

Town of Needham, Massachusetts
Housing Needham (HONE) Advisory Group
Meeting Minutes
January 29, 2024

Place: Charles River Room, 500 Dedham Ave, Needham and Virtual Meeting via Zoom
Present: Co-Chair, Heidi Frail; Co-Chair, Natasha Espada; Michael Diener, Kevin Keane, Liz Kaponya, Joshua Levy, Jeanne McKnight, Ronald Ruth
Remote: William Lovett
Absent: None
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

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

Goals are to review the Schedule Overview, the 6 facilitation questions to comply with MBTA Communities Law, and whether to add an additional Scenario model as a separate Warrant Article.

The group needs to determine an alternative to using the offset calculation, finalize base Scenario boundaries, finalize base zoning parameters, decide on affordable housing/inclusionary zoning percentage and parking requirements. Results will be presented to 3 boards, the Planning Board, the Design Review Committee and the Select Board, followed by the 2/15 HONE meeting. Present the final base Scenario and discuss the add-on Scenario.

II. Approval of Minutes from HONE Meetings of 12/11/23, 12/20/23 and 1/4/24

The minutes of 12/20/23 will be held for discussion at a future meeting.

MOTION: J. McKnight moved to approve the meeting minutes of 12/11/23 and 1/4/24.

SECONDED: K. Keane

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

MOTION CARRIES: 9-0

III. Overview of Schedule Moving Forward, Lee Newman, Director of Planning and Community Development; Katie King, Deputy Town Manager

Members discussed feedback that drives HONE goals and schedules to conclude the HONE process in time to get both Articles to the State for review by May 1. There is a need to separate whether compliance is the goal or a two-Article recommendation from HONE to appointing boards.

Schedule Updates:

- 1/29 - Process community feedback; make final decisions for a base compliance Scenario

- 2/6, 2/12, 2/13 - New meetings to update the Planning, Design Review, and Select Boards
- 2/15 - Make final decisions about the add-on Article
- 3/7 - HONE meeting instead of Community meeting (finalize format for 3/28 meeting)
- 3/28 Community Meeting #3
- 4/4 - Debrief 3/28 Community meeting; make final recommendations
- Additional meeting April 25 for consultants to share final report with HONE, based on decisions at 4/4 meeting
- Schedule April 30 as a joint meeting with boards to send recommendations to State on 5/1

J. McKnight requested members to alert her before discussion of Scenario changes to A-1 zoning or Hillside Ave. Industrial area inclusion as she is a resident/Board member of Rosemary Ridge Condominium and will recuse herself to avoid conflict of interest.

IV. Review Feedback from Community Meeting and Survey Results, Heidi Frail and Natasha Espada, Co-Chairs; Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates

Consultants reviewed Survey results from 595 paper and on-line Surveys. People who chose Scenario A or B did not want to grow the unit capacity or boundaries from what was presented. People who chose Scenario C wanted more housing. Community comments were reviewed. Members were grateful for resident participation.

Residents expressed concern for not rezoning the single family residential district in the Hersey Station area. It was implied a section of SRB on Highland Ave. was already zoned GR but it was proposed for rezoning in the Housing Plan. Be consistent with rezoning. Do not take single-family residences to make compliant parcels. Revisit the change of SRB to GR in other areas and exempt that portion.

Comments were made about areas outside the half-mile radius such as the former Muzi Ford site as well as mixed use districts and the possibility to incentivize starter homes. The Planning Board is not constrained by the MBTA Communities Act and could do something with the Hersey Station area. The golf course and parking lots are not eligible to contribute to MBTA Communities Act compliance.

Members discussed answers the Community would like clarified such as how new housing would affect school system enrollment and costs, Town department input on infrastructure analysis, and the financial benefit to the Town if more people moved into Needham.

Some participants did not fully understand proposed boundary changes in individual zoning districts or what HONE presented. Members discussed how this could have been better clarified. Participants made thoughtful comments and seemed supportive that HONE presented satisfactory solutions. One member suggested residents would be satisfied with Scenario A with changes (Scenario A Version 2).

FAQs are being prepared. To learn more and subscribe to updates on the multi-family zoning initiative in Needham, residents were encouraged to visit the project page on the Town's website: <https://needhamma.gov/5402/MBTA-Communities-Law-the-Housing-Needham>.

V. Review Feedback from Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) Meeting, Heidi Frail and Natasha Espada, Co-Chairs; Bill Lovett

CEA feedback focused on understanding the impact of HONE maps on compliance and housing production and highlighted the complexity of redevelopment compared to other communities. CEA discussed factors that make projects economically feasible as well as reasons why projects are not pursued and what the Town can do to make decisions that facilitate some development.

Speeding up projects is crucial for economic growth. A long process can hinder small and medium sized developers who lack capital. To expedite the process, incentivize small developers to build 40- or 50-unit developments. The Town should allow developers to decide whether to provide one parking space per unit rather than a Town mandate. Be flexible with parking and building height. Density could be increased in existing apartment areas.

CEA discussed first floor commercial use in the Town center and felt the Center Business "cruller" surrounded by residential units was a good approach. Members discussed the unpopularity of first floor, sidewalk residences and the developer's expense to provide a lobby or gym instead.

CEA consensus was that Scenarios A and B don't incentivize development due to insufficient zoning changes. Scenario C or a Scenario C Plus would do so. We should call out existing sites where we have existing density such as at 100 West St. There was mixed feedback on the special permit process with large developers comfortable and small developers concerned.

One HONE member favored mixed use not only in the downtown Central Business district but in other existing business areas. If housing will be allowed, there should be incentives for mixed use. We want to continue to provide businesses for the additional amount of residences.

The CEA discussion focused on the vertical aspect of how much is allowed on a given lot and how to spread fixed costs like elevators over the cost of the project. The developer would determine how to rent units with no off-street parking and if there is a market for that. The compliant district could have map boundaries similar to Scenario A but with heights similar to Scenario C.

Members discussed zoning barriers to have more multi-family housing approved. We need a consensus on density differences between the Center and General Residence. The process is laborious and requires site plan review. Learn from other municipalities who have already passed their MBTA Communities Act zoning.

R. Ruth addressed E. Halvorsen as to the degree to which the Needham site approval process complied with what was supposed to be as of right site plan approval under the MBTA guidance.

ACTION: This matter will be discussed at the next HONE meeting on 2/15/24.

VI. Selection of Final "Base Model" for MBTA Communities Compliance, *Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates*

Members discussed changing the parking requirements in our existing Central Business mixed-use zoning to let us use the "offset" calculation in the Scenario A model. To comply with MBTA Communities Law, parking requirements for some commercial uses would have to be removed. It was suggested that this should be a Planning Board decision, rather than included in HONE's proposals.

Consultants discussed hypothetical alternatives to using the "offset" in Scenario A:

- 146 additional units are needed in Scenario A to comply without the offset
- Add the Hillside Avenue Business District to Scenario A to get an additional 56 units at 3 stories in height.
- To increase units, consider adding in the Avery School Condominium parcel, now zoned SRB, to the Apartment A-1 district, and including Hamilton Highlands, now in Apartment A-1, which would be contiguous to each other and already have multi-family housing existing today.

Consultants discussed policy oriented questions. Members discussed height, a special permit for setbacks, and modeling Scenario A at 0.7 FAR for the Chestnut Street Business District.

Consultants will remodel Scenario A as Version 2. Bring Hillside Ave. Business District back in, make minor changes to the Chestnut Street Business District, bring in the Avery School Condominium and Hamilton Highlands parcels.

MOTION: K. Keane moved to support not doing the parking changes for the Center offset and instead adding in the areas as discussed for Hillside Avenue, Hamilton Highlands and Avery School unless EOHLC gets back to us then we can do the original plan.

SECONDED: N. Espada

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

MOTION CARRIES: 9-0

Q6: Please note if you would like to see the boundaries changed in any of the individual zoning districts delineated on the Scenario C map.

Scenario A - The existing zoning in Avery Square currently allows standalone multi-family housing by special permit under the same rules that are now proposed to convert to as of right.

Members discussed preserving mixed use where it already exists. People may not be willing to accept dramatic changes to incentivize. If we have places to add extra density while protecting first floor commercial, it will be more acceptable. The plan will be metered slowly into

production. Make sure the density can keep up with the retail; we don't want vacant store fronts. We've seen a plan for 100 West St. for 4 stories.

Some members felt the Town should not require mixed use in Avery Square. You're going to attract ancillary tenants. Not mandating mixed use will be a loss for retail, though. If we don't mandate mixed use, we don't have to incentivize greater height and density.

Consultants described Town Meeting voting thresholds. It was noted that the Community Survey provided data points and not votes.

MOTION: H. Frail moved to leave current zoning as is for Avery Square in base model Scenario A and allow multi-family to the ground as of right.
SECONDED: K. Keane
ROLL-CALL VOTE: Unanimous
MOTION CARRIES: 9-0

We can provide 10% compliance in an area outside the half-mile radius. An Apartment-1 district with a multi-family condominium development already exists on Greendale Ave. and Hamlin Lane called Charles Court East. This could be added if we need additional unit capacity to achieve compliance.

MOTION: N. Espada moved to include Charles Court East condominium development on Greendale Ave. and Hamlin Lane as part of the 10% of MBTA Communities Law outside the half-mile radius.
SECONDED: K. Keane
ROLL-CALL VOTE: Unanimous
MOTION CARRIES: 9-0

Members discussed incentivizing commercial, particularly in the Business, Chestnut Street Business and Avery Square Districts. The group could consistently add height to first floor commercial to maintain the same number of residences. Setback is another incentive that can be determined when writing the zoning.

A member noted that Needham established the Apartment-1 district to allow multi-family as of right decades ago, when other cities and towns pushed back on multi-family housing. Needham moved forward with multi-family zoning at that time and now we can take advantage of the zoning that's already in place.

Members discussed pulling back the boundaries on Scenario C and putting in density where it makes sense. There was discussion about excluding General Residential in Scenario C.

To achieve compliance of 1,784 required units in Scenario A, boost dimensional regulations in the Heights, increase the FAR to 2.0, and increase unit density.

Members discussed whether adding commercial to residential in a mixed-use concept would help to incentivize housing. A straight allowance for density, more FAR or height is more incentive than adding mixed use. Creating more density by right will create more development.

Consultants discussed voting thresholds at Town Meeting; a 51% threshold would be allowed for articles that include more residential. If an article is standalone commercial or hotels, that would require a two thirds majority vote. Check with Town Counsel to confirm.

Members agreed Scenario A would include uniform building heights of at least three stories for multi-family by right for the Chestnut Street Business, Garden Street Overlay, and Avery Square Overlay districts. Change FAR to 0.7.

At 9:52 pm, W. Lovett left the meeting.

Prioritization of parcels added to the base map

- Get to 1,784 units with a bit of cushion over this number
- Increase to 3 stories in height in all districts
- FAR of 0.7
- Is HONE's top priority to use the offset for Center Business if we hear from the State that we can do so without making changes to the zoning parking-requirement?
- We've added 4 areas: Hillside Avenue Business., Hamilton Highlands, Avery School Condominium and Charles Court.
- Charles Court for Scenario A, Option 2 can be recommended to the Planning Board
 - o Charles Court is built and outside the half-mile radius. The State may reject the area because there is no access to public transportation there. If needed, drop Charles Court.

Parking Minimums

Members discussed the parking study that was done for 4 multi-family locations in Needham. The average was .84 parking spaces used overnight. Members decided the minimum parking space would be reduced from 1.5 parking spaces down to one parking space as part of the base.

Inclusionary Zoning

Members agreed to a 12.5% inclusionary zoning affordable housing requirement, which reflects what is in Needham's existing zoning.

MOTION: J. McKnight moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:35 pm.

SECONDED: N. Espada

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

MOTION CARRIES: 8-0

Respectfully submitted,

Dale Michaud

Recording Secretary

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>

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- Housing Needham Advisory Group (HONE) 1/29/24 Agenda
- HONE Draft Meeting Minutes 12/11/23, 12/20/23, 1/4/24
- HONE Scope of Work/Timeline
- Needham MBTA Communities, Public Meeting #1 Input Summary, RKG Associates, Innes Associates
- Needham MBTA Communities Process, Scenario Overview, RKG Associates, Innes Associates
- Scenario A: Framing Questions, RKG Associates, Innes Associates
- Existing Zoning and Base Scenario Zoning, RKG Associates, Innes Associates
- Memo from Gary Ajamian
- Memo from Marianne Cooley
- Memo from Michael Normile
- Memo from Michael
- Memo from Scott Schwartz
- Memo from John Cross
- Memo from Eric Fritz
- Memo from Needham Housing Coalition
- Needham Housing Coalition 1/21/24 Response to HONE 1/18/24 Meeting Materials
- Memo from Jane Volden
- Memo from Les Kalish
- Memo from Andrew Thoresen
- Memo from Scott Schwartz
- MRSC Municipal Research and Services Center Articles
- Memo from Michael Normile
- Memo from Michael Baker
- Memo from Paula Dickerman
- Letter dated 1/29/24 from Robert T. Smart, Jr., Esq.
- Memo from Linda Barry
- Memo from Mark Osborne