

Town of Needham, Massachusetts
Housing Needham Advisory Group (HONE)
Meeting Minutes
October 5, 2023

Place: Hybrid Meeting, Charles River Room, PSAB, 500 Dedham Avenue, Needham
The Board will attend in person. The public may attend in person or via Zoom.

Present: Co-Chair, Heidi Frail; Co-Chair, Natasha Espada; Kevin Keane; Jeanne McKnight;
Ronald Ruth

Remote: Michael Diener; Liz Kaponya; Joshua Levy; William Lovett

Staff: Katie King, Deputy Town Manager; Lee Newman, Director of Planning & Community
Development; Alexandra Clee, Assistant Town Planner; Karen Sunnarborg,
Community Housing Specialist

Guests: Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates

Call to Order

At 6:00 pm., H. Frail called the meeting to order disclosing the meeting is being video recorded.

I. Welcome and Meeting Goals, Heidi Frail, Co-Chair

H. Frail reviewed the meeting agenda.

II. Approval of Minutes of September 7, 2023

This item was postponed until the next meeting.

III. Review of Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) Compliance Modeling Results, Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates

Consultants presented results of running two scenarios through compliance models for the Town's existing bylaw zoning as well as the Housing Plan. ***The presentation is available in the Meeting Packet at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>***

Existing Zoning Proposal

Consultants described changes the Town would need to make if Existing Zoning Districts and parameters were modeled to allow multi-family housing as of right.

Of the districts modeled, only two don't currently allow multi-family housing in the Industrial and Business district. All other districts allow multi-family housing by special permit at 18 units per acre. The conversion is from a special permit process to an as of right. The apartment district allows it as of right at that density. The Town could open up the use in the Business and Industrial district at those density parameters.

- M. Diener discovered General Residence is listed as 2 units per acre when it should be 2 units per *quarter* acre. This equates to 8 units per acre rather than 2 units per acre.

Existing Zoning Districts were modeled with total acreages. The General Residence unit capacity is bringing down the density.

Housing Plan Proposal

Consultants reviewed what would happen if we modeled the Housing Plan Proposal rezoning some parcels of land and making slight modifications to zoning parameters.

Scenarios for Pathways to Compliance using Existing Zoning versus Housing Plan were reviewed. Consultants compared gross acreage, additions/changes to Apartment 1 and SR B zones, and dimensional zoning. They discussed why the Center District was not modeled.

Consultants will confirm whether MBTA modeling for the 7 districts using existing zoning includes contiguous requirements.

Members agreed it is good news the Town does not need to make zoning changes to the General Residence district to achieve compliance, but could if you want to encourage housing.

IV. Questions and Comments

Members discussed coming to a consensus for a committee approach; are we in this for compliance, or is this for housing production? We could choose not to rezone any General Residence but it is possible that we could. Hitting our numbers is one thing; deciding what is best for Needham is another.

Present two scenarios to the public and get community feedback.

It is difficult to rezone near the Hunnewell area as there would be inequity there. If that block of General Residential is omitted in the Industrial area because there is no contiguity, what happens to the numbers? The General Residence district brings the numbers down. See how much can be on Highland and Chestnut Streets.

Members discussed the equity of the Housing Plan density - 72 acres in the Heights; 25 acres in the Central Business and Chestnut St. areas. Zoning maps and options were discussed.

- Have multi-family in the Heights; these areas are presently zoned A-1.
- Look to minimize traffic.
- Create more density closer to the downtown than in the Heights.
- Create a smaller district with more density to try to drive business, foot traffic, development.
- Contrast this scenario for Community feedback versus a more spread out plan.
- Reallocate some of the density.
- Exclude some Downtown area in the Housing Plan.

General Residence district in the Housing Plan has not been rezoned. We count it but it has not changed.

Consultants explained the guidance on mandatory mixed use districts. You can have mixed use; you cannot mandate it. *Presentation in the Meeting Packet at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>*

Needham must make changes to Existing Zoning as it does not meet density requirements. The Housing Plan may not need to be changed. Once EOHLC releases guidance, consultants may need to rework the plan.

Shifting the Density

Look at the Housing Plan scenario. By adding these portions, we do shift the density. When we consider this is Existing Zoning and we would not be changing it in this scenario though we count it in the district, the density is well proportioned along the area we are discussing. H. Frail disagrees. The Housing Plan adds pieces that help to fill in some of those spaces.

Members discussed why the Linden/Chambers Housing Authority property is not listed. It is publicly owned land, will be senior restricted, and is 100% affordable housing. It cannot be included in the MBTA zoning because it is restricted to seniors.

Members discussed whether it could be an overlay zone or amend the underlying zoning to be compliant with MBTA 3A.

The consultants suggested one option for the Center Business district is to identify streets where you want first floor mandated mixed use and create a donut. The center of the donut would not be the MBTA 3A district but a mandatory mixed-use district. Around the center, change the area that is Center Business zoned so you have contiguity and maintain your core, mixed use walkable development. You still maintain some units in the Center Business district. Members agreed we want units in an area that is walkable.

Members discussed the height in the Housing Plan.

Present Existing Zoning to the community.

- A simple chart showing Apartment A1 and Hillside Avenue Business that allow multi-family housing. This is our Existing Zoning which does not meet MBTA 3A requirements.
- The next page is Existing Zoning Districts with a description of the changes.

K. King suggested the scenarios are complicated. There is a lot of wiggle room for compliance.

- What does the community want Needham to look like? Call out particular areas.
- How do people feel about multi-family housing only in Needham Center?
- On what particular areas do we want feedback?
- How do you feel about height or parking areas?
- Build neighborhoods the way people want to live in them versus strict compliance.

The October 18th meeting will be a formatting meeting to organize thought points and a vision.

Members discussed the questions they want the community to provide feedback.

- In which areas would more density be beneficial?

- Zoning - where do we want density, height, parking (get answers that pass at Town Meeting)
- Provide community questions to the consultants to build visual tools for public meeting
- Existing density - Under current zoning, the area could look like X or Y. If the building exists, here is what it would look like to add two floors under the current density.
- One member suggested presenting only the Housing Plan since the Existing Zoning does not meet the density requirements for an MBTA 3A district.

V. Next Steps

Next meeting: October 18, 2023, 6:00 pm, hybrid

Members discussed the strategy for the next meeting.

- Inform the community of MBTA parameters and levers to be changed (geography, height, parking).
- Small group meetings (short presentation, easels, post it notes for community feedback)
- Provide stations with photos (Mapping, Existing Zoning, Housing Plan, Existing Density, Height, Parking, Neighborhood Transition). All these factors can be changed.
- The Housing Plan recommendations:
 - Are these district defining boundaries appropriate?
 - Visualizations - Zoning will lead to this. People need to understand that 50 acres of density means six-story buildings versus 350 acres which spreads out the density.
- Consensus:
 - Two large print 4' x 12' maps with true Existing Zoning numbers, Housing Plan suggestions and numbers
- At the next meeting, talk about format of the public meeting and how to incorporate maps
- Downtown, Needham center, Chestnut St., mixed or single use in both districts at what density
- Due to stations, the public meeting will be in-person, virtual and recorded

Consultants will put together draft setup of stations, concepts, how to engage public feedback

- Use levers not setbacks to frame comments (height, parking, density (more or less), open space
- Use simple animations to frame results 'if this, then that'
- Consultants will staff the stations
- Hold a second public meeting to engage questions using post-it note feedback from the first meeting
- November public meeting - Consultants will prepare an animated PowerPoint storyboard

MOTION: R. Ruth moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 pm.

SECONDED: K. Keane

ROLL-CALL VOTE: H. Frail, aye; N. Espada, aye; M. Diener, aye; L. Kaponya, aye; K. Keane, aye; J. Levy, aye; W. Lovett, aye; J. McKnight, aye; R. Ruth, aye. Unanimous.

MOTION CARRIES: 9-0

Informational - The Meeting Packet is available at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>

Respectfully submitted,
Dale Michaud, Recording Secretary