NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

July 22, 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, Chairman, on Tuesday, July 22, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. with Messrs. Block, McCullen and Greenberg, Director of Planning & Community Development, Ms. Newman and Assistant Planner, Ms. Clee. Ms. Espada arrived at 7:05.

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 includes no 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.

Decision: Amendment to Major Project Site Plan Special Permit No. 93-3: Wingate Development, LLC, 63 Kendrick Street, Needham, MA 02494, Petitioner (Property located at 589 Highland Avenue, Needham, Massachusetts). Regarding certain plan modifications, including the addition of 2 EV chargers, a Bocce court, Dog Run, and extended sidewalk and 3 parking spaces.

Ms. Newman noted the decision approves the changes the applicant requested with the addition of electric vehicle parking spaces, a dog park and a bocce court. Mr. Greenberg stated he could not vote on this matter. This will be continued until after Ms. Espada arrives.

Decision: Amendment to Major Project Site Plan Review No. 2013-02: Town of Needham, 1471 Highland Avenue, Needham, MA 02494, Petitioner (Property located at 1407 Central Avenue, Needham, MA). Regarding proposal for a new building addition of approximately 12,400 square feet, as well as the renovation of roughly 1,800 square feet within the existing storage garage to create a dedicated tire maintenance bay.

Ms. Newman noted this decision approves the changes to the Jack Cogswell Building requested with the condition the Planning Board request be included. The DPW has reviewed the draft and are ok as presented. Mr. McCullen asked if there is a commitment regarding traffic and was informed there is. If there is a problem the Planning Board can reexamine it. Ms. Espada arrived.

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 grant the relief requested in the application as presented in the Planning Board decision.

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 approve the decision as granted in particular to grant (1) a Major Project Site Plan Special Permit Amendment under Section 7.4 of the Zoning By-Law and Section 4.2 of Major Project Site Plan Special Permit No. 2013-02, dated April 2, 2013, Amended June 10, 2014, July 8, 2014, January 20, 2015, May 6, 2015, January 26, 2016, July 19, 2016, November 20, 2018, August 6, 2019, September 3, 2019, October 19, 2019, January 4, 2021, June 1, 2021 and October 19, 2021 and Insignificant Change on September 15, 2020, further amended on September 20, 2022: and (2) the requested Special Permit under Section 5.1.1.5 of the By-Law, to waive strict adherence to the requirements of Section 5.1.3, Parking Plan and Design Requirements, specifically Sections 5.1.3(a), 5.1.3(k), 5.1.3(l) and 5.1.3(n): subject to the following plan modifications, conditions and limitations with a slight modification to include the word "Law" next to "By-".

Decision: Amendment to Major Project Site Plan Special Permit No. 93-3: Wingate Development, LLC, 63 Kendrick Street, Needham, MA 02494, Petitioner (Property located at 589 Highland Avenue, Needham, Massachusetts).

Regarding certain plan modifications, including the addition of 2 EV chargers, a Bocce court, Dog Run and extended sidewalk and 3 parking spaces -- Continued.

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

VOTED: to approve the requested relief as more specifically identified in the decision and GRANT (1) a Major Project Site Plan Special Permit Amendment under Section 7.4 of the Zoning By-Law and Section 4.2 of Major Project Site Plan Special Permit No. 93-3, dated July 27, 1993, as amended August 9, 1994, August 8, 1995, November 21, 1995, June 3, 1997, March 15, 2011, Insignificant Change on April 18, 2013 and further amended on December 7, 2013, March 15, 2022 and May 16, 2023: subject to the following plan modifications, conditions and limitations within the decision before us.

Decision: Amendment to Major Project Site Plan Special Permit No. 2017-07: The Children's Hospital Corporation c/o Boston Children's Hospital, 300 Longwood Avenue, Boston, MA, Petitioner (Property located at 66 B Street, 360 First Avenue, 410 First Avenue, and 37 A Street, Needham, MA). Regarding request for certain modifications to the conditions in the 2021 Amendment.

Ms. Newman noted this decision approves what the applicant asked for -- utilizing $30,000 for traffic at a town intersection of its choice, monitoring at the 3-year point and a $25,000 contribution fulfills the conditions of a Signal Warrant Analysis at Kendrick Street.

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 grant the requested relief contained in the amended decision with respect to a Major Project Site Plan Review Special Permit Amendment under Section 7.4 of the Zoning By-Law and Section 4.2 of Major Project Site Plan Special Permit No. 2012-07, dated October 15, 2012, amended and restated April 2, 2013, amended September 17, 2013, January 6, 2015, April 28, 2015, November 10, 2015, April 25, 2016, November 4, 2020 and January 4, 2021 as detailed above and subject to the following plan modifications, conditions and limitations.

Discussion: Attorney Tim Sullivan regarding possible development at 100-110 West Street.

Tim Sullivan, Attorney with Goulston & Storrs, noted Welltower is the owner of the site and there is an agreement with Greystar to develop the property. He thought it would be good to come in and talk about what is wanted for the site. He reviewed the existing background including the MBTA process. He noted the Attorney General is looking at the zoning. There have been a lot of public comments, draft zoning and 2 Town Meetings. They are looking at as of right, 3 stories with curb cuts and setbacks that break up the façade. The applicant wants to get feedback while the Attorney General is reviewing the zoning. Ryan Souls, Senior Director of the local development team at Greystar, gave the history of Greystar. He noted the company has completed 16 projects, over 4,700 apartment/homes and 1.5 million square feet of commercial space. They manage over 19,000 units in over 70 communities. This is their first time in Needham. He noted they will be vertically integrated and the construction team will work with the Building Department.

Mr. Souls reviewed the existing conditions – 190,000 square feet, 3 stories with L shaped parking in back, a small garage and some parking on the side. The façade is very long, almost 650 square feet. He reviewed the amenities in the area including the MTBA stop and the Heights common. He showed the conceptual design. There will be 189 units with 15% studios, 40% 1-bed, 35% 2-beds and 10% 3-beds. There will be 189 parking spaces. The building will be a 3-story wood frame construction setback almost like 2 separate buildings were designed. There is a setback for green space on Highland Avenue. There will be direct access units on Highland Avenue and West Street. This is as of right and complies with all requirements. The plan is to maintain, modify and upgrade the existing curb cuts. The existing structure is within the MBTA zone of influence but there is a plan for parking there. There is a 110-foot single family setback from the south. He showed slides to start the conversation. The design consideration is being worked through. The applicants are working with direct unit entry and feel the streetscape can really be engaged. There will be access to a corridor as well, but some units will have direct entry. It will look like town homes with a more urban nature.

Mr. Souls showed assorted conceptual courtyard programming. One courtyard will be on Highland Avenue and will be public facing. A back courtyard will be more residential with seating, grills and amenities the residents could use with a decent-sized park area as well. It could be an amenity for residents and the community as well and will make a transition scale down from commercial. Mr. Crocker asked if the courtyard on Highland Avenue would be functional or more visual. Mr. Souls noted it would be narrow with seating, but it would be more visual. This will be further developed by the architect. He just wanted to get some concepts out there and get some comments. Mr. Sullivan reviewed the schedule. They are waiting for the Attorney General but would like to finalize and submit the site plan, have meetings in September, October and November and go through the process. There would be comments from other departments and hopefully construction will begin in January 2026 with a completion date of September 2027.

Ms. Espada commented the entry units and articulation of the streets and outdoor amenities are great. Community outreach is important as this is an important site. She appreciates the thoughtfulness of the introduction of the project. She asked if there were any sustainable features. Mr. Souls stated passive house or alternate certificate at a baseline. The project is already meeting the goals of sustainability. Passive house has been their goal. They need to balance affordability to residents versus the cost of some of the measures. The project will have things, such as solar, ready for future conversion. The alternative energy is at a cost neutral basis, so it does not add to residents' costs but they continue to evaluate and explore. Ms. Espada asked where the back of house with generators and trash or anything is, related to that. Will Harned, Associate with Greystar, noted there will be 2 buildings and a connecting piece with a loading dock right in the back there. Ms. Espada asked if all trash would be interior to the building. Mr. Harned stated that is what is typically done. There is full-time management staff as well as maintenance. Usually, trash will be rolled out when the service comes. Ms. Espada asked if the plan was to continue the tree line up the street and she was informed that would be part of the site plan submission.

Mr. Block stated he loves the concept, and it looks like a great project. He asked when the zoning was passed for the Base Compliance Plan. Ms. Newman stated it was passed in May. Mr. Block stated there is a 6-month approval process for the Attorney General so the decision would come in October. Ms. Newman anticipates August or September. Mr. Sullivan clarified the Attorney General has 90 days if no extension is requested. Mr. Block noted there is no parking structure. All parking is in the rear and side which he thought was an interesting concept. He asked how many spaces per unit there would be and was informed one space per unit. Mr. Block commented the zoning minimum was good as the town is trying to promote more to commuting with public transportation. He stated Needham opted into the Specialized Stretch Energy Code so the costs will be higher. He asked if the applicant had thought about a traffic impact analysis and site circulation analysis. Mr. Sullivan stated that it is in process and will be part of the site plan process. Mr. Souls stated he misspoke earlier and understands the Specialized Stretch Code.

Mr. Greenberg thanked the applicant for the thoughtful presentation. He noted the preliminary egress/ingress and asked if there would be a full left turn and right turn both in and out of Highland Avenue and West Street. He asks because of the new stop sign on West Street and possible back-ups. Mr. Souls stated this is being actively reviewed. The existing curb cuts for both access points may not be needed. Mr. Greenberg echoed Ms. Espadas' comments regarding the front of the building detracting from the concrete jungle. Mr. McCullen commented, in the spirit of the MBTA Communities Act, he likes the design and amenities. He really likes the first-floor entry that opens the building into the neighborhood. He also likes the landscaping and the preservation of the curb cuts. He commented the Town is going through a parallel process of a quiet zone so there may need to be additional signal spacing lights at the egress. He feels that is something to take into account. He will be interested in the circulation plan and traffic study.

Mr. Crocker noted this is a great property and location. He loves any type of roof top decks, if possible, green roofs or solar canopies. Incredible things can be done here. There should be green space along Highland Avenue, and the applicant may want to think about something for kids. Mr. Souls noted the fiscal impact study will have some kids. Ms. Newman asked the anticipated rental stream. What market are they targeting? The applicant sees diverse demographics in locations like this for a broad mix of renters. Tim Beinert, Director, noted the entry will be $2,500 for studios and the rates go up from there. Mr. Crocker asked what amenities will be there. There will be a leasing office, lounge space in a boutique building and a fitness center is the number one amenity residents look for. Mr. Crocker asked if there will be an internal pool and was informed that a pool is not planned. There will be grills, outdoor eating stations, lawn games, a dog park and a playground or play space.

Request to Release Bond: Sunrise Terrace (formerly 1001 and 1015 Central Avenue) Definitive Subdivision Amendment: Hillcrest Development, Inc., 78 Pheasant Landing Road, Needham, MA, Petitioner (original owner and Petitioner RRNIR LLC, 20 Beaufort Avenue, Needham, MA). Property located at 1001 and 1015 Central Avenue, Needham, MA.

Ms. Newman noted the street is in and has been inspected by Engineering. The Town is holding $195,000. The DPW has issued a letter to release the bond while retaining the Off-Street Drainage Bond for the subdivision. This is for street drainage and infrastructure.

Upon a motion made by Mr. McCullen, and seconded by Mr. Greenberg, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:
VOTED: to release the bond as in the packet for Sunrise Terrace in the amount of $195,000.

Minutes

Ms. Espada noted on page 4, 2nd paragraph, she had commented the park was a 7,000 square foot amenity. She thinks that park is the lot adjacent to the development. It should be specified where it is. Ms. Newman believes the proposed park is at the intersection of Gould Street and TV Place. Ms. Espada noted the minutes say, "Ms. Espada feels the applicant needs a cut through." That should be "cut through the building." She wants to make sure the little park is not lost.

Upon a motion made by Mr. McCullen, and seconded by Mr. Block, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:
VOTED: to accept the minutes of 6/3/25 as amended.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. Greenberg, it was by a vote of four of the five members present (Mr. McCullen abstained):
VOTED: to approve the minutes of 6/17/25 as presented in the packet.

Report from Planning Director and Board members

Ms. Newman noted the Large House Study Committee met last night. There is a focus on bringing in the development community and looking at a mixture. Notices were sent out to about 100 builders and maybe 20 showed up. Some of the feedback included primary space on the first floor, second floor and basement. The attic is not necessarily a concern. There was an expression that the values may stabilize initially then continue an upward trend. They feel the price per square foot would go up as the price went down. Mr. Block noted that is an antithetical goal. Mr. Crocker noted the goals are not for affordability but for the bulk of the houses. Mr. Block stated they talked about ensuring downsize or starter like smaller homes almost like a planned community. He asked if it is permissible limiting zoning and limiting the size of homes to 2,200 to 2,500 square feet? Ms. Newman noted there are places that were created with small lots and small house construction with higher densities. Mr. Block would like to add this to the Planning agenda and calendar then it could be considered as capacity allows. Mr. Crocker loves the basic concept but does not know where in Needham that could be.

Mr. Block noted it could be on any existing square foot lot in the Single Residence B District. He does not see it feasible to knock down a house. He feels certain lots in SRB could be made smaller so they could be subdivided. The town could have 3,000 square foot lots with a 5-foot setback. The Board is talking about Unlocking the Charles. That could be a mix of density that could be explored. Maybe allow an acre and a half of 3,000 square foot lots with 2,500 square foot homes. Mr. Crocker feels all is worth exploring. Ms. Newman noted RDV, the firm that has been hired, has started to work on modeling. There will be modeling on 3 different house sizes on non-conforming lots and conforming lots. There will be examples of 3 houses that were built reducing the size by a certain percentage and see what happens when the size is shrunk down. She plans to have those 3-dimensional models available at the next housing meeting.

Ms. Newman noted there is correspondence in the packet from the Attorney General's Office with Guidance on the Regulations of Religious and Educations Uses of Land Under the Dover Amendment. Child Care is a protected use. She noted there is also a notice from Avita with a change of ownership. Mr. Crocker noted with the Dover Amendment there are 8 categories. He feels it will be interesting to see how that would factor into projects that come into town. Ms. Espada noted work with be starting on the Stephen Palmer in September.

Mr. Block stated he would like to talk about planning. He thought it would be helpful. He would like to see the Board move forward on the Great Plain Avenue rezoning and Unlocking the Charles. Stephen Palmer could benefit from this. He would like to study this as a Planning Board and does not feel another committee is needed. The Board could take 20 to 30 minutes a meeting to talk about this between now and December or January. The existing zoning should be looked at. He feels neighborhood association groups, developers, property owners, landlords and tenants should be brought in, not all on one night, to try to understand zoning from their perspective and what could be beneficial. The Board could then put together a zoning framework that could be refined, discussed and debated. The members could work with Ms. Newman on writing the zoning. He feels they could accomplish 2 zoning amendment changes in a very efficient manner and do other planning issues in the background. The Select Board and Finance Committee could be brought in so all know what is happening. The Planning Board could get on the Select Board and Finance Committee agendas throughout the process. There will be multiple public meetings along the way. They can preserve the transparent process but still produce significant zoning reform. He feels Central Avenue has multiple sites ready to turn.

Mr. Crocker likes the basic concept. He asked what the multiple sites on Central Avenue were. Mr. Block meant Great Plain Avenue and noted Stephen Palmer, Greene's Field and 888 Great Plain Avenue. Ms. Newman stated the Stephen Palmer Committee is looking at the building to see if it makes sense to retain it or if it needs to go. This would involve looking at Greene's Field and will be a very public process. Depending upon that, the zoning may need to be revised. There will be a recommendation on what the land use profile should look like that is coming out in the Spring. The consultant has already been funded and hired. She recommends the Select Board and Planning Board be a part of that. Ms. Espada stated there is already a consultant for Stephen Palmer looking at this. She feels the time should be spent on the ones that do not have a consultant yet.

Mr. Block made a motion that the Planning Board take up the examination and study of rezoning Great Plain Avenue from Warren Street to Linden Street. A discussion ensued. Mr. Crocker feels there needs to be some integration with Stephen Palmer but feels it would not happen for May. He feels the Board should spend time looking at the Overlay District and what expansions could be done there. He would rather spend time on Wexford Street. Mr. Greenberg stated he has heard a lot of committees do not talk to each other. There is a high need to revitalize the center and bring in foot traffic. Stephen Palmer is just one portion. They do not need to wait a year for that but need to work in tandem. Mr. McCullen agrees it can be done in parallel with communication and reporting on where the Board is. He feels the Board needs to get back to planning. There is enough talent on the Board, and he feels there is some benefit. The downtown area needs to be looked at. Mr. Crocker would like to include Chapel Street and the Overlay as well.

Ms. Espada is all for planning and that area needs a lot of thought. She asked, if not doing the traditional process, what is the new process and who is working on it? Does it require Ms. Newman and Ms. Clee's time and do they have available time to help? How is the Board moving forward with this? She has limited time. Who is running it and what is the community process? She wants to know what the process is. Mr. Block feels the meetings have not been very long lately. He or Mr. Greenberg could lead in terms of Great Plain Avenue. There is no need for a separate committee. He feels almost every meeting, for 20 or 30 minutes, the Board should talk about Great Plain Avenue and Unlocking the Charles. There should be specific things to talk about at each meeting. Questions could be asked, and policy could be debated working toward some specific objectives and come up with zoning and zoning reform. Third parties will be engaged as needed.

Ms. Espada wants to see a timeline and an agenda for each meeting. She needs to see a work plan. Mr. Block laid out a schedule for some meetings if the Board wants to codify that. They can look at Chapel Street as part of it. He does not want to get too far afield with Chestnut Street and Highland Avenue. Ms. Espada feels setting boundaries should be the first part of the plan and set goals to make progress. Mr. Crocker amended the motion to include Chapel Street. Mr. Block accepted the amendment.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Block, and seconded by Mr. Greenberg, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to take up the examination and study of rezoning Great Plain Avenue from Warren Street to Linden Street. including the amendment made by Mr. Crocker to include Chapel Street.

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 adopt the same approach in consideration of Unlocking the Charles and specifically the area between the highway and the Charles River from Highland Avenue to Central Avenue, to consider rezoning at a subsequent Town Meeting and that the Board will follow the same procedure which will include community access, community participation and community engagement, public hearings and engage consult when needed to do that work.

Upon a motion made by Mr. McCullen, and seconded by Mr. Block, it was by a vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

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Justin McCullen, Vice-Chairman and Clerk