

Town of Needham, Massachusetts
Housing Needham Advisory Group (HONE)
Town Hall, 1471 Highland Ave.
COMMUNITY MEETING
Meeting Minutes
November 9, 2023

Place: In-person at Powers Hall or on-line registration to participate via Zoom.
Present: Co-Chair, Heidi Frail; Co-Chair, Natasha Espada; Michael Diener, Liz Kaponya, William Lovett, Jeanne McKnight; Ronald Ruth; Kevin Keane; Joshua Levy
Staff: Amy Haelsen, Director of Communications and Community Engagement; Katie King, Deputy Town Manager; Lee Newman, Director of Planning & Community Development; Alexandra Clee, Assistant Town Planner
Guests: Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates

Call to Order

At 7:00 pm., H. Frail called the public meeting to order. The meeting is being video recorded.

Sign-in and Welcome

H. Frail thanked Town staff for their commitment to move this process forward. She thanked the audience as well as 200 on-line registrants for their willingness to provide input into the process. Special thanks were given for the heroic efforts of consultants, Emily Innes and Eric Halvorsen to simplify and visualize this incredibly complex subject.

Introductory Remarks

The MBTA Communities Law was passed in 2021. It applies to 177 cities and towns that have or are adjacent to communities that have MBTA transit stops. Municipalities need to confirm they have zoning districts of reasonable size where multifamily housing of 3 or more units is zoned for by right.

Needham does not currently comply with this law. We need to change the zoning to comply with this law. Needham has some discretion for how it implements the new zoning. The point of this meeting is to show the community how the levers work, the changes the Town can make and the effects those changes will have.

N. Espanada informed the community what has already been done. With input from many community meetings, the Housing Plan Working Group published a Housing Plan to provide a pathway for creating housing opportunities in Needham. They concluded the Town needs to pursue opportunities to provide housing that is affordable to all residents of different income levels. Implementation of the Housing Plan to preserve and increase both moderate and affordable income housing is critical to maintaining the diversity and economic prosperity of Needham. The Housing Plan presented 17 recommendations in 3 categories for Town Boards and Committees to take advantage of these opportunities.

Zoning - The Housing Plan stressed the need to develop a more holistic, comprehensive orientation toward zoning to avoid having to be reactive on a project by project basis, to be more intentional and look at Townwide opportunities for directing future development. The number one strategy for zoning is to comply with the MBTA Communities guidelines under Section 3A of the State Zoning Act that mandates a certain level of by right multifamily housing zoning in each community within or adjacent to the MBTA service areas. The level in Needham is 15% of its housing stock. Recommendations include expanding the A1 zoning requirements of up to 18 units per acre in areas located primarily along the Highland Ave. and Chestnut St. corridor. These are preliminary views.

This is a goal setting session with the community. The planning timeline was outlined:

- September 2023-March 2024 - Planning through community engagement and analysis. We will develop conceptual plans and zoning proposals with our consultants. Consultants will create economic models to be sure they can feasibly be constructed in the future.
- January 2024, March 2024 - Two additional community meetings in January and March before zoning language is finalized
- April-June 2024 - After the conceptual is done, it will go to the State for a 90 day review.
- July-September 2024 - We will finalize the zoning language.
- October 2024 - Town Meeting
- November-December 2024 - Submission of compliance will be sent to the State between.

HONE Group is helping to implement the plan with guidance from RKG Associates and Innes Associates who are helping to conceptualize the plan for the community.

The audience was encouraged to stay engaged from now through March so we are all in agreement for the direction we want Needham to go.

Presentation

Eric Halvorsen of RKG Associates made presentation to the public regarding Needham MBTA Communities requirements, levers, and engagement. He gave an overview of the MBTA Communities Act and the purpose behind the law which is to drive new housing. The State has a housing shortage which is impacting our ability to house people in an affordable manner. It is starting to impact our competitiveness from an economic and business standpoint. He invited the public to ask questions at the activity stations.

The presentation is in the Meeting Packet is available at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>

Activity Stations

The public present were able to ask questions, express concerns, and provide comment via sticky notes at each activity stations. Emily Innes presented the information from the stations that in-person attendees are experiencing at the in-person meeting to those participating via Zoom. The on-line public were polled under supervision of consultant, E. Innes.

An example of questions polled to online participants included:

Should Needham's Center Business Zoning District be included in the MBTA District?

- Would you change the zoning to allow multifamily by right?
- Would you leave the zoning as it is?

The public were invited to attend HONE meetings on Zoom or view the meeting videos on The Needham Channel on the YouTube platform. The full analysis of public input at activity stations as well as the online public polling will be assembled in professional format by the consultants.

Station Report Outs

Public participants remained to regroup for report outs of public general consensus for each of four activity stations as well as the virtual polling.

H. Frail gave a preliminary analysis of General Residence A-1 according to the public in attendance in the room. Those tabulations are from the public in the room and do not include online polling.

J. McKnight gave a preliminary analysis of Apartment A-1 zone.

R. Ruth and W. Lovett gave a preliminary analysis of Business Zones.

N. Espada gave a preliminary analysis of Industrial zones.

Consultant, E. Innes shared preliminary analysis according to online public polling.

Meeting minutes, presentation, and public polling results will be available online after the meeting.

Next Steps

To learn more and subscribe to updates on the multi-family zoning initiative in Needham, please **visit the project page on the Town's website**.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Dale Michaud
Recording Secretary