

**City of Newton Planning and Development Department  
Needham Street Area Vision Plan  
Public Forum  
April 23, 2018  
6:00 – 8:00 p.m.  
Barry Price Center  
27 Christina St  
Newton, MA 02461**

**Summary of Comments**

The April 23, 2018 Needham Street Area Vision Plan meeting was a public forum offering the public an opportunity to view draft statements, key ideas, and short and long term action items to be incorporated as part of the draft Needham Street Area Vision Plan. Once finalized, the Vision Plan will be voted upon by City Council to be adopted as part of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Barney Heath, Director of the Planning and Development Department provided attendees with a short presentation about the process. The entire presentation can be viewed at [www.newtonma.gov/needhamstreet](http://www.newtonma.gov/needhamstreet). The public forum was set up in six different stations for the public to view, each with a City staff member to answer questions. The stations included: overall vision, environmental health, transportation, land use, design, and implementation. At each station, the public was encouraged to leave notes with feedback.

A summary of comments from the members of the public both at the event and received via email included:

**Overall Vision Station**

- No buildings, business or residential more than five stories above street level. No exceptions.
- Newton needs more affordable housing – more elevator buildings for elderly. There should not be a restriction on number of stories.
- No discussion of past studies and data analysis.
- Process made it difficult for the public to participate.

**Vision for Environmental Health Station**

- Climate resiliency should include utilities underground to preserve power in increasing storms.
- Solar panels do not look nice for the new buildings.
- In every aspirational photo that you are showing, trees are extremely prominent, yet there are none being planned.
- Trees, not solar panels, in parking lots.
- Put solar on roofs.
- Underground utilities.

- Needs to be metrics and targets in the report to improve air quality, traffic, impervious (pavement) surfaces, flooding, etc.
- Needs to be expected renewable energy generation and energy efficiency and recycling in any building or renovation.
- Hope for increased accessibility to the Charles River and South Meadow Brook.
- Link Needham Street to the walking path on the Town of Needham side of the Charles River.
- More trees.
- Pocket parks.
- Solar carports are ugly.
- Plant diverse species of trees, not monocultures.
- Use silva cells/structural soil to create more than minimum required root space so trees will live longer.

### **Vision for Transportation Station**

- Wider sidewalks, shade trees, fewer curb cuts, commercial not high-density residential.
- If the road is being redone, why not put electrical etc. underground? It's an important issue! Discuss it!
- Reduce traffic or at least not make the traffic worse than today.
- Provide metrics that must be met.
- Should be a mention of traffic, gridlock, or how vehicles are pushed into the abutting neighborhoods.
- How will transit signal priority on Winchester & Needham St. for buses & shuttles impact the bikers and walkers + safety? If we want safety need to control for speed!
- add bus shelters and T pass purchasing stations on Needham St.
- Please remove the idea of transit options on the Upper Falls Greenway. The Greenway cannot share with the T or buses. Take that out. Bikes, walkers, joggers, strollers, and wheelchairs all compatible but not buses & rail.
- Air quality needs to be tested and air pollution should be controlled and managed.
- Be more specific about what is planned for Chestnut and Ellis Streets.
- No one brought up the 850 unit apt building proposed by Northland? Why?
- Move Cabot's from Washington St Newtonville to Needham St – new restaurants.
- Add an ice cream place but leave Cabot's where it is!
- Where is the "1 tree for every 10 parking spaces" in commercial parking lots as per current ordinance?
- Consider a new road through the DPW yard.
- Increase bus #59 frequency .
- Coordinate with DPW & MBTA regarding bus stop design and locations .
- Connect Elliot St to Needham St via the DPW!
- Further research support for work at home – particularly research gender issues .
- Set aside space for new elementary school to serve Upper Falls and Needham Street.
- Remember: octogenarians do not bicycle! (Is elderly housing planned?)
- Need tree canopy to encourage walking. Need shade in summer.
- No cars – jitneys and buses.

- Oak St – no outlet onto Oak St from Pettee Lane – 92 families too much traffic.
- New Green line stop behind National Lumber.
- Use greenway as a transportation corridor with some sort of tram or people mover, possibly autonomous vehicles.
- More rational and frequent bus service.
- Business improvement district (together with Needham) to pay for this.

### Vision for Land Use Station

- Need street and plaza trees to make appealing to pedestrians and cyclists in summer. All the nice “vision” pictures have trees!
- Require all parking lots to have 1 tree per 10 spaces (interior trees) plus perimeter trees per zoning code, any time building wants a special permit.
- EDC rep said their vision was it should all be commercial – I agree. Already have residential component with Avalon and apartments near Charles River. Need development that will add tax revenue without cost of residential.
- Put utilities underground.
- Unfunded mandates = \$1 billion therefore we need more commercial on Needham St.
- We need a Stop & Shop or Star Market, i.e. a grocery store.
- Who insures that the developers follow through on what was promised when they get their permits. It did not happen on Court St (prices increased) and not on Austin (not green).
- We all want diversity, etc. but how will this happen?
- Newton taxes for residents are high. We need commercial development. Where is that vision?
- Add T stop behind National Lumber – tracks are right there.
- Given the proposed number of rental units, there is a need for a supermarket.
- Will private developers who are building hundreds of units of residential be required to build a new school?
- Newton lost Trip Advisor and Clark Shoes. Someone should be looking to replace them!
- Given Newton’s unfunded liabilities, approaching \$1 billion, it’s important to develop commercial real estate which is taxed at 2x residential. 850 units of additional housing.
- Disagree with giving priority to the Newton Needham Chamber of Commerce. They are way to pro-business and development and do not care about the local community needs or quality of life.
- Diverse housing options should include Newton Public Housing. People who are truly low income, handicapped seniors on fixed incomes. Not just faux low income.
- Seems like the small businesses on Needham Street are already dying even without the new storefronts you are proposing. Do an inventory of what we currently have in retail and is vacant before adding new storefronts.
- Don’t reduce parking minimums because without parking most shoppers will not come to this area. The locals walk and bike but not shoppers from further away.

## Vision for Design Station

- Open side roads to general public.
- How will schools be affected?
- What does the pedestrian journey look like from residential to street?
- Wires Underground.
- The photos of desired places are all more attractive than current ugly Needham St. and each desired place has utilities underground. Where is that plan?
- Set a limit of five stories for buildings from street level. While the condominium building on the corner of Oak Street and Needham Street is 7 stories, 2 of those stories are below street level and are thus not really visible. Your “page 40 from cities for people” makes abundantly clear how out of scale a building higher than 5 stories would be.
- People in the U.S. are used to using their cars. They are not going to suddenly stop using their cars to go to this development because “you” have asked them to. One beautiful day when its neither too hot nor too cold, I might walk but those days are few and far between! I’m sure that the development will look beautiful, but I’m’ still concerned with the traffic because I live 1.2 miles from this area. I think that it will be a miracle if the traffic isn’t increased at least 10x as much as it is now. Now it is terrible! You could have the best entertainment and restaurants in the world but it will be easier for me to go into Cambridge or Boston. I hope I’m proven wrong.
- Urgent – middle class senior housing.
- Don’t dwarf the historic buildings, houses on Chestnut & Linden St. by allowing the developments to be tall and make shadows in the neighborhood. Don’t allow three-story townhouses where the housing of the neighborhood is two story.
- Please explain “encourage deeper lots along Needham St. to be divided into smaller lots to increase intersection density and route options?”
- A key idea that is not mentioned: the historical setting with a context of a mill village and the river edge is not talked about. Why is the historic setting not included.

## Vision for Implementation Station

- If there is going to be additional significant housing, there should be a good-sized full service grocery store for new and existing apartment dwellers to help reduce traffic and to meet customer needs.
- We need senior housing.
- Efficient ways to create housing and maintain open space.
- Affordable housing – apartments and condominiums.