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Barney S. Heath
Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 11, 2018

TO: Councilor Albright, Chairman
Members of the Zoning and Planning Committee

FROM: Barney S. Heath, Director of Planning and Development
James Freas, Deputy Director of Planning and Development
Rachel Nadkarni, Long Range Planner

RE: **#185-18 Discussion and adoption of Needham Street Vision Plan**
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING requesting discussion and adoption of the Needham Street Vision Plan as an amendment to the 2007 Newton Comprehensive Plan.

MEETING DATE: May 14, 2018

CC: Ouida Young, City Solicitor

Since December 2017, the Planning Department has been working with the Needham Street Area Community Engagement Group on the development of the Needham Street Area Vision Plan. The engagement group process wrapped up with its final meeting on April 30th and the Planning Department staff is currently in the process of preparing the draft of the Vision Plan for consideration by the City Council as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan.

Attached you will find, the draft materials presented at the Needham Street Area Vision Plan Public Forum on April 23rd. These include the Vision Statement for the area as well as vision statements for key topic areas from environmental health to urban design. These materials will be updated to reflect further public comment at the public forum as well as the comments of the Committee.

At the upcoming meeting, we request that the Committee discuss setting a June 25th Public Hearing, which is the last available public hearing before summer break. There is a planned discussion on this item again on June 11th, but due to noticing timeline, a decision to set the public hearing date is needed sooner.

If you would like to see minutes of each meeting of the engagement group and the materials that they produced, please visit www.newtonma.gov/needhamstreet.

Needham Street Area Vision Plan

The Needham Street area will be an area of the city designed for all-ages and connected to transportation options. The area will continue to reflect to its industrial history and current commercial strength while adding diverse residential options and modern innovation industries. The Needham Street area will be a prosperous mixed-use district that emulates many of the positive aspects of Newton's villages. Future growth will incorporate environmentally sustainable technologies and design.

A Vision Plan is...

A guide for public policy action regarding a particular geographic area, in this case the Needham Street area, based in:

- Broader citywide strategies
- Past studies and data analysis
- Community engagement

A document that outlines:

- Objectives for the future
- Guidelines for private development & public investment

The final Needham Street Vision Plan is anticipated to be adopted by the City Council as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan.

Community Engagement Group

The Community Engagement Group, which consists of residents, commercial property owners, topic area experts, and at-large representatives, was formed to help design, facilitate, and synthesize input from public meetings in order to help maximize participation and involvement in the planning process. The group met seven times over the course of five months and their thoughtful feedback and input can be seen in each of the five Vision Plan topics.



Email your thoughts to needhamstreet@newtonma.gov by 11:59pm, Sunday April 29th.
www.newtonma.gov/needhamstreet



Public Forum

Tonight's public forum encourages additional community participation and feedback on the draft ideas for the Needham Street Area Vision Plan.

The public forum showcases six different stations: Overall Vision Statement, Environmental Health, Transportation, Land Use, Design, and Implementation.

Please make sure to fill out a comment card and leave comments at each station!

In order to make sure your comments are a part of the public forum's report please send any additional thoughts to us via email by April 29, 2018.

Next Steps

Staff will finalize a draft vision plan document and submit it to the City Council for consideration as an amendment to the City's Comprehensive Plan.

A public hearing will be held at the City Council and Planning Board following initial committee discussions. All are encouraged to attend and participate. Join the project email list to receive updates.

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Vision for Environmental Health

The Needham Street area will be an area designed to facilitate ecological health through restoration of existing open space and support healthy lifestyles with the creation of diverse, multi-use, natural areas that encourage use and environmental education.

Key Idea 1: Increase climate resiliency - as one of the areas of Newton with the most impervious surfaces, the Needham Street area is at elevated risk the effects of climate change and as an innovation district, it is a prime place for the City to incorporate more climate change mitigation techniques.

Short Term Actions:

- Update requirements in the zoning ordinance with respect to pervious/impervious coverage, landscaping, low-impact stormwater management, and erosion/sedimentation controls.
- Increase plantings to address heat island effects, provide stormwater management, meet street and building shade desires, create habitat, and increase aesthetic appeal.
- Set standards for stormwater management in any new public streets/public spaces.

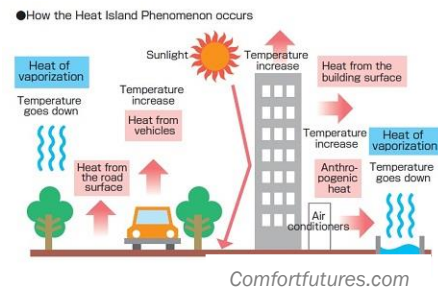
Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Work with the N² Innovation District, Green Newton, and others to promote climate resiliency innovation in the existing building stock (e.g. electric vehicle charging stations, tree planting).

Key Idea 2: Encourage buildings to be built and operated in sustainable ways.

Short Term Actions:

- Require and/or incentivize development and renovations to build with:
 - Sustainable, energy efficient materials
 - Sustainable waste management plans (for before, during, and after construction)



staff contribution:
example of low impact
stormwater management



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- Proper soil/erosion controls
- Net zero energy
- Require and/or incentivize buildings to maximize energy efficiency and renewable energy generation.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Increase shuttle services to open space/natural areas, transportation hubs, and cultural/community amenities to reduce CO₂ emissions from single-occupancy vehicles.

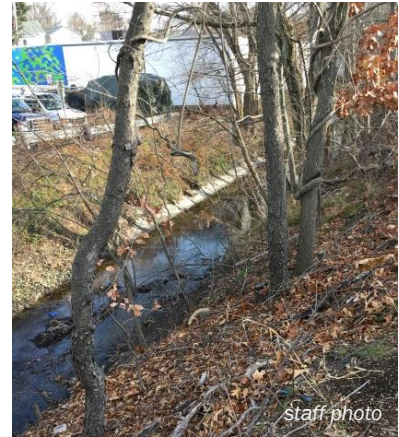
Key Idea 3: Improve health of and access to diverse open spaces.

Short Term Actions:

- Increase healthy green space along South Meadow Brook through restoration plantings and consider daylighting opportunities.
- Coordinate with MassDOT to pursue adding street trees with stormwater management capability along Needham Street.
- Expand accessibility to all as trails, natural areas, and public amenities are added and upgraded.
 - Increase access to those with disabilities through addition of ADA-compliant trails and amenities.
 - Place bike racks, benches, and informational, educational, and/or play features along trails.
 - Expand trail loops to connect to neighborhoods, transit stations, and commercial destinations.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Create a “Sustainable Living” theme for Needham St. focused on the natural amenities of the area including the Charles River, South Meadow Brook, and the Upper Falls Greenway.
 - Develop community-based programs that increase people’s involvement with and knowledge about local natural features.
 - Explore options for a “Sustainable Living’ environmental education center.
- Encourage stewardship investment (financial and otherwise) in the maintenance and restoration of existing open spaces.
 - e.g. Encourage volunteer days with residents and businesses in the area to maintain the health of open spaces through trash removal and small invasive species pulls.
- Require new development/redevelopment to incorporate new publicly accessible open spaces in the Needham Street area.
 - Focus on diverse new public open spaces that encourage outdoor activity, environmental awareness, and community bonds, (e.g. trails, interactive water features, playgrounds, community gardens, plazas, and public art space).



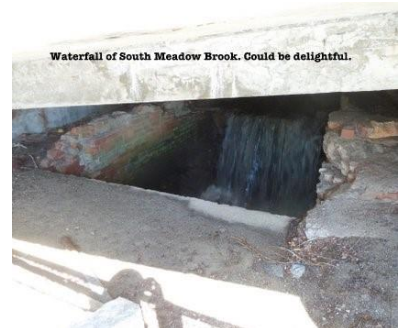
Staff photo



staff contribution:
example of daylighted stream



Path from Columbia Ave. to Greenway and onto Countryside School - make safer and more "official"



Waterfall of South Meadow Brook. Could be delightful.

All photos submitted by Community Engagement Group Members unless otherwise noted

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Vision for Transportation

The Needham Street area will have safe and convenient transportation connections in and around the local neighborhoods and to regional destinations. Needham Street will be a walkable retail spine, supported by diverse options for getting to the street – whether by transit, walking, biking, or driving.

Key Idea 1: Improve safety and accessibility to make Needham Street area safe and welcoming to all.

Short Term Actions:

- Update accessible curb ramps in conjunction with City accelerated road program projects (e.g. Chestnut/Ellis).
- Work with MassDOT to pursue lighting upgrades along Needham St.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Manage driving speeds in neighborhoods to at or below the posted speed limit through roadway design and safety education.
- Update street, sidewalk, and parking lot lighting.
- Incorporate principles of accessible/universal design in street, sidewalk, and parking lot design.

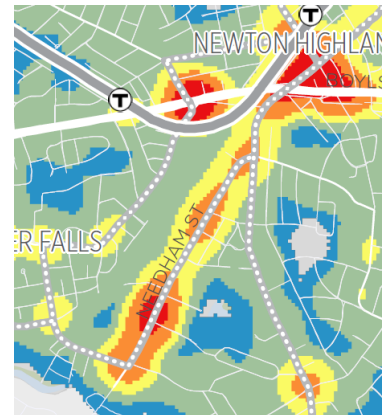
Key Idea 2: Expand and enhance transit connections along Needham Street, the central spine of this area.

Short Term Actions:

- Coordinate existing and add new publicly accessible fixed-route shuttle services along Needham Street to the Green Line.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Improve transit stops and bus management at MBTA-stations.
- Institute transit signal priority on Winchester and/or Needham Streets to improve reliability of buses and shuttles.
- Advocate for additional MBTA service.
- Explore transit options along the Greenway connecting Green Line at Newton Highlands to Needham Heights Commuter Rail.



Crash Hotspots Map, involving any mode of travel, 2008-2013



Photo from Newton-in-Motion

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Key Idea 3: Extend and connect neighborhoods and adjacent properties to the Greenway for walking and biking.

Short Term Actions:

- Extend the Greenway north to Curtis Street.
- Connect the Greenway to paths into adjacent neighborhoods and properties along Needham Street.
- Activate edges of the Greenway with community gathering spaces and recreation-related commercial activity.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Link to DCR Barnes Trail in the Town of Needham via Charlemont St and Christina Street Bridge.



Staff photo

Key Idea 4: Shift Needham Street from an isolated road with few routing options to a connected roadway.

Short Term Actions:

- Encourage connections between parking lots and require wayfinding signage to guide drivers to those routes.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Create new driving and non-driving connections off of Needham Street as opportunities present themselves.



Key Idea 5: Manage transportation demand in new development.

Short Term Actions:

- Design new development to encourage walking, biking, and transit including supporting a mix of uses.
- Establish standards for transportation demand management in new development (e.g. subsidies for transit, bike storage).

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Consider strategies for parking management. Explore options for centralized parking facilities.



Photo from staff presentation

Key Idea 6: Prepare for future transportation technology as fleets of shared, electric, autonomous vehicles are anticipated in the coming decade.

Short Term Actions:

- Coordinate with existing and emerging shared fleet companies.
- Plan for electric vehicles charging in all new buildings and encourage addition of charging stations in existing parking lots.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Track autonomous vehicle innovations and management strategies.



Photo from Wikimedia Commons

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Vision for Land Use

The Needham Street area will be a vibrant destination with a distinct identity. The area will have a diversity of homes, businesses, and gathering places for community life.

Key Idea 1: Support and encourage a mix of residential, commercial, office, entertainment, recreation, manufacturing/production uses reflecting the industrial heritage of the area, meeting the service needs of the adjacent neighborhoods, and providing for the evolving needs of a thriving business center.

Short Term Actions:

- Amend zoning along Needham Street to allow mixed uses, including housing, community uses, smaller commercial uses, and compatible manufacturing/production uses (e.g. breweries, R&D lab space, etc.).
- Allow more uses by-right with clear development and design requirements (height, massing, etc.), along with clear operating standards.

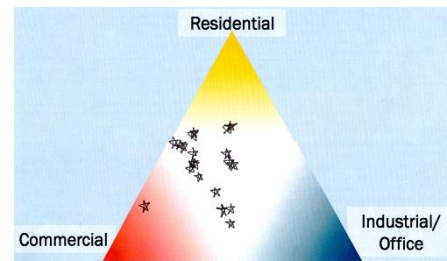
Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Attract employers and support employees by encouraging housing and transportation options, as well as amenity uses, such as restaurants and entertainment.
- Work with the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce and N² Innovation District to attract new businesses and economic development assets like co-working to the area.

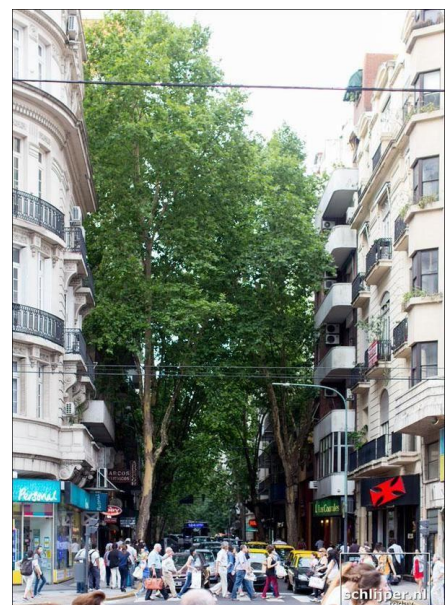
Key Idea 2: Provide a diversity of housing options in the Needham Street area.

Short Term Actions:

- Encourage a range of housing unit types and sizes to accommodate all ages and those with various incomes.
- Reduce minimum lot area per unit in the zoning ordinance to encourage smaller housing unit sizes for smaller households and more sustainable living.
- Update inclusionary housing requirements in the zoning ordinance to provide housing for a greater range of incomes.



Compilation of Community Engagement Group Member's Recommended Mix of Uses



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Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Improve transit and bicycle access as well as transportation support services to appeal to potential car-free residents.

Key Idea 3: Increase small retail and specialty uses – diversify, attract, and sustain small local businesses along the Needham Street retail spine.

Short Term Actions:

- Allow shared parking and reduce parking minimums to support retailers in encouraging customers to shop at multiple locations on Needham Street.
- Eliminate special permit requirement for small-scale retail (currently large footprint retail is allowed by right, but small retail of less than 5000 s.f. requires a special permit).

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Locate neighborhood-scale retail and service uses on the ground floor of new developments.
- Work with the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce and N² Innovation District to support business growth in the Needham Street area.

Key Idea 4: Provide a range of community gathering spaces throughout the area.

Short Term Actions:

- Amend zoning to allow broader range of civic and recreational uses such as libraries, museums, and theaters as well as entertainment and recreational uses such as bowling alleys, ice skating rinks, and athletic facilities.
- Require publicly accessible open space in new large developments and develop design standards for public open spaces.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Consider the Needham Street area as a potential site for future public investments in community centers or civic institutions.



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Vision for Design

The Needham Street area will be an inviting place for people of all ages and abilities. The physical environment will be comfortable and healthy. The area's buildings and public spaces will be designed for the human-scale and will promote an active pedestrian environment.

Key Idea 1: Incentivize contextual and human-scale building design; base zoning standards for building massing and articulation on the immediate context and best practices for vibrant neighborhoods.

Short Term Actions:

- Establish zoning standards and design guidelines based in the vision and lessons learned from inspiration places. For example:
 - Preserve historic buildings and highlight natural features
 - Line public open spaces with active facades
 - Encourage facades to relate to human-scale (e.g. enclosure standards relating height to street width, encourage architectural detail)
- Require new building heights to meet residential heights at residential neighborhood edges; utilize grade change and upper-story setbacks to modulate height of larger buildings
 - The area south of the railroad spur offers the best opportunity to allow taller buildings.
- Encourage deep lots along Needham Street to be divided into smaller blocks to increase intersection density and route options

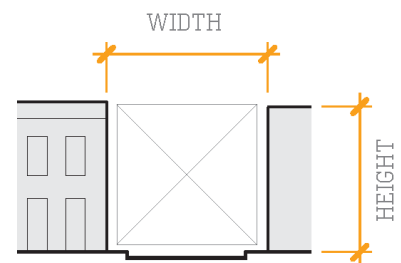
Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Work with businesses to clarify wayfinding signage.
- Establish standards for and encourage active commercial front yards along Needham Street - e.g. outdoor dining, new tree planting, lighting, etc.

Key Idea 2: Encourage high quality architecture and sustainable construction - befitting the area's history of industrial craftsmanship and innovative present.



Staff Photo - Saco-Pette
Machine Works



A street feels comfortably enclosed when bordered by buildings approximately equal to the street width

Short Term Actions:

- Request new development to utilize natural and hardy materials, particularly where users can interact with them (e.g. ground floor facades, fences, and public spaces).
- Encourage identity-enhancing public space elements (e.g. street-lamps, benches, banners, etc.) that underscore the innovation and sustainable living themes.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Work with the N² Innovation district to develop and install identity-enhancing wayfinding signs.
- Request new development to incorporate latest sustainable construction methods and make those innovations part of the visible identity of the area.



Key Idea 3: Utilize the design of buildings and public spaces to encourage active community life – design plays an important role in shaping how people interact with their environment, including the choice to walk or not, to socialize in a public space or not.

Short Term Actions:

- Establish design standards for newly created or renovated public and privately-owned publicly-accessible open spaces
 - Encourage diverse open space programming – areas for social gathering and play as well as for quiet rest and relaxation.
 - Connect public open spaces with the sidewalk network – physically and aesthetically (e.g. furniture and materials).
 - Set “all age friendly” guidelines – e.g. benches with arms for older adults and elements of play for children.
- Establish lighting standards that encourage evening activity.
- Amend the zoning ordinance to strengthen requirements around active front facades.
 - Frequent entrances along a façade
 - Parking behind buildings
 - Break up long buildings with modulated depths and materials

*Ongoing/Long Term Actions:*

- Work with businesses to increase transparency in windows.
- Work with property owners to activate the greenway edge with art installations, transparency into abutting shops, direct entries, public gathering spaces, etc.
- Expand arts installations and programming in public spaces, particularly interactive pieces (e.g. the Artful Planos program)
- Require new development to underground utilities.

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Vision for Implementation

The Needham Street Area Vision Plan will inform public and private sector decision making. The City of Newton will continue to be a leader in coordinating the long-term improvement and success of the area, working in partnership with residents, businesses, and the city as a whole.

Key Idea 1: Adopt the Needham Street Area Vision Plan through established City Council process, make recommendations actionable through amendments to City Ordinances and policies as applicable.

Short Term Actions:

- Work with the Newton City Council to finalize and adopt the Needham Street Vision Plan as an amendment to the City's comprehensive plan.
- Incorporate appropriate recommendations from the Needham Street Area Vision Plan into the Zoning Redesign draft zoning ordinance.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Use the adopted vision plan when reviewing proposed new development/redevelopment proposals and proposed City investments.
- Guide private sector and community groups to recommendations in the vision plan.

Key Idea 2: Make community engagement a cornerstone of actions taken in the area - realizing this vision will require that Newton continue its ongoing successful partnerships.

Short Term Actions:

- Involve the community engagement group and others who have participated in this process in future community planning processes occurring in the Needham Street area.
- Work with area partners to implement recommendations from the Needham Street Area Vision Plan.



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Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Develop a culture of stewardship for the Needham Street area through community events and engagement (e.g. Greenway cleanup, social events in public spaces).

Key Idea 3: Establish equity as an essential consideration, in order to support the citywide goals and commitments to being all-age friendly and welcoming community as well as supporting business growth.

Short Term Actions:

- Update inclusionary housing requirements in the zoning ordinance to expand the availability of deed-restricted affordable housing.
- Encourage new development to include deed-restricted middle-income housing in addition to housing in the lower affordable housing price range.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Explore ways to support affordable business space for new and family-run businesses.

Key Idea 4: Work within an active management framework for implementation, allowing for and encouraging course corrections as circumstances change while remaining true to the core directive of the vision for the Needham Street area.

Short Term Actions:

- Continue to build understanding of fiscal impacts to the City relative to new development/redevelopment and policy decisions.
 - Fiscal impact studies, particularly those related to school enrollment, are valuable tools for guiding investment to ensure there are adequate facilities to support new residents while maintaining current quality of service.

Ongoing/Long Term Actions:

- Make it easier for short-term trials, pilots, and pop-ups – in line with the area's identity as an innovation district.
 - Whether for a new city program in a public space or a new private use, create flexibility for temporary activities that take an iterative implementation approach – test ideas to gauge community response and adjust as needed.
- Plan to update the Needham Street Area Vision on a regular basis.
 - Just as this vision plan looked back to the ideas developed in past plans, this plan should be revisited in approximately 10 years or as otherwise warranted by changing circumstances.

