

Housing Needham (HONE) Advisory Group

Wednesday November 15, 2023

7:00 p.m.

Charles River Room

Public Services Administration Building, 500 Dedham Avenue

AND

Virtual Meeting using Zoom

Meeting ID:

834 7583 6726

(Instructions for accessing below)

To view and participate in this virtual meeting on your phone, download the “Zoom Cloud Meetings” app in any app store or at www.zoom.us. At the above date and time, click on “Join a Meeting” and enter the following Meeting ID: **834 7583 6726**

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US: +1 312 626 6799 or +1 646 558 8656 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 346 248 7799 or +1 669 900 9128 or +1 253 215 8782 Then enter ID: **834 7583 6726**

Direct Link to meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83475836726>

- I. Welcome and Meeting Goals, *Heidi Frail, Co-Chair*
- II. Review feedback from Community Meeting and Recap, *Heidi Frail and Natasha Espada, Co-Chairs; Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates*
- III. Selection of Zoning Scenarios to Model for MBTA Communities Compliance. *Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates*
- IV. Overview of the Schedule Moving Forward. *Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates*

Housing Needham (HONE) Advisory Group

Heidi Frail	Select Board (co-chair)
Natasha Espada	Planning Board (co-chair)
Kevin Keane	Select Board
Jeanne McKnight	Planning Board
Joshua Levy	Finance Committee
Ronald Ruth	Land Use Attorney
William Lovett	Real Estate Developer
Liz Kaponya	Renter
Michael Diener	Citizen at Large

Comments from Members of the Public in Attendance at Town Hall during the November 9, 2023
Housing Needham Advisory Group Workshop
Collected and Summarized by Joshua Levy

Zoning

- Concern that there is too much construction in Needham Heights, and suggests shifting some of the increased density near Hersey (2x people)
- Why is the area within ½ mile of Hersey excluded if the intent is to spread out the zoning for additional housing over a greater area?
- The area within ½ mile of Hersey should be included in the area considered for re-zoning (2x people)
- Advocated for no change in zoning (2x people)
- We need more “starter units” for home ownership that fosters wealth creation
- Incremental changes are better than wholesale changes. Some people don’t want to live in Brookline or Newton, and that is the appeal of Needham
- Don’t want Needham to change and become Cambridge or Sommerville (2x people)
- Many young people who grew up in Needham do not plan to move back after college because they can’t afford to without living with their parents. It is difficult for people who want to live here to afford it, including people who work in Needham as police officers, fire officers or teachers. More housing would help. Needham should zone for more housing than the minimum required under the MBTA Communities Act.
- Would like to see Needham comply with the MBTA Communities Act

Workshop Format

- It was hard to conceptualize density from the panels. There appears to be a clear preference for more density, but not sure if the numerical values from the stickers are interpretable (2x people)
- There was no opportunity to express a geographical preference for where additional housing should be located [e.g. preference for Business district over Industrial district]
- Suggestion to add interactive maps to the website to allow people to adjust the levers on their own
- Appreciate the format of the workshop and the ability to express preferences

Lars Unhjem
Town Meeting Member, Precinct F
56 Meadowbrook Road
Needham, MA 02492

November 9, 2023

Heidi Frail, Co-Chair
Natasha Espada, Co-Chair
HONE Advisory Group
Needham Town Hall
1471 Highland Avenue
Needham, MA 02492

RE: November 9, 2023 Multi-Family Zoning Workshop / MBTA Communities Act Compliance

Dear Co-Chair Frail, Co-Chair Espada, and the Other Members of the HONE Advisory Group,

Thank you to HONE and the Needham Housing Work Group for your combined efforts to lead all of us forward as we wrestle with complex issues related to housing, the long-term character of Needham, and compliance with the MBTA Communities Act.

It is with regret that I am unable to attend the first community meeting tonight due to prior commitments. This letter is submitted for your consideration, and I welcome further discussion and/or look forward to participating in future community meetings.

The Needham Housing Plan reflects a tremendous amount of effort and serves as a starting point for HONE's charge to recommend draft zoning to the Select Board and Planning Board to submit to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) and Town Meeting. An initial goal is to submit such proposed zoning to the May 2024 Town Meeting, just six months from now, meaning less than six months to finalize the draft zoning language.

As identified in the October 5, 2023 presentation to HONE by RKG Associates & Innes Associates (RKG/Innes), adoption of all of the Needham Housing Plan recommendations represents a dramatic potential impact to Needham's built environment and many of our residential neighborhoods.

Given the very short timeframe to submit draft zoning and the significance of the potential impact of such zoning, I firmly believe and strongly recommend we should seek to do only the minimum necessary to

comply with the MBTA Communities Act while being guided by the Needham Housing Plan recommendations. We can always do more later.

In the aforementioned RKG/Innes presentation on October 5th, slide 12 presented the results of adopting the Housing Plan Scenario recommendations, including establishing a Unit Capacity of 5,183 homes, nearly three times the required Unit Capacity of 1,784 homes.

Summarized here and detailed below, I recommend we consider the following adjustments to the Housing Plan Scenario in order of priority/impact:

- Remove General Residence (GR), Hillside Ave Business (HAB) and Avery Square Business (ASB) from allowing multifamily as of right (except as however may already be allowed today)
- Amend Apartment A-1 (A-1) dimensions to allow 20 dwelling units per acre as of right
- Do not adopt Needham Housing Plan Recommendations 1a and 1j
- Amend Needham Housing Plan Recommendation 1b to include only Avery Park Condominium
- Rezone 100 West St. from ASB / Single Residence - B (SRB) to ASB
- Amend Avery Square Overlay District (ASOD) to include all of 100 West St.
- Allow multifamily as of right using A-1 dimensions in ASOD
- Rezone 148 West St. from Industrial (IND) / HAB to A-1
- Rezone 148 Chestnut St. (BID Needham) from GR to A-1

Taken together, using Needham's WebGIS service as a guide, the adjustments outlined above are estimated to result in the following adjusted outputs:

Model Outputs	As Presented on Page 12 of the October 5, 2023 Slide Deck	Adjusted as Outlined Above	Change #	Change %
Gross Acreage	341.25	164.72	(176.53)	-52%
DDD Acreage	306.97	142.25	(164.72)	-54%
Unit Capacity	5,183	2,141	(3,042)	-59%
DU/AC	16.9	15.1	(1.8)	-11%

In summary, the adjustments outlined above exceed the District Size, Unit Capacity, and 15 DU/AC requirements while incorporating most of the Needham Housing Plan recommendations. Further, the potential impact to Needham's single-family and two-family residential districts is significantly reduced.

If you have any questions or comments, it would be my pleasure to discuss further at your convenience. Thank you for giving these thoughts your consideration.

Kind regards,


Lars Unhjem

Detailed Discussion of Housing Plan Scenario Adjustments:

Remove General Residence (GR), Hillside Ave Business (HAB) and Avery Square Business (ASB) from allowing multifamily as of right (except as however may already be allowed today)

The GR, HAB, and ASB districts directly abut Needham's single-family and two-family residential neighborhoods.

Upzoning GR to allow 20 units per acre as of right, as is implied by the RKG/Innes analysis, is not appropriate in my opinion. This represents a potentially dramatic change in the character of these single-family and two-family neighborhoods, which covers large areas of land. It is unclear why this is being considered given it was not recommended by the Needham Housing Plan. Therefore, it is recommended that GR as implied is removed. This recommendation is the very top priority of all the changes outlined in this letter. All the other changes outlined in this letter are designed expressly to make removing GR as implied possible while still complying with the MBTA Communities Act.

Except for 100 West St. (use to be determined), ASB comprises commercial and mixed-use buildings. According to the MBTA Communities Act, zoning may allow, but cannot require, ground-floor commercial uses. It is my opinion every effort should be made to preserve commercial uses on the ground floor within ASB. Therefore, it is recommended that ASB is removed.

HAB comprises a mix of public, commercial, and residential uses and is located across the street from a two-family neighborhood. Multifamily is allowed by special permit in HAB, which provides an extra layer of protection for those families living across the street from this zone. Therefore, it is recommended that HAB is removed.

Amend Apartment A-1 (A-1) dimensions to allow 20 dwelling units per acre as of right

A-1 allows for a maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.5, or 21,780 square feet per acre. A-1 allows for a maximum density of 18 dwelling units per acre. Taken together, this equates to an average of 1,210 square feet per dwelling unit. This is quite large by modern standards.

Increasing the maximum density to 20 dwelling units per acre reduces the average dwelling unit to 1,089 square feet, consistent with modern standards. No other changes to dimensional controls are recommended, and thus building and site massing remains the same in either case.

Therefore, it is recommended that the maximum density for A-1 be increased to 20 dwelling units per acre.

Do not adopt Needham Housing Plan Recommendations 1a and 1j

The areas covered by Needham Housing Plan Recommendations 1a (west of Highland Ave between Hamilton Highlands and Hunnewell Street) and 1j (both sides of Highland Ave between

Avery Square and the Library / Christ Episcopal Church) are well-established single-family neighborhoods.

Upzoning the area covered by 1a from SRB to A-1 represents a potential impact of up to a 400+% increase in dwellings per lot, a 67% increase in floor area ratio, a 20% increase in # of stories, and a 14% increase in height (feet).

As summarized and detailed above, it is recommended to remove GR from as-of-right zoning. Accordingly, maintaining the area covered by 1j as SRB is highly appropriate.

Contextually, these two areas also “frame” and provide a reprieve from the intensity of uses, massing, and activities within Needham Heights and Needham Center. This creates rhythm, separation, and a sense of place for each part of town.

Therefore, it is recommended that Needham Housing Plan Recommendations 1a and 1j not be adopted.

Amend Needham Housing Plan Recommendation 1b to include only Avery Park Condominium

Extending the existing A-1 zone covering Hamilton Highlands (an existing multifamily complex) across the street to the Avery Park Condominium (an existing multifamily complex) enables a zoning district of at least five acres, which is required by the MBTA Communities Act. No other parcels need to be impacted to achieve this objective.

Therefore, it is recommended that Needham Housing Plan Recommendation 1b be amended to include only Avery Park Condominium.

Rezone 100 West St. from ASB / Single Residence - B (SRB) to ASB

Amend Avery Square Overlay District (ASOD) to include all of 100 West St.

Allow multifamily as of right using A-1 dimensions in ASOD

According to the September 7, 2023 RKG/Innes presentation to HONE, the MBTA Communities Act does not allow for the inclusion of split parcels or partial parcels. As summarized and detailed above, it is recommended to remove ASB from as-of-right zoning. As noted, 100 West St. is an exception and provides a unique opportunity to help with Unit Capacity calculations.

To capture the unique benefits of 100 West Street while protecting the character of most of ASB, it is recommended that ASB and ASOD is applied across the entirety of the 100 West St. parcel and that ASOD allows multifamily as of right using A-1 dimensions.

Rezone 148 West St. from Industrial (IND) / HAB to A-1

According to the September 7, 2023 RKG/Innes presentation to HONE, the MBTA Communities Act does not allow for the inclusion of split parcels or partial parcels. As summarized above and

detailed below, it is recommended to remove HAB from as-of-right zoning. Rather than rezone 148 West St. to be all within the Industrial district, which may result unpleasant outcomes along the West Street frontage, it is recommended to rezone 148 West St. to A-1.

Rezone 148 Chestnut St. (BID Needham) from GR to A-1

Although not listed as a recommendation in the Needham Housing Plan, the RKG/Innes analysis implies a substantial increase in as-of-right multifamily zoning for GR to more than 20 units per acre. Rezoning 148 Chestnut from GR as implied to A-1 represents no change in unit density, and otherwise allows for nearly identical uses under current zoning. As such, GR as implied and A-1 are substantially the same zoning.

As summarized above and detailed below, it is recommended to remove GR from as-of-right zoning. Nevertheless, 148 Chestnut provides a unique opportunity to help with Unit Capacity calculations. It is unlikely that the hospital will be replaced with an apartment building.

Therefore, it is recommended that 148 Chestnut be rezoned to A-1 to help with the Unit Capacity calculations.