

MEMORANDUM

TO: Needham Planning Board
FROM: Katie King, Deputy Town Manager
SUBJECT: MBTA Communities Act Zoning Proposals School Enrollment Analysis
DATE: September 20, 2024

Putting Zoning Projections into Context

The goal of analyzing a zoning proposal is to provide the Town with projections, not exact predictions.

As you know, zoning bylaws establish options of what an owner can do with their property relative to the size and number of buildings and how they are used. The Planning Board's zoning proposals under the MBTA Communities Act add options for property owners to those that already exist in the Town's zoning bylaw. Zoning sets parameters for what is possible, but ultimately it is up to each owner to decide if they will (re)develop their property and how based on the various options available to them.

Unlike zoning proposals that are prompted by a site-specific development project, the zoning proposals before the Planning Board set a proactive vision for the possibility of development across roughly 100 acres near the Needham Junction, Needham Center, and Needham Heights commuter rail stations.

Since this is zoning and not a specific development proposal, there are many variables that cannot be known. However, the Town can make reasonable assumptions about these variables to give a directional sense of what to anticipate in the future. These projections help inform decision makers about potential trade-offs and benefits of the zoning proposals. The Town will also use these projections as a starting point for operational and capital planning and will update assumptions annually as zoning possibilities materialize into actual projects and new, more specific information is known.

Updated Unit and Student Projections

At your September 17th meeting, the Board voted to retain a floor area ratio (FAR) of 1.3, by right, in the Avery Square Business District (100 West Street parcel) but capped the number of allowable units at 190. A maximum dwelling units per acre of 44 was applied to this district in the draft zoning language to accomplish this goal, which resulted in 189 units under the MBTA Communities Act compliance model. This zoning change results in a decrease of 54 units and a decrease of 7 students in each scenario below. There are no other changes in these projections compared to those presented at the Board's public hearing on September 5.

RKG Projections (updated 09/19/2024)	Units	Students
Base Compliance Plan: Likely Build	411	55
Base Compliance Plan: Full Build	1,870	236
Neighborhood Housing Plan: Likely Build	1,288	164
Neighborhood Housing Plan: Full Build	3,296	415

School Enrollment Projections vs. Actuals

At your September 17th meeting, I presented a more detailed analysis of the student enrollment projections from RKG Associates compared with the student generation rates that Needham has experienced over the last five years from three large multi-family housing developments. This analysis concluded that the RKG projections are consistent with Needham's experience over the last five years. Appendix 1, *Student Projections vs. Actuals, Updated 09/19/2024*, has been updated to reflect the reduction of units and students due to the unit cap in the Avery Square Business District (100 West St).

Future School Needs Committee

Needham's Future School Needs Committee, including members from the School Committee, Select Board, and Finance Committee, meets annually with the School Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent for Finance & Operations to review enrollment projection assumptions that will be used to generate updated enrollment forecasts for the district. The Committee has begun its process for the 2025/26 - 2039/40 Enrollment Forecast.¹

McKibben Demographics is the Needham Public Schools' consultant who is responsible for the annual enrollment forecasts. To ensure that McKibben and RKG are using pupil generation multipliers consistently, Lee Newman, Director of Planning and Community Development, Anne Gulati, NPS Assistant Superintendent for Finance & Operations, and I met with McKibben. McKibben agreed with the assumptions used in RKG's calculations and will use these multipliers in the updated forecast, which is anticipated to be finalized in December 2024.

School Capacity Analysis

At your September 17th meeting, I also presented a school capacity analysis to put student projections into context of the Needham Public School's Master Plan to better understand potential capital impacts. The methodology used to project if the school master plan would be able to accommodate additional students was as follows:

- Start with McKibben's peak enrollment projection for NPS over the next 15 years.
- Add the RKG student projections to get a total enrollment projection.
- Compare that total enrollment projection to the school capacity of the preferred School Master Plan Scenarios C1a (renovate Pollard for grades 6-8, High Rock becomes a 6th elementary school, Mitchell renovated as 3-section school) and C2 (C1a, but with a 4-section Mitchell School).

The most conservative aspect of the School Capacity Analysis methodology was the proportion of the RKG students applied to each school level. All projected students were assumed to enter the elementary level (46% of current NPS students are at the elementary level), all projected students were assumed to enter the middle school (23% of current NPS students are in middle school), and half of the projected students were assumed to enter high school (30% of current NPS students are in high school). This methodology overestimates the likely impact at each school level, providing a worst-case scenario. This approach was particularly conservative on the middle school level out of recognition that the Pollard School is in the process of transitioning from a concept in the School Master Plan to a building project.

¹ A. Gulati memo, Future School Needs Committee, 09/17/2024
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eyCeszx24EdcRgl11njFtb31uZTf8Bd5/edit>

The analysis concluded that the School Committee's preferred master plan scenarios (C1a and C2) would accommodate the student projections for both the Base Plan and the Neighborhood Housing Plan Likely build outs at the elementary and middle school levels. The student projections from the Neighborhood Housing Plan Likely build out would exceed high school capacity (1800 seats) by 11 students (or < 1%).

MSBA Pollard Reconstruction

In December 2023, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) invited the Town of Needham into its Eligibility Period for the Pollard Middle School. This is the beginning of the MSBA's grant approval process, through which they will decide on whether to partner with the Town in funding a new or renovated Pollard. One step in this process is an agreement between the MSBA and the Town on what student enrollment number the new building, if funded, would be designed to accommodate. On September 17, the MSBA provided the Town with its final enrollment figure for a Grade 6-8 Pollard School at 1,335 students.

The MSBA's letter (enclosed) indicates that its original enrollment projection was 1,290 students but after further discussions with the school district, enrollment was adjusted upwards to reflect fluctuations in out-of-district enrollment patterns (10 students added), new housing developments in town (15 students added), and potential zoning changes due to the MBTA Communities Act (20 students added).

Appendix 2, *School Capacity Analysis, Updated 09/19/2024*, has been updated to reflect the MSBA's conclusions that 20 students will enter middle school due to the zoning and the Pollard capacity is 1,335 students. An assumption of 60 students entering middle school under the Neighborhood Likely Build is extrapolated from the 20 applied to the Base scenario, representing three times the figure in the Base and roughly one third of the RKG student projection for the Neighborhood Likely Build Out. The analysis has also been updated to reflect the reduction of units and students due to the unit cap in the Avery Square Business District (100 West St). The specific numbers in these analyses will continue to move over time, as McKibben updates enrollment forecasts annually and planning documents (including both the zoning proposals and the School Master Plan) evolve into more concrete projects.

Under this updated analysis, student projections from the Base Compliance Plan Likely Build Out would exceed the MSBA enrollment capacity by 34 students (2.5%). Student projections from the Neighborhood Housing Plan Likely Build Out would exceed the MSBA enrollment capacity by 74 students (5.5%).

The Town's most recent project in partnership with the Massachusetts School Building Authority was the Sunita Williams Elementary School. The MSBA's final enrollment for the design of SWES was 430 students. The current enrollment at SWES is 534 students (24% above the design capacity). The school district regularly manages some amount of fluctuation in student populations within each school.

MBTA Communities Act Zoning
Student Projects vs. Actuals: Expanded Analysis 10.3.2024

◊ RKG Associates projections are consistent with the student generation rates that Needham has experienced over the last five years from large multi-family housing developments in town.

◊ The Town conferred with McKibben Demographics, the Needham Public Schools' consultant responsible for annual enrollment projections. McKibben agreed with the assumptions below.

RKG Projections	Units	Students
Base Compliance Plan: Likely Build	411	55
Base Compliance Plan: Full Build	1,870	236
Neighborhood Housing Plan: Likely Build	1,288	164
Neighborhood Housing Plan: Full Build	3,296	415

Actuals: Children Attending NPS from Specific Developments	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	Average	Units	student generation rate per unit
Charles River Landing (300 2nd Avenue)	18	14	14	17	21	16.8	350	0.048
Kendrick (275 2nd Avenue)	46	50	58	50	45	49.8	390	0.128
Modera (700 Greendale Ave)	41	41	38	45	45	42	136	0.309
Hamilton Highlands (757 Highland Avenue)	8	12	22	27	31	20	79	0.253
Rosemary Ridge (100 Rosemary Way)	0	1	4	6	7	3.6	105	0.034
Rosemary Lake Apts (multiple addresses)	22	27	29	37	46	32.2	204	0.158
Total	135	145	165	182	195	164.4	1264	0.130

Source: Needham Public Schools

Actuals: Unit Distribution	studio & one-bed	%	two-bed	%	three-bed	%	Total Units	
Charles River Landing (300 2nd Avenue)	244	70	106	30	0	0	350	25% affordable
Kendrick (275 2nd Avenue)	202	52	149	38	39	10	390	25% affordable
Modera (700 Greendale Ave)	19	14	103	76	14	10	136	25% affordable
Hamilton Highlands (757 Highland Avenue)	3	4	76	96	0	0	79	
Rosemary Ridge (100 Rosemary Way)	30	29	75	71	0	0	105	
Rosemary Lake Apts (multiple addresses)	102	50	80	39	22	11	204	
Total	600	47	589	47	75	6	1264	

Source: Town of Needham

MBTA Communities Act Zoning
Student Projects vs. Actuals: Expanded Analysis 10.3.2024

RKG Assumptions: Unit Distribution	studio & one-bed	55%	two-bed	35%	three-bed	10%		
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Source: CoStar (note: 10% studios, 45% one-beds)

RKG Assumptions: Student Generation (this example is the Neighborhood Housing Plan Likely Build Out)	Unit Breakdown	Unit Breakdown: Detailed		% unit type assumptions	projected # units	RKG student rate	projected # students	Student Generation Rate per Unit
total number of units	1288	MARKET (87.5% of total units)	studio	10	112.70	0.00	0.00	
total market (87.5%)	1127		one bed	45	507.15	0.00	0.00	
total affordable (12.5%)	161		two bed	35	394.45	0.16	63.11	
			three bed	10	112.70	0.50	56.35	
				<i>Subtotal</i>	1127.00		119.46	
		AFFORD-ABLE (12.5% of total units)	studio	10	16.10	0.00	0.00	
			one bed	45	72.45	0.00	0.00	
			two bed	35	56.35	0.38	21.41	
			three bed	10	16.10	1.20	19.32	
				<i>Subtotal</i>	161.00		40.73	
				Total	1288		160	0.124
				w/rounding	1288		164	0.127

Sources: Student rates from Residential Demographic Multipliers, Needham Public Schools actuals. Assumptions affirmed by McKibben Demographics. Market vs. affordable % determined by the zoning language.

MBTA Communities Act Zoning School
Capacity Analysis w/current

◊ Student enrollment projections are put into context of the Needham Public Schools' Master Plan to understand potential capital impacts.
◊ The School Committee's preferred master plan scenarios (renovate Pollard for grades 6-8, High Rock becomes a 6th elementary school, Mitchell renovated as 3- or 4-section school) would accommodate the student projections for both the Base Plan and the Neighborhood Housing Plan Likely build outs at the elementary level.
◊ Compared to current elementary school capacity, the Base likely build would exceed capacity by 49 students (2%) and the Neighborhood likely build by 158 students (6%).
◊ The total enrollment projection for middle school would exceed the MSBA capacity for the Pollard School by 34 students (2.5%) under the Base Plan Likely build out and by 74 students (5.5%) under the Neighborhood Plan Likely build out.
◊ The student projections from the Neighborhood Housing Plan Likely Build Out would exceed Needham High School capacity (1800 seats) by 7 students (< 1%).

Data & Assumptions	Elementary	Middle	High School	Sources
McKibben peak enrollment projections through 2039	2628	1349	1725	McKibben Report, Dec 2023; elementary peak is 2038-39, middle peak is 2030-31, high school peak is 2034-35.
RKG student projections due to zoning (see below)				figures updated 09/19/2024
% NPS student enrollment by level (2024-25)	46%	23%	30%	McKibben Report, Dec 2023
Addition of RKG projections to McKibben peak enrollment	Assumes ALL students generated from zoning enter elementary school at the same time.	Assumes 20 students for Base Likely Build Out and 60 students for Neighborhood Likely Build Out enter middle school.	Assumes HALF students generated from zoning enter high school at the same time.	The MSBA concluded that 20 students would be generated at the middle school level due to the zoning. An assumption of 60 students entering middle school under the Neighborhood Likely Build is extrapolated from the 20, representing three times the figure in the Base and roughly 1/3 of the RKG student projection for the Neighborhood Likely Build Out. Applied students at elementary and high school levels are conservative.
Proposed School Capacity	2854	1335	1800	Elementary Capacity from School Master Plan Scenario C1a (Dore & Whittier). Middle capacity from Massachusetts School Building Authority enrollment capacity for Pollard Middle School project. High School figure is current capacity.

MBTA Communities Act Zoning School
Capacity Analysis w/current

BASE COMPLIANCE PLAN LIKELY BUILD	Elementary	Middle	High School
McKibben peak enrollment projection (FY25-39)	2628	1349	1725
additional RKG enrollment projection	55	20	28
Total Enrollment Projection	2683	1369	1753
Current School Capacity	2634	1419	1800
Current Capacity vs. Enrollment	-2% or (49)	50	48
Proposed School Capacity	2854	1335	1800
Proposed Capacity vs. Enrollment	171	-2.5% or (34)	48

NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING PLAN LIKELY BUILD	Elementary	Middle	High School
McKibben peak enrollment projection (FY25-39)	2628	1349	1725
additional RKG enrollment projection	164	60	82
Total Enrollment Projection	2792	1409	1807
Current School Capacity	2634	1419	1800
Current Capacity vs. Enrollment	-6% or (158)	10	<1% or (7)
Proposed School Capacity	2854	1335	1800
Capacity vs. Enrollment	62	-5.5% or (74)	<1 % or (7)

Note: This analysis incorporates 180% of students projected from the zoning to present a worst-case scenario.
Base: 55 students projected, 103 included in analysis.
NHP: 164 students projected, 306 included in analysis.