NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

April 1, 2025

The Needham Planning Board meeting, held in the Charles River Room of the Public Services Administration Building, and virtually using Zoom, was called to order by Artie Crocker, Vice-Chairman, on Tuesday, April 1, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. with Messrs. Block, Alpert and McCullen, Planner, Ms. Newman and Assistant Planner, Ms. Clee. Ms. Espada arrived at 7:06 p.m.

Mr. Crocker noted this is an open meeting that is being held in a hybrid manner per state guidelines. He reviewed the rules of conduct for all meetings. This meeting does not include any public hearings and no public comment will be allowed. If any votes are taken at the meeting the vote will be conducted by roll call.

ANR Plan – Robert DiPierro, Applicant: John Zadroga, Vasu Talluri, Property Owners, (Property located at 235 Central Avenue and 9 Rosegate Road, Needham, MA).

Ms. Newman noted the plan was signed earlier. The Board allowed a lot line adjustment between Lot 2A and Lot 3B. Now the applicants are revising another lot line adjustment. Lot A will be conveyed to Lot 2A and Lot B will be conveyed to Lot 3B. There is required frontage on a public way. This has been reviewed by Engineering and Planning Board staff and she recommends the Board vote to endorse the plan Approval Not Required.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. McCullen, it was by a vote of the four members present unanimously:
VOTED: to endorse the plan ANR as presented.

Agreement: Scenic Road Act and Public Shade Tree Act: The Town of Needham, 1471 Highland Avenue, Needham, MA Petitioner (Property located at 1285 and 1307 South Street (Assessor's Map 211, Parcel 5), across from 12 Fisher Street/0 South Street (Assessor's Map 209, Parcel 1) and 1115 South Street (Assessor's Map 207, Parcel 3).

Ms. Newman noted this is a follow up to the Planning Board's hearing for the Town's Scenic Road request. They are waiting on the final caliper size of the trees from Tree Warden Ed Olsen, which has not been received. She was hoping the Board could accept the agreement in its current form and ultimate recommendation from Tree Warden Olsen on the caliper of the 15 trees to be planted. Mr. Alpert stated the applicant was saying the trees are to be replaced 2 to 1 but not planted in the same location. Ms. Newman noted that was correct. There needs to be 30 trees and not 15. She will revise that. Mr. Alpert wants to make sure the DPW applicant is in agreement that it is not 15 trees.

Ms. Espada arrived at 7:06 p.m.

Mr. Alpert noted on page 2, paragraph 4, it says "any damage to other private property shall be restored...." That "other" should be taken out. The trees are not on private property. It should say "any damage to private property." Ms. Newman stated that was fine. All agreed "other" will come out. Mr. McCullen stated it should say 30 trees or a 2 to 1 replacement.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. McCullen, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:
VOTED: to agree to this agreement with the Town with the additional changes as follows: in paragraph 2, the number of trees installed should be changed from 15 to 30, the caliper of the trees will be as agreed by the Tree Warden and remove the word "other" in paragraph 4.

Minutes

There were no minutes.

Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

Report from Planning Director and Board members

Ms. Newman noted there was a request from the League of Women Voters to know which members are being assigned to which precinct at their warrant meeting. Ms. Espada will take Precincts A, B and C; Mr. McCullen will take Precincts D and E; Mr. Block will take Precincts F and G; Mr. Crocker will take Precincts H, I and J and Ms. Newman will take the conference room with the new Planning Board member. Ms. Newman stated she is looking at taking the large house information to Town Meeting in 2026. The Planning Board will have hearings beginning in January 2026. A question came up as to how soon the Planning Board would need the final recommendation from the Committee to move forward with that schedule. She asked if mid-November would be sufficient. Mr. Crocker stated he would want to notice a hearing in January for a hearing in February or March. He anticipates having public hearings and having some of the Large House Committee members come to the Planning Board meetings starting at the next meeting to give status updates. Mr. Block would like to have the information, at the latest, in October and Mr. Crocker agreed. Ms. Newman stated she is looking at May.

Ms. Espada noted the Committee needs to figure out how to define FAR and how to effectively regulate the use. Should it be a fixed cap or a fixed cap with an escape value like Wellesley does? There will probably be a Large House meeting in May or early June and there will be 3 meetings. The Committee will work on strategies over the summer. Mr. Alpert stated the first Monday in May is late. If Town Meeting goes for 4 nights the 4th night is 5/14. He feels they would want to have it after Town Meeting. Mr. Block does not want it after Town Meeting. The Committee should have their act together and have a listening meeting in early May and a 2nd meeting before the summer. Ms. Newman noted the focus on an extra meeting was to come up with some proposals regarding FAR and present them as options in September. She wants to do some modeling and that would be done over the summer for presentation in September.

Ms. Espada requested Ms. Newman put together a calendar. Mr. Crocker would want to have 2 public hearings. Mr. McCullen stated there were 3 public hearings for the tennis courts. He feels there may need to be more public hearings for Large Houses. Ms. Newman noted this needs to be done in January for a hearing in February so there is time. Mr. Crocker feels the Committee needs to bring it to the Planning Board by October. Mr. Block feels getting the official modeling set up is critical. Ms. Newman is doing the RFP now for consulting for the 3D modeling. Mr. Block feels it would be better if that company was engaged soon, preferably in May, and present for 10 minutes on what their influencing factors are for the algorithm. It is only an equation. The public needs to know what a, b, c and d are. The sooner that is set up the better. It could be prepped and presented at the Large House Public Engagement Meeting. The meeting could be done the 3rd or 4th week of May and have the company that is engaged speak for 10 minutes at it. Mr. Crocker is not sure that is possible.

Mr. McCullen stated the whole issue is about the fiscal impact analysis for why this Town has not had the appetite to do something earlier. We are now going to change that, which is fine, but the impacts need to be looked at, presented and have the community able to say it is fine. The crux of the issue is the privacy rights of the individuals on their property and what their value is able to do to sell it. A fiscal impact analysis is the most important thing for this Committee to figure out. Mr. Crocker agrees people selling the house would have the rights. The changes we are doing have an impact on the community, their value and the quality of life. Mr. McCullen stated the fiscal impact to the Town, the buyer and the seller all need to be looked at. The fiscal impact is the most important factor of this process. Mr. Crocker noted the committee is still looking at the values. It is an important metric to know but there are a number of other factors that will have weight as well.

Mr. Alpert suggested if Town Meeting goes for 4 nights that would be the week of the 12th. He does not feel they want to have a 3rd major meeting on the Town Meeting weeks. If they go to the 26th that is Memorial Day. He feels they may want to schedule a hearing for Wednesday, 5/21, or Thursday, 5/22 and a report to Town Meeting before Memorial Day. Mr. Block asked when the RFP is due. Ms. Newman needs to put together the scope of work for the 3D model and they will work together on the fiscal impact. Mr. Block feels the fiscal impact analysis is more critical than modeling if they can get the RFP out by the end of next week. Ms. Newman asked what they are modeling if they do not know what is going to be proposed. Mr. Block noted actual variables like FAR, lot size and height. That should be laid out and say, for example, FAR is from here to here. The Committee will decide on lot coverage, FAR and square footage on a lot. Mr. Crocker stated the Committee were looking at non-conforming lots and picking as many samples as possible. They are now looking at conforming lots. They are looking at parameters and visuals of what they are looking like. Does it fit or not, what changes would we like, and will there be a fiscal impact? The Chair of the Wellesley Planning Board came to the meeting yesterday and some of that could apply to Needham.

Ms. Newman stated the fiscal piece could be linked to the different modeling being developed. Mr. Block commented it should not take 6 weeks to complete as it is not that difficult. Ms. Espada commented it takes a while to tweak it. They want to know the criteria by which the fiscal impact is going to be created and to give a big picture of what the impact would be. Mr. Alpert asked who is doing the fiscal impact analysis. Ms. Newman noted there will be an RFP. Mr. Alpert stated Mr. Block suggested getting that RFP out to hire someone to do the fiscal analysis so they can do the modeling and can hit the ground running. He feels they should get the RFP out. Ms. Newman stated she met with Wellesley and was surprised to hear about their system. It has a lot of support in Wellesley. Their system says you can build on a 10,000 square foot lot 3,100 square feet, which is inclusive of the garage. They started at 3,600 square feet. If the applicant wants bigger, they can go through the large house review. It seems only 20% of houses are going above these limits. She is surprised it is not more. Mr. Crocker noted the Wellesley Chairman said when someone comes for a large house review, they look at the neighborhood, what is happening in it and how it would fit with that. That builds a lot of value over time. They are taking control and being careful with what they are doing.

Mr. McCullen made a motion to adjourn and to acknowledge Mr. Alpert for his 10-year contribution and volunteering on this Board and many others and the time and effort to this Board and his broader service to the Town. Mr. Alpert thanked him for the kind words. He has enjoyed every minute of it with the exception of 1688 Central Avenue which was a challenge. He wanted to acknowledge having served with wonderful people on this Board. Some were already friends and some became friends. That is an experience he will treasure. They are excellent people with hearts in the right place. He also wanted to acknowledge Lee Newman and Alexandra Clee. He appreciated their expertise, devotion to the Town and the Board. It was wonderful working with them. Ms. Espada stated Mr. Alpert has a way of assessing what everyone is saying and bringing it together to move it forward in a thoughtful way.

Upon a motion made by Mr. McCullen, and seconded by Mr. Block, it was by a vote four of the five members present (Mr. Alpert abstained):

VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 7:56 p.m. and to thank Mr. Alpert for his 10-year contribution and volunteering on this Board and many others and the time and effort to this Board and his broader service to the Town.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

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Artie Crocker, Vice-Chairman and Clerk