

Town of Needham, Massachusetts  
**Housing Needham (HONE) Advisory Group**  
Meeting Minutes  
February 15, 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, William Lovett, Ronald Ruth  
**Remote:** Jeanne McKnight  
**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**  
Chairs commended HONE members for their thoughtful contributions to the charge.

**II. Approval of Minutes from HONE Meetings of 12/20/23**  
This item was deferred to a future meeting.

**III. Presentation and Approval of Final Base Scenario, Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates**

The Final Base Scenario will be divided into two Warrant Articles to comply with MBTA Communities Law - a Base Compliance Scenario map and a bonus map, with the intention to produce housing in Needham.

Consultants presented Housing Needham (HONE) Town Visioning for Multi-Family Housing available at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx> Existing zoning parameters were reviewed.

Consultants modeled zoning capacity in existing zoning districts that align with Scenario A boundaries except Business and Industrial districts where housing is not allowed.

L. Newman discussed Scenario A mapping and community feedback on the loss of first floor retail in the Avery Square Business District. Consultants were asked to model the Carter building at the 100 West Parcel, calculate units under the existing overlay districts and the proposed zoning and compare results, which was a difference of 11 units.

Chair Frail supports commercial, ground floor use as an important neighborhood amenity stating the commerce attracts people to the area. She supports the moving of units lost to first floor commercial to the parcel at 100 West St., in the Alternative Scenario A.

A discussion revolved around the feasibility of a 3 or 4 story scenario. The Base Scenario would be 3 stories with the possibility of growing it with incentives in the Bonus Scenario.

Members supported Scenario A Alternate model with 4 stories by Special Permit and increased 1.0 FAR by right with a 1.4 FAR in the Base Scenario by Special Permit. The Base Scenario model will not change. Scenario A (Alternate) becomes the model for MBTA Communities Law base compliance.

Members discussed whether the Site Plan Review process notifies abutters. Consultants will confirm with EOHLC. Needham's current Zoning By-Law includes a Special Permit process for Site Plan Review, a process which notifies abutters. An MBTA Communities Site Plan Review process could be established.

Members discussed how to discourage developers from tearing down the Carters building to put up a new building. The Town's current understanding is that the owners intend to tear it down. It was not built for multi-family use. They will unlikely be swayed by incentives to keep the existing building.

Consultants await clarification from the State on the Center District. Consultants removed the Center from Scenario A Alternate and added in Hillside Avenue Business. If the State approves the Center area, this will be a bonus number of units.

#### **IV. Selection of Final Add-On Scenario for MBTA Communities Compliance, *Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates***

Scenario B is now named the Bonus Scenario. The intent of MBTA Communities Law is to produce neighborhoods within a one-half mile radius of MBTA. Members reviewed the map by neighborhood. The HONE charge is to create zoning for MBTA Communities Law. Rezoning outside the one-half mile radius can be determined by the Planning Board.

Base Scenario zoning will comply with MBTA Communities Law. The Bonus housing plan doesn't need to adhere to MBTA Communities guidance. Both will be sent to the State for clarification.

Members discussed each neighborhood in the model by current zoning, what was modeled, and any edits or additions including height, FAR, parking, and inclusionary zoning.

#### **Apartment A-1**

Included in Apt. A-1 are Hamilton Highlands, Avery School condominium, and Hillside Avenue Business as part of Scenario A. Greendale Ave. is outside the half-mile radius and not counted.

#### **Chestnut St., Scenario C Corridor**

Members agreed to 2.0 FAR, 4 stories by right for standalone housing, mixed use by Special Permit.

Members agreed **Chestnut St. East** to allow 3 stories of standalone, multi-family housing by right, and 3.5 stories with first floor commercial by right at 2.0 FAR with exception of the Briarwood parcel.

In the Bonus Scenario, **Chestnut St. West** neighborhood, members agreed to allow 4 story, at 2.0 FAR for multi-family housing by right; members agreed to allow first floor commercial use, with an additional 0.5 story by right.

Members discussed offering fifth floor options on Chestnut St. West.

Needham has a Streetscape design plan. Greenspace is not naturally occurring in this area. The MBTA model leaves 20% for setbacks and Open Space which Consultants described. It is to account for setbacks. If the group wanted to have open space on the parcel beyond the setbacks, they would want to increase the open space requirement, but that would infringe on ability to build. It's a tradeoff.

The current bylaw for Chestnut St. Business requires a 50-foot setback from a residential district (with the 25 feet closest to the residential district being landscaped and the remaining 25 feet may be for an accessory use, no structure). Where the lot abuts the MBTA right-of-way, the side and rear setback shall be 10 feet landscaped. In the Chestnut Street Overlay, the side and rear setback is 25 feet from the MBTA right-of-way. The front setback in the Overlay is a minimum of 5 feet and a maximum of 15 feet.

**MOTION:** J. Levy moved to add 20% Open Space in the Base District.  
**SECONDED:** R. Ruth

**J. Levy withdrew his motion in favor of using the landscaping standards in Site Plan Review to discuss setbacks, pervious surface and the like.**

**Chair Frail asked if there was group consensus on using landscaping standards in Site Plan Review to discuss setbacks, pervious surface and the like. No members were opposed to moving forward with this standard.**

Members discussed the Garden St. district and agreed to mirror the Chestnut St. East side. The Garden Street Overlay District is currently zoned for 2.5 stories (35 feet) and 3 stories (37 feet) by Special Permit and for 0.70 FAR, with an increase by Special Permit to 1.2 FAR for mixed use and 1.0 for multi-family. Some members did not agree with applying Chestnut Street East standards and wanted either 2.5 stories of multi-family by right with 3 stories by Special Permit or did not want to increase the FAR beyond 1.5.

**MOTION:** H. Frail moved to approve 3 stories of multi-family housing by right with 2.0 FAR at the Garden St. overlay, and to increase to 3.5 stories by right with 2.0 FAR with first floor commercial.

**SECONDED:** N. Espada

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

**MOTION CARRIES: 7-2**

### **Center Business, Scenario A**

Center Business is not in the Base Scenario. Consultants modeled 5 stories with 1.25 FAR. Members discussed incentivizing first floor commercial mixed use.

Consultants described two Bonus Scenario strategies:

- 1) If the Bonus Scenario passes, the Base Scenario goes away.
- 2) You have a compliant Base, and a non-compliant Bonus. The Base must pass to be compliant. The Bonus Scenario may or may not pass but is not compliant with the MBTA Communities Act.

J. McKnight commented that Needham needs a vibrant downtown with housing and amenities. With advocacy of the City of Newton, we thought changes that EOHLV made to the guidelines would allow count mixed use buildings to count. EOHLV has made it very difficult to go in that direction because they won't allow the required parking. We're left with the option to allow standalone, multi-family housing if we want it to count toward MBTA Communities Law compliance. This circumstance is in opposition to the needed change to this area. J. McKnight voiced an opinion for mixed use but against standalone, multi-family housing for this area.

This will not count toward the Base scenario. H. Frail said it doesn't have to be MBTA compliant if they do it in the Bonus.

Members discussed Overlay A (3+1 height) and Overlay B (2+1 height) in the Consultant presentation available in the Meeting Packet at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>. At the time that the Center Business area was last rezoned, the 3-story height was retained around historic Town Hall. Members discussed whether to add the Center Business District to the proposal. J. McKnight questioned if the group should be proposing this, as it wouldn't comply with MBTA, since the group already has a full plate. N. Espada said that the entire spine is being reviewed to create a vibrant area. Members then discussed whether to allow standalone multi-family housing in an area around the Center Business. The Community expressed they wanted first floor retail.

J. Levy suggested that they take the existing zoning and change from Special Permit to as of right, with mandatory mixed use. Currently, we have two overlays that allow for mixed use, so this would change to by right. L. Newman explained the history for having it by Special Permit, which was to make sure the Town retained some control or oversight of the center of Town.

H. Frail expressed concern that if HONE is proposing zoning that is not compliant with MBTA Communities, it may go beyond the scope of HONE's charge. J. McKnight noted that the group should be careful that what we bring to Town Meeting, Scenario A or B, can be enacted with a majority vote and will not require a 2/3 vote. When we talk about changing dimensions for mixed use housing in our downtown, we're getting away from zoning amendments that can be passed by majority vote.

Consultants read from Section 5 of the Zoning Act: If ordinance or bylaw allows for multi-family housing or mixed use development as of right in an eligible location, that can be a 51% vote according to the guidance. You allow for it as of right. It does not say "mandate" one way or the other.

Consultants recommend submitting only MBTA Communities Law compliant scenarios to the State.

Some members suggest the pink area should be left as is to focus on first floor commercial. Others suggest removing the pink area from the HONE plan as we don't want mandatory mixed use. You cannot have both. To deal with it cleanly, remove the pink area and keep Apt. A-1 on the west side.

**MOTION:** J. Levy moved that the Bonus Scenario does not need to strictly adhere to MBTA Communities Law.

**SECONDED:** R. Ruth

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

**MOTION FAILS:** 1-8

**MOTION:** H. Frail moved that all of the Map Scenarios should be compliant and in the spirit of MBTA Communities Law.

**SECONDED:** R. Ruth

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

**MOTION CARRIES:** 8-1

Members discussed the treatment of the Center Business District on the map with options to leave it off the map or include it with zoning as proposed in Scenario C. Some members disagree with the proposed 4 story housing plan which was 2.5 stories with a 1.0 FAR. One member asked to clarify to allow standalone multi-family housing by right in the pink area between the railroad right of way and Linden St. Commercial by right cannot be mandated. Members question whether the Congregational Church should be included in the contiguous area.

**MOTION:** H. Frail moved that the pink shaded area on the Center Business B map be zoned multi-family housing to the ground, 4 stories, 2.0 FAR, by right

**SECONDED:** R. Ruth

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

**MOTION CARRIES:** 6-3

**MOTION:** H. Frail moved that the meeting enter a 5-minute recess at 10:10 pm.

**SECONDED:** R. Ruth

**ROLL-CALL VOTE:** Unanimous

**MOTION CARRIES:** 9-0

Members returned to the meeting at 10:15 pm.

### **General Residence**

Consultants successfully added units and contiguity but not density. This secures additional housing options not currently allowed. Members discussed the GR area near the Fire Station and former Santander Bank along Highland and Webster Streets. There are 1,056 units in these sections. We need more compliance.

**MOTION:** M. Diener moved not to include General Residence at this time and encourage the Planning Board to review the matter.  
**SECONDED:** R. Ruth  
**ROLL-CALL VOTE:** Unanimous  
**MOTION CARRIES:** 9-0

At 10:44 pm, Jeanne McKnight recused herself for the reason she resides in zone A-1 and serves on the Board of the condominium that is in this zone.

### **Apt. A-1**

This is currently zoned for 3 stories, at 0.5 FAR. The area contains the Baptist Church, Christian Science Church, and Hillcrest Garden. It is Town owned land and will not contribute to MBTA Communities Law compliance. HONE will drop this A-1 district. The Planning Board has already reviewed this.

In Scenario C, we looked at 4 stories and 1.0 FAR with maximum 24 dwelling units per acre. It includes St. Joseph's School but not Steven Palmer apartments. Some are SRB. Take everything off that is east of Pickering. The Base Scenario cuts the A1 district at May St. and Oakland.

Members agreed to not include Stephen Palmer parcel in the Scenario.

**MOTION:** J. Levy moved to approve 4 stories, 1.0 FAR, 24 dwelling units per acre in the Apt. A-1 District except where areas were cut out of A-1.  
**SECONDED:** R. Ruth  
**ROLL-CALL VOTE:** M. Diener, nay; N. Espada, nay; H. Frail, nay; K. Keane, nay; L. Kaponya, nay; J. Levy, aye; W. Lovett, nay; J. McKnight, abstained; R. Ruth, nay.  
**MOTION FAILS:** 1-7

Some members agreed the FAR is too low for feasibility. Members discussed increasing the number of dwelling units per acre rather than the FAR.

**MOTION:** N. Espada moved to approve Apt. A-1 District across the board at 4 stories, 1.0 FAR, 36 dwelling units per acre.  
**SECONDED:** R. Ruth  
**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, abstained; R. Ruth, aye. Unanimous.

**MOTION CARRIES: 8-0**

Members reviewed areas that are not currently zoned Apt. A-1 on the map.

- Congregational Church - Hillside Ave. is General Residence and Industrial on Pleasant St.
- Hillside School will probably be labeled excluded land by EOHLC and would not count.
- Industrial - Make commercial-use parcels Industrial (Needham Oriental Rug is currently GR but is occupied by Industrial use, pre-existing, non-conforming).

The Industrial is currently in the Base map. It is not expanding.

**MOTION: H. Frail moved to keep the boundaries of the Industrial District as shown on the map and that multi family is added to the district.**

**SECONDED:** L. Kaponya

**Discussed followed and no vote was taken.**

Apt. A-1 as proposed is currently zoned General Residential including two parcels. Include the A-1 District, but the GR will go to the Planning Board. The Industrial zone will be zoned multi-family housing by right as an allowable use. The boundaries will remain unchanged, but heights, FAR, and unit capacity will be adjusted. Members discussed using the same dimensions as A-1.

At 11:28 pm, J. McKnight recused herself as she lives across the street from the Industrial District.

Members considered each Industrial zone in the Bonus Scenario to see whether it could be made part of the A-1 District. Having higher density for one Industrial area than another was also considered.

**MOTION: N. Espada moved to set the dimensions to 3 stories, no FAR, 24 dwelling units per acre in the Industrial District on Crescent St., and to set the dimensions to 4 stories, 1.0 FAR, 36 dwelling units per acre in the Industrial District on Hillside Ave.**

**SECONDED:** R. Ruth

**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, abstained; R. Ruth, aye. Unanimous.

**MOTION CARRIES: 8-0**

**Hillside Ave. Business**

Members reviewed all parcels on the map and decided to add housing units to the Industrial District. They selected two parcels which will become Apt. A-1 District: the Carter Methodist Church plot and the plot across the street which already has multi-family housing. Other parcels will remain SRB. Underlying zoning is not changed. HONE has not determined these parcels are A-1 for all purposes, but they are A-1 for the purposes of MBTA.

- The Library and the Episcopal Church on the corner of Rosemary and Highland is SRB currently; there was consensus to change this from SRB to Apt. A-1.
- The Denmark Lane area contains apartments. There was consensus to make this Apt. A-1.
- The Congregational Church is currently SRB. There was consensus to change it to Apt. A-1.

**Hillside Ave.** - Hillside Avenue Business is currently in the Base Scenario at 3 stories, .5 FAR. In order to try to get the Base Scenario to the compliant numbers, make it 3 stories, 1.0 FAR.

**MOTION:** N. Espada moved to zone Hillside Avenue Business District as Apt. A-1 at 3 stories, 1.0 FAR, 24 dwelling units per acre.

**SECONDED:** R. Ruth

**All members agreed.**

For clarification, the Industrial District around Crescent Street is zoned at 3 stories, FAR 0.75, 24 units per acre.

Members decided to consider the 100 West Street parcel separately.

**Avery Square** - There was consensus for no standalone multi-family housing.

**100 West parcel** - Overlay dimensions: It is in the Base by Special Permit.

**Business District** - Nothing needs to be changed in the boundaries.

Sudbury Farms to the north, funeral homes to the south, across the street from the A-1 district.

Scenario A zoning is currently 3 stories, FAR not applicable.

Scenario C zoning is currently 5 stories, 1.5 FAR, 50 maximum dwelling units per acre.

One member felt this is one area to incentivize mixed use in the Bonus Scenario.

Members decided to use the same dimensional requirements as Chestnut Street West.

**V. Finalize Inclusionary Zoning Percentage Recommendation**, *Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates*

We will apply inclusionary zoning uniformly across the districts at 12.5%.

**VI. Finalize Parking Requirement Recommendation**, *Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates*

Members agreed to a parking limit minimum of 1.0 space per residential unit uniformly across the Base and the Bonus Scenarios.

**VII. Next Steps** - Future meetings: 3/7, 3/28 Community Meeting #3, 4/4, 4/25

**MOTION:** N. Espada moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:11 am.

**SECONDED:** J. Levy

**ROLL-CALL VOTE:** Unanimous

**MOTION CARRIES: 9-0**

Respectfully submitted,



Housing Needham (HONE) Advisory Group  
February 15, 2024

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>