

Town of Needham, Massachusetts
Housing Needham Advisory Group (HONE)
Meeting Minutes
December 20, 2023

Place: Charles River Room, 500 Dedham Ave, Needham and Virtual Meeting via Zoom
Present: Co-Chair, Heidi Frail; Co-Chair, Natasha Espada; Liz Kaponya, Kevin Keane, Joshua Levy, William Lovett, Jeanne McKnight, Ronald Ruth
Remote: Michael Diener
Absent: None
Staff: Katie King, Deputy Town Manager; Lee Newman, Director of Planning & Community Development; Alexandra Clee, Assistant Town Planner
Guest: Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates

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

I. Welcome and Meeting Goals, Heidi Frail and Natasha Espada, Co-Chairs

Co-Chair Frail stated that the HONE Advisory Group will not recommend the Hersey Station area for modeling by the Consultants for the following reasons:

1. There is not enough usable land within the Neighborhood Business District at Hersey Station to make a district compliant with the MBTA Communities Act of 5 contiguous acres.
2. The 1.5-acre MBTA parking lot can't be counted for MBTA Compliance as the land is publicly owned.
3. HONE Group has decided not to recommend rezoning 4.5 acres of single-family residences to make Hersey Station an MBTA Communities compliant district.

The HONE mission is to create a compliant MBTA Communities District to pass at Town Meeting. HONE will recommend to the Planning Board the Hersey Station area business parcels be rezoned outside of the MBTA Communities process. Ms. McKnight noted that Panellas market on Central Avenue recently had an overlay to allow for multi-family in a mixed-use setting and this overlay could serve as a model for the Planning Board.

II. Approval of Minutes from HONE Meetings of September 7, 2023, October 5, 2023, October 18, 2023, November 9, 2023, and November 15, 2023.

MOTION: J. Levy moved to approve HONE Meeting Minutes of 9/7/23, 10/5/23, 11/9/23 and 11/15/23.

SECONDED: N. Espada

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

MOTION CARRIES: 8-0

MOTION: R. Ruth moved to approve HONE Meeting Minutes of 10/18/23.

SECONDED: J. McKnight

ABSTAINED: J. Levy was not present on 10/18/23.

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

MOTION CARRIES: 7-0-1

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

E. Halvorsen explained 6 scenarios from the presentation, *Housing Needham (HONE), Town Visioning for Multi-Family Housing.ppt*. The presentation is available in the Meeting Packet at <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>

HONE members discussed the 6 Scenarios presented in the light of height and density, areas with or without General Residence that do or do not meet MBTA Communities compliance, and areas that could be made compliant as MBTA Communities Districts.

Members discussed contiguity in Scenario 3 versus Scenario 2. Scenario 3 has lower density but more units. Downtown buildings lack vibrancy. Scenario 3 would encourage vibrancy.

Members discussed whether or not to incentivize mixed use in other Scenarios. Consultants specified a 51% approval vote is required if seeking zoning for a housing use overlay. A two-thirds majority vote is required for mixed use other than housing only.

Consultants suggest separating in the Housing Plan what to accomplish with MBTA Communities zoning versus other zoning. MBTA will not work for everything.

Members discussed 3 Scenarios: minimum, middle, and maximum ground concepts. Consultants modeled unit density per parcel in the General Residence District. Members discussed proposing targeted units per acre rather than height specific. Create a control for the number of units per lot versus per acre and where to add density in each District.

Once the prime Scenario is approved, Town Staff will talk with Police, Fire, DPW, and schools regarding building infrastructure, capacity, and school enrollment in the Due Diligence process.

Members discussed Districts for consultants to model for compliance with MBTA Communities Law.

J. McKnight, a Rosemary Ridge condominium homeowner and HONE member, will refrain from discussion of upzoning the Apartment A-1 districts and/or rezoning the Industrial District along Hillside Avenue to allow multi-family housing as an additional use.

Members will keep boundary Districts the same on Chestnut St. Center Business District and Avery Square and add density to get the maximum Scenario then get public feedback.

Members discussed modeling a 5 story height cap for Chestnut St. Center and Avery Square while keeping all General Residential.

HONE Members expressed interest in having the Consultants model the 3 Scenarios as presented, two Scenarios as is: Scenario 1 for minimum ground, Scenario 3 for middle ground, and Scenario 6 as maximum ground to have density created to comply with MBTA Communities.

IV. Review of Alternative Affordability Percentage Thresholds Analysis, *Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates*

Consultants presented the Economic Feasibility Analysis (EFA) available in the Meeting Packet at <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>

MBTA Communities Act guidelines require an EFA be completed for any community that wants inclusionary zoning (a set-aside for affordable units within a residential development over a certain number of units) higher than 10%.

For example, if a parcel contains over a certain number of units, 12.5% of units must be set aside as deed-restricted affordable for people earning less than 80% of the area median income.

MBTA guidelines limit inclusionary zoning thresholds to 10% of total units at or below 80% of AMI for income restricted units. The EFA can support an exception that allows higher limits. The model tests Scenarios to determine feasibility if inclusionary zoning is increased.

Consultants worked with EOHLC to develop EFA guidelines. They built a model for other communities. It is a point in time analysis. Assumptions and Return on Costs were discussed.

Consultants will clarify for the public that MBTA Communities Act will not create more than a set percentage of affordable housing.

If the Town wants inclusionary zoning, it must comply with the State and the EFA must be part of this package unless HONE members decide on inclusionary zoning between 0% and 10%. Because we are already at 12 1/2% in some zoning districts, HONE should make a recommendation as part of its submission to the State by April.

V. Review of Fiscal Impact Model & Analysis Results, *Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates*

Consultants presented the *Housing Needham (HONE), Fiscal Impact Model & Analysis Results* presentation available in the Meeting Packet at <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>

The Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA) measures the impact of a hypothetical development scenario by comparing gross property taxes with municipal and school costs with positive impact if revenue outweighs costs. At the time, Consultants had not met with departments, but had received some

data from the town, including department staffing and budget information from the finance director.

The mixed-use scenario was not modeled at this time, but Consultants have a commercial module. The model separately analyzes police, fire, DPW, schools, and general government (everything else).

The modeling approach is different for schools versus other departments as it estimates the number of new students. Modeling for the schools included actual data from the school department about the types of housing units where students live. It was noted that the number of students in prior developments was less than what the town's demographer had projected. For units with three bedrooms, estimated numbers were increased from Needham's actual experience to project costs more conservatively (i.e., higher). Consultant noted that the total per student cost from the model was likely high, but a conservative estimate.

Consultants shared model assumptions used. Consultants will meet with departments and schools in January to go over analysis results. The FIA focuses on operating costs, not capital expenses. One purpose of the meetings with departments will be to review potential capital costs.

The analysis calculated an estimated net fiscal impact for each District under each Scenario. The preliminary analysis showed a positive fiscal impact to the levy, with additional revenue from CPA and vehicle excise taxes.

VI. Review Strategy for January 18 Community Meeting, *Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates*

The public meeting will be offered in-person with a hybrid option. Consultants will present the 3 Scenarios. A public feedback survey will be ready in the room and on-line to answer specific questions. The survey will remain open for two weeks so people can watch the video recording of the public meeting. HONE members will hear public comments. Members will answer clarifying questions. Complex answers will be provided after the public provide survey responses.

VII. Next Steps

Town Staff will produce a timeline of decisions that need to be made.

Consultants will finalize Scenarios.

Consultants will create visual maps showing height and density for the January 18 public meeting.

Consultants will prepare draft survey questions for the public meeting.

The second HONE postcard will be mailed to residents for outreach before January 5.

Town Staff will meet to discuss consultants fiscal impact analysis.

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

MOTION: **R. Ruth moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:13 pm.**

SECONDED: N. Espada

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

MOTION CARRIES: 9-0

Respectfully submitted,

Dale Michaud
Recording Secretary