

Town of Needham, Massachusetts
Housing Needham Advisory Group (HONE)
Public Services Administration Building, 500 Dedham Ave.
Minutes
April 25, 2024

Place: Charles River Room and Virtual via Zoom
Present: Karen Calton, Heidi Frail, Michael Diener, Natasha Espada, Kevin Keane, William Lovett, Jeanne McKnight, Ronald Ruth
Absent: Liz Kaponya
Staff: Alexandra Clee, Assistant Town Planner; Amy Haelsen, Director of Communications and Community Engagement; Katie King, Deputy Town Mgr.; Lee Newman, Director of Planning & Community Development
Guests: Gary Ajamian, Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; K. Buckley, Emily Innes, Innes Associates; Christine Urban

Call to Order

At 7:00 pm, H. Frail called the meeting to order, performed roll-call; the meeting is being video recorded.

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

H. Frail thanked members for their inspiration and participation to achieve the intended purpose.

Approval of Minutes from Prior HONE Meetings

MOTION: J. McKnight moved and K. Keane seconded to approve the meeting minutes of 04/04/24 with non-substantive edits.

Vote: M. Diener, **aye**; N. Espada, **aye**; H. Frail, **aye**; K. Keane, **aye**; W. Lovett, **aye**; J. McKnight, **aye**; R. Ruth, **aye**. **Motion Carries: 7-0**

Update on Capital Memo and Traffic Study, *Katie King, Deputy Town Manager*

K. King reviewed edits to the Capital Memo that were agreed upon at the last meeting which included:

- Added population growth estimates
- Compliance with MBTA Communities Act does not require municipalities to install new water or wastewater infrastructure or add to current infrastructure to accommodate multifamily production
- Needham maintains no overnight parking ban
- Any development must comply with codes
- Stormwater management is quality and quantity focused
- Order the Traffic Study
- State whether there is impact on high school
- Page 6, water section, water was left out
- Move dept. studies to Methodology section

Traffic Study

Town Staff met twice with an engineering firm to discuss a Scoping Study and review Traffic Studies. The final scope should be ready this week. The Town Manager will inform the Finance Committee that the Town should press for a transfer of funds if the scope exceeds the estimate.

The scope's focus is to analyze existing and anticipated conditions under the NHP Plan Likely Build-out.

ACTION: Identify areas where there might be points for litigation.

Discussion of Citizens Petition, *Gary Ajamian*

G. Ajamian of 47 Meetinghouse Circle addressed the HONE Committee with a presentation available in the Meeting Packet at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>

"The current Citizens' Petition has been circulated in full compliance with Needham's General Bylaws, and to specifically address the issues raised by the Town's HONE Committee, namely, Section 1.8 Appropriations - Information Relative to Ballot (and voting) Questions."

He stated that the Petition is based on convictions rather than facts, asserting that the Consultant, RKG Associates lacks relevant technical expertise and is influenced by MBTA interests rather than the Town's interests. The Petition claims that the six current analyses are speculative and incomplete, and that the term "Propensity for Change" is not industry recognized. The Petition proposes Engineering Studies to close the gap in technical and capital construction analytics and supplement the work of RKG Associates.

Co-Chairs defended the Chapter 149, Procurement Process in selecting a Consultant. HONE members are experienced architects, developers and attorneys. RKG Associates is a firm with experience in working with the State's model and assisting towns with complying with the BTA Communities Law. Town Staff will continue to meet with experts in Town departments.

The MBTA is not involved with RKG Associates. The Town must comply with MBTA Communities Law through zoning changes.

At 7:29 pm, K. Calton joined the meeting.

K. King shared sources of information foundational to her memo such as the Needham 2025 Study which was gathered from Town department experts but did not include an engineering component since experts who know the infrastructure did not see the need for this. The memo outlines the DPW Master Plan in the Five Year Capital Plan which is used by Staff teams for Town operations. Town Staff and HONE members expressed confidence in the proposed zoning.

K. Buckley

He expressed concern for what he sees as a 30% population increase in the NHP Full Build-Out and a discrepancy in school student numbers. He believes residents will experience impacts in sewer, electrical grid, and stormwater areas. An Engineering Study would identify the impacts. The State is willing to negotiate. He feels the Town should gather more information before making a decision.

K. King's Capital Memo references study after study that has been done, is underway, and for which the Town will be appropriating future funds to support this work.

- **Water** - Planning is underway. Town Meeting appropriated design funding in 2024.
- **Sewer** - The Town completed a study in 2016 that identified target areas. DPW has requested \$1,000,000 in 2026 to formulate a Sewer Plan for IR, Infrared Spectroscopy approval.
- **Stormwater** - In 2024, DPW requested the Town appropriate \$250,000 for public infrastructure to supplement ARPA funds for a Stormwater Plan.
- **Transportation** - DPW is currently partnering with MEPS, Military Entrance Processing Stations to complete a Transportation Plan to be completed in 2025.
- **Parking Plans** - the memo references parking plans done recently.

The DPW Master Plan will be executed regardless of MBTA Communities Law zoning. Professional and competent Town Staff provided input on existing plans, zoning and stated that improvements to current systems are sufficient to handle the proposed zoning.

W. Lovett stated that the Capital Memo addresses residents' concerns that there is enough infrastructure to support the zoning (impervious area, stormwater). Infrastructure requirements are the developer's responsibility.

The distinction between As of Right and Special Permitting was clarified. As of Right zoning for multifamily housing could be included in an Overlay district and would meet the MBTA Communities requirements. A Special Permit could be required for certain dimensional characteristics beyond the By-right dimensional requirements. Existing regulations such as building codes, tree guidelines, Stormwater Bylaws, and wetlands requirements apply to both As of Right or Special Permit types of development. For example, a Special Permit allows the Planning Board to request a developer invest money in intersection improvements while As of Right does not permit the Town to require the developer make investments.

Members discussed with G. Ajamian that the Town is not responsible to replace the entire water pipe if there is not enough water pressure to support plumbing for development projects to comply with MBTA Communities Law.

Christine Urban, 1106 Webster St.

The Consultant's Report and Capital Memo assert that development will occur in a 19 to 34 year timeframe. She contends the development will occur in as little as 5 years and is concerned about the net absorption rate. She cited three developments which were built quickly. Development in Needham will attract developers; there is new State money; the schools will attract families. External pressures will accelerate development more rapidly than is projected.

E. Halvorson cited data taken from 177 communities and does not believe 1,900 units will be built within 5 years by changing the zoning from Special Permit to As of Right.

E. Innes suggested that 177 communities will comply with the MBTA Communities Law. There are a limited number of developers and contractors for building which creates a natural limitation.

At 8:03 pm, G. Ajamian, K. Buckley and C. Urban left the meeting.

Members discussed adding an Executive Summary to the Capital Memo which highlights modifications and procedures in place to develop these projects. One member suggested adding available data on stormwater and other facilities that support each area within the zoning districts.

HONE members agreed the Town has conducted thorough infrastructure studies which are applicable to the project, and the infrastructure is sufficient for the proposed zoning. Any issues with specific geographical locations should be reported to the Select Board and Planning Board.

Review of Final Report, Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates

E. Halvorsen reviewed the presentation available in the Meeting Packet at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>

Review of Final Zoning, *Emily Innes, Innes Associates; Lee Newman, Director of Planning and Community Dev.*
E. Innes reviewed the presentation available in the Meeting Packet at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>
She highlighted changes suggested by Town Counsel. Edits were described section by section.

100 West St. Parcel

Members suggested Consultants add explanations to the Propensity for Change diagrams. Members discussed possible density bonus opportunities for certain types of developments. Members discussed current zoning for the 100 West St. parcel as well as the current Overlay.

Members discussed whether to turn the parcel over to the Planning Board for further evaluation.

Members discussed the capacity implications to the models. K. King suggested we would be adding As of Right to the unit capacity. The Planning Board could put forth the As of Right zoning with a Special Permit option in an Article at the October Town Meeting.

MOTION: H. Frail moved and K. Keane seconded that in the Base Compliance Plan, the 100 West St. parcel remains a Special Permit with a setback for the fourth floor recessed from the face of the building on Highland and West Streets.

Vote: K. Calton, **aye**; M. Diener, **aye**; N. Espada, **aye**; H. Frail, **aye**; K. Keane, **aye**; W. Lovett, **aye**; J. McKnight, **aye**; R. Ruth, **aye**. **Motion Carries: 8-0**

L. Newman clarified that underground parking is the only exemption for FAR in all modeled zoning districts except the Avery Square Overlay district where parking garages can be above ground. This exemption should be provided for Avery Square to maintain internal consistency within the zoning framework. Currently, underground parking doesn't count toward FAR in Needham Center and Chestnut St. Corridor, but above ground parking counts toward FAR. Exempting above ground parking from the FAR was implemented on the other side of the highway when zoning the Business Center and Muzi site.

Consultants suggested the models created assumed above ground, residential parking and not structured parking above ground. The recommendation to exempt structured parking from FAR for one site does work, but it needs to be applied to accessory uses. The structured parking does not count toward the FAR at the 100 West St. parcel, but it does count toward the FAR in every other district. Members reviewed parcel uses in the zoning.

Consultants discussed building footprints and uses with members and the inconsistency of zoning versus exempting parking from FAR requirements. Members made reference to an Accessory Table of Uses.

There was member consensus to make a parking adjustment to the 100 West St. parcel.

Vote to Recommend Final Plan and Final Zoning to Select Board and Planning Board

MOTION: J. McKnight moved and R. Ruth seconded that the HONE Committee recommend the Final Report and Final Results prepared by RKG Associates and Innes Associates with one additional paragraph to be added regarding the explanation of Propensity for Change model illustrations, the paragraph suggested by Town Counsel, and the definition for Workforce Housing.

Vote: Unanimous. **Motion Carries: 8-0**

Next Steps and Thank You, *Heidi Frail and Natasha Espada, Co-Chairs*
Co-Chairs expressed gratitude to serve with members in this endeavor.

April 30, 6:00 pm - Select Board Joint Meeting (HONE Committee, Planning Board, Finance Committee)
Recommend Final Plan and Final Zoning to Select Board and Planning Board.

Matters not reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance - There were none.

Adjourn

MOTION: K. Keane moved and M. Diener seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 pm.

Vote: Unanimous. **Motion Carries:** 8-0

Informational - The Meeting Packet is available at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>
Watch HONE meetings: <https://www.youtube.com/user/TownofNeedhamMA>
Maps can be found at <https://www.ma.gov/mbta>

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**.

Respectfully submitted,

Dale Michaud
Recording Secretary