Note: The respondent goes on with a 2-page addendum that largely deals with concerns related to trees, run-off and why the new homes are not better utilizing solar energy options. The respondent further questioned why not one person who was affected by new construction was on the Committee. Bottom-line is that the current proposals do not go far enough and are “too little too late”.)

I hope that this current initiative makes significant changes so that our town culture, appearance and “personality” do not become one of exclusivity and wealth. Please be brave and make significant changes to our zoning bylaws. (Note: Also makes considerable comments about requiring builders to leave mature trees and/or plant larger trees.)

The Committee should find a way to bring back the detached garage. The driveway becomes longer and can accommodate more cars, more play space, and abutters might actually get to meet. Accommodating the garage into the house makes the house ugly and too big. Also the sense of community is ruined by the new “garage houses” as today’s buyers drive in and out of their garages without ever acknowledging or meeting their neighbors. Don’t say it can’t be done, fight for it!

Please consider the effects of any new zoning laws on average house prices. Can exceptions be made if housing is deemed affordable?

No mounding should be allowed. Lot coverage should be no more than 25%. Every tree of 5 inches in diameter or greater taken down should be replaced up to a maximum of #(10?). Run-off must be managed.

The #1 thing I’d like to see is the protection of mature trees. #2 would be to encourage design elements so that homes have some uniqueness and aren’t simply repeated over and over. Finally, it is absurd that I need to print this out and mail it to you as there are countless free online survey tools.

I think the Committee has missed the mark by focusing on the aesthetics of new builds. The issue is that \$700K houses are being replaced by \$1.5 million houses, because that is what is profitable for builders. The regs need to be written to encourage renovation, keeping more housing stock under \$1 million. The “standard” house elements are only “standard” because that is what is required/expected when paying \$1.5 million for a house. Also at issue are the environmental impacts – less green space for water to drain, trees clear cut to maximize lot coverage, and wildlife displaced. I would love to see fewer ugly homes built, but more importantly, I would like young families to be able to afford to move to Needham and not live in an apartment. Let’s encourage smarter design, not just prettier. There is so much wasted space in these new builds because they are designed around \$/square foot, backwards-engineered from how much profit the builder wants to make, not what the buyer wants. Tighter regs will force builders to design the best house for the lot, not just the biggest. I hope that whatever new regs are passed will address problems with these new builds: 207 Marked Tree, 10 Brookline Street, 9 Wachussetts, and 39 Birds Hill. An example of the kind of work we should be encouraging is 9 Shady Lane.

This survey is way too complex for citizens, and needs to be short and simple.

Information provided: Of the 30 dwellings on Livingston Circle, 19 have been teardowns. Already 1 couple is downsizing after only 6 years, looking for a smaller house. House on Great Plain and Manning is oversized and obliterates the property behind it on Manning. Wish we had some good architects overseeing the building process.

You have to be very careful about impacting the value of the property. For older houses with obsolescence a real possibility, the value might well be only what a builder will pay. Limiting the size

of a replacement home can severely limit the amount a builder can reasonably offer. Lowering the value means that the owner might be paying too much in taxes for some time. Given the need new buyers have for large open rooms, walk-in closets, and large bathrooms; older smaller houses lose their appeal. Let's face it, for some property it's the land that is most valuable in a market sense – don't destroy it.

Regulations should encourage new small houses for which there is a market in Needham. The appearance of new houses is less important than their overall size. Regulate/ban new house irrigation systems which are depleting our drinking water supplies. Enforce Needham General By-Law 3.8.1 (noise regulations) and charge fines from \$50 to \$500 per violation. Add other fines for damages to abutter properties by builders.

I generally support changes that do not shift or change the setbacks, but instead focus on decreasing the size of the house (e.g., FAR allowance). Also, please give consideration to homes on lots that are narrow (e.g., 80 feet width or less) because current setbacks are already limiting and additional setbacks would severely restrict good design.

Several pages of comments are included with photos and tables concerning the situation at Livingston Circle where there have been 19 teardowns since 2001, representing 63% of the 30 existing properties. One comment included, "This appears to be the future of Livingston Circle: young families with 2-4 children will buy in, hold the house and enjoy the Needham schools (and taxes) for a decade or so, and then look to downsize elsewhere. In short, we fear that our street is no longer a place for lifetime residents, it has become a temporary dormitory for families with young children." He goes on with, "Developers cater to every whim of the buyers, with no regard to the abutters or the neighborhood. Buyers of the large houses are encouraged to take every last inch they are allowed, literally and figuratively. On the other hand, they're discouraged from doing such responsible things as leaving some trees or installing solar panels." He inserts compelling before and after pictures including a concrete basketball court that was built 3 feet from his border and outdoor lights that shine down on the court into their home.

All these changes do not control the number of houses torn down or restrict their size in a meaningful way. The character, scale and open space have been adversely affected by large houses. Neighborhoods that were open and great places to live look like "sardines in a can". The stock of small affordable homes is being eliminated. Where do young middle class families live? How do our teachers, firefighters, public works staff and police afford to live here? In the beginning a few local builders were building large houses, now contractors are coming to Needham to create buildable lots by destroying the fabric of our neighborhoods. Let's start with the following: 1) Need police details at all residential construction sites to reduce traffic problems, noise, and insure safety for children walking to school. 2) Construction must start within 10 business days of house demolition, and if not assess damages of \$100 per business day. 3) All construction vehicles must be marked with contractor's name, trade address and phone numbers. 4) Contractors must make a proposal specifying why a teardown is necessary and provide an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). 5) Abutters should be given an opportunity to review a complete set of plans and specifications before any permit is granted. 6) Enforce disturbing the peace laws (no radios, no work on Sunday, no work on Saturday before 8 AM and after noon).

Committee recommendations must consider the long-term consequences. Just about all of the properties in Needham will turnover eventually and if all these are replaced with large houses, it's going to look ridiculous. Bylaws must be written in such a way to avoid this future scenario, and boards must be willing to say no. How about having a maximum FAR for the various residential zones in Needham (e.g., zone xyz contains 3 square miles (made up of totaled lot sizes only) (83,635,200 sq. ft.) and maximum FAR of 0.33 which would give 27,599,616 sq. ft. When this maximum floor area is reached or approached, choices will have to be made as to who can/cannot

build a large house. I think a way to conserve much of the moderate housing will be to calculate the current zone FAR, add a little to that, and let that be the new maximum.

The town is changing at a rapid pace. It seems that all of the smaller affordable houses are being torn down and giant houses are going up. The streets have lost so many trees and residents are losing their privacy. The Town needs to add more zoning regulations so builders can build houses that don't dwarf the other houses on the block and still make Needham an affordable place for young families.

I would very much like to see the zoning changes reflect these simple ideas: Let the new construction fit the lot, be in the spirit of the neighborhood, and respect nature's legacy. Lastly, the baseline program does not reflect what typical houses once were, limits the possibility of socio-economic diversity, and reduces energy efficiency.

Documents from the public meeting and the questionnaire are too "in the weeds," filled with an incredible amount of detail that can be hard to follow for the average citizen. The materials, in my opinion, are way too "inside baseball" to encourage all but the most determined minority of citizens to decipher. (There's more about the format of the questionnaire.) Do whatever regulating that encourages houses to be built or remodeled so that they don't appear to be oversized in established neighborhoods or that will lead to an overcrowded feeling in neighborhoods that wind up filled with replacement homes. Building "big" hardly ensures that neighborhoods will become more attractive or that property values will rise. In fact, Needham's homes are virtually guaranteed to increase in value given the Town's proximity to Boston and public transit. If Needham winds up a community of "trophy houses," the town's character is likely to change through less economic and house-sized diversity.

This approach is very inefficient for respondents, for those who will need to enter the responses, and those who will analyze and report on the results.

I found this questionnaire to be very technical in its description and difficult for a lay person to understand. I would also suggest that more information be provided on when and why the Board decides to waive requirements. I'm not sure what the point is of creating a Committee to study the need to create more requirements if in the end the Board can simply waive them at its discretion. Also, in light of all the new construction that is happening in town, is the Committee going to address the need for new regulations to monitor construction noise in residential neighborhoods?

Respondent thanks the Committee and indicates the teardown issue is a big problem, further acknowledging that there is no way to please everyone with the regulations. Then states, "I don't mind big houses in themselves, but they should be designed in the context of the neighborhood, not as generic mansions that will bring the most profit for sellers. I've heard developers say that buyers are requesting these big houses with special features (high ceilings, open concept, etc.). Perhaps some buyers do, but there are plenty who want something affordable and modest and can no longer find that in Needham. Needham's old streets and neighborhoods help give it the charm and desirability that we all love, and these big ill-fitting houses, in many cases, are spoiling that charm as well as doing physical damage to the surrounding land.

More complaints on not using an electronic survey format and then refers the Committee to Restore Needham's 4-21-16 memo for additional comments.

The proposals fail to address the biggest issue – height. Given the average height of "older" homes is around 28 feet, then allowing homes at 35 feet or higher that disrupt drainage and completely change the character of neighborhoods is a flawed proposition. We renovated a 1,650 square foot house and added on the back without changing the character or height of the home to get to a 3,000 square foot home that completely fits the neighborhood and looks almost the same from the front as before without coming even near the new proposed setback limits.

There is no need to change what is already a well-functioning framework. The increased building and teardowns in Needham is what is attracting so many new families to the town like mine and many friends over the last 5 years. It also increases the tax base significantly, benefiting everyone in town. Another recommendation for using an electronic format for the survey. House size to lot size ratios should be much more strictly regulated. Brookline, Concord, Newton and other towns do a good job in this area. Present Needham listings include many examples of very large houses on smaller lots – for example, a 6,160 square foot home on a 9,600 square foot lot. This should not be allowed. Exceptions could be applied for through the Design Review Board of Planning Board. Abutters and neighbors should be included in the process. Applying simply to the ZBA would not be recommended; more oversight is needed.

I believe people should be able to build on their property within reason, and if they want a big house... so be it. Just cause no harm to me or my neighborhoods. I also believe your Committee needs to address landscaping and drainage. Comments accompanied by photos of water run-off problems (street flooding and neighbors basement now having water based on the new home construction) as well as late night work and early morning deliveries during construction. Additional comments involved issues during construction that the Town needs to better control (e.g., builder must have a trash dumpster and pick up trash on a daily basis that flies away; builder must use a large magnet and survey for loose nails each day on the property and neighboring properties; install a porta potty on the property and not on the sidewalk nor the edge of the property; install a true temporary fence; require no interior and exterior construction on Sundays except for existing homeowners; allow no deliveries before or after stated hours nor deliveries that block traffic for hours; and issue fines for violations (calls to the Police Department have not been effective and should instead be directed to the Building Department).

We were unable to complete the survey because it is overwhelmingly complex but have some feedback. Builders should be required to address privacy effects on adjacent properties when houses are built disproportionately high or close to adjacent lots. There is no tree or fence tall enough to give us back our privacy or the sunlight we used to have for our garden. We used to look out our back windows and see trees and sky. Now we see HOUSE. The amount of new construction is severely reducing the number of mature trees in Needham. We need to consider the environmental impacts as well as the aesthetic. When you replace a 1,200 square foot house with a 5,000 square foot house, the result is usually more school-age kids. We should put a moratorium on new construction until the town can figure out how to physically accommodate the increase in school enrollments. As builders make more and more profits, fewer affordable homes are available.

The survey seems very technical and involved, and I just want to give the Committee my general impressions. Those in small houses surrounded by larger ones feel that light and privacy has been taken away from them, particularly if the larger house is toward the south as it casts a long shadow in the winter onto the smaller one. Light is very important for morale and solar gain in the winter. They also can feel that neighbors are peering in from much higher windows whether this is actually happening or not. Often mature trees are removed so you have another privacy issue when the backs and sides (private sides vs. street side being public) are too close. Mature deciduous trees to the south and southwest of a house also provide shade in the summer and light in the winter. Mature trees also help to offset the carbon footprint of the new house. Beyond “mounding” and the neighborhood watershed, another issue is earth permeability. We need the rainwater to seep into the ground to replace the groundwater for future generations. If too much of the land is built and covered with asphalt, rain simply runs off. Like FAR and mounding constraints, there must a way to put constraints on the land available for rain to seep into our groundwater supply and avoid overcharging the storm drains in the short term.

The survey doesn't address what appears to me is the bigger issue, which is the loss of trees which provide shade, habitat, privacy, and water absorption.

Lots should not be clear cut as is always the case in Needham. A concerted effort should be made to save large trees on the property. This is an important environmental issue, impacts neighbors and the special characteristics of the neighborhood.

The Committee has a very tough job of balancing the interests of the town with the right of developers to build houses that meet the market's needs and are profitable. We won't stop the construction of large homes, but we can ensure that Needham's character is not overwhelmed by them.

Older homes should be renovated and preserved.