



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

April 6, 2020

Members Present:

Peter Doeringer, Chair
Sonia Parisca, Vice Chair
Kelley Brown
Barney Heath
Sudha Maheshwari
Jennifer Molinsky
Chris Steele
Kevin McCormick (not voting)
James Robertson (not voting)

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

Barney Heath
Director
Planning & Development

Gabriel Holbrow
Community Planner
Engagement Specialist
Planning & Development

Members

Peter Doeringer, Chair
Kelley Brown, Member
Sudha Maheshwari, Member
Jennifer Molinsky, Member
Sonia Parisca, Vice Chair
Chris Steele, Member
Barney Heath, *ex officio*
Kevin McCormick, Alternate
James Robertson, Alternate

Staff Present:

Devra Bailin, Director of Economic Development
Danielle Bailey, Grants Manager
Eamon Bencivengo, Housing Development Planner
Amanda Berman, Director of Housing and Community Development
Malcolm Lucas, Housing Planner
Gabriel Holbrow, Community Planner – Engagement Specialist, staff to the Board
Katy Hax Holmes, Chief Preservation Planner
Tiffany Leung, Senior Community Development Planner

Other Present:

Susan Albright, City Council President
Deborah Crossley, City Councilor
Dan Foley
Julia Malakie, City Councilor
Josephine McNeil
Hannah Scott
Pamela Wright, City Councilor

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

Chair Doeringer opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

1. Proposed Role for Planning & Development Board in New Landmarking Ordinance

President Albright described the process for revising the City's Landmarking Ordinance. A working group that was assembled to investigate the issue determined that the landmarking process needs a complete reorganization and reordering. The Historic Commission is now seeking input from groups like the Planning and Development Board to better understand the context for landmarking requests regarding aspects such as zoning, economic development, climate change, etc.

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The working group is looking at the language and process used in other communities as part of their process. Councilor Crossley noted that there will be an update on the status of the landmarking ordinance at the next Zoning & Planning Committee. Several questions that remain about the ordinance were discussed, including the process by which a landmarking decision could be overturned, whether the mayor will be given veto authority, and how this process can clarify the Board's role in landmarking.

Ms. Parisca inquired about the status of the already nominated properties. Director Heath said that some were not accepted by the Historical Commission. Two were listed on the National Register of Historic Properties, one was demolished by the property owner, and one, the Davis Hotel, has been designated a landmark. At this time there are three other properties where a report was recommended. Meanwhile, City Council had an item to delay any landmarking decisions, which passed. This means the three recommended will likely be considered under the new process.

2. Public Hearing: FY21 Annual Action Plan and FY21-25 Consolidated Plan

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Molinsky, the Board voted 6-0-1 (Director Heath abstaining) to open the public hearing at 7:06.

Ms. Berman and Ms. Leung delivered a presentation on the FY21-25 Draft Consolidated Plan and FY21 Annual Action Plan for the City of Newton and the WestMetro HOME Consortium. The five-year Consolidated Plan and the one-year Annual Action Plan cover the use of three federal funding programs: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG). The presentation outline included the plan's goals for the use of funding as well as projects and activities in support of each of the goals. Ms. Leung and Chair Doeringer noted that Board members joined committees with staff to review applications for two grant programs supported by funding under the Consolidated Plan. Chair Doeringer and Ms. Molinsky participated in the review of Human Services grant proposals. Mr. Steele and Ms. Maheshwari participated in the review of Emergency Solutions grant proposals.

Chair Doeringer expressed that the coming year would be an appropriate time for the Board to consider some broader policy questions, including (1) whether the annual priorities for serving various vulnerable groups should be augmented in some way, (2) what should be the balance between safety net programs and issues of longer-term employability or income improvement, and (3) to what extent should resources be targeted to those most in need.

Ms. Molinsky asked if architectural access funds could be used for housing authority or other non-profit-owned housing or if it must be for used for a public space. Ms. Leung noted that architectural access improvements for housing would take place through the housing rehabilitation program, while architectural access funds are intended for public spaces. Ms. Leung further noted that all the projects funded by the architectural access program go beyond the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and so would not happen without CDBG funding.

In response to a request from Mr. Steele for information on the use of funds for administrative costs, Ms. Bailey explained CDBG caps administrative costs at 20 percent, HOME caps it at 10 percent, and ESG caps it at 7.5 percent. Funds for administrative costs are used to fund the staff to run the programs, including fringe benefits, as well as office operations including printing, postage, advertising for legal notices, computers. Administrative costs can be used to fund something like a study, but there is not a lot of room as every year fringe benefits grow.

Mr. McCormick noted that the Consolidated Plan does not seem to target households with incomes less than 50 percent of area median income (AMI), even though supporting materials for the plan

make clear that these households are more cost-burdened, have fewer housing opportunities, are more over-crowded, and thus have the greatest needs in Newton. He expressed a hope that these households be given priority, at least in the future. He further noted that HOME funds are currently being used in other parts of the consortium but not in Newton, and expressed hope that a way can be found to use HOME funds in Newton, such as a tenant-based rental assistance (TBRA) program.

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Molinsky, the Board voted 6-0-1 (Director Heath abstaining) to close the meeting.

3. Vote on Recommendation to the Mayor regarding FY21 Annual Action Plan and FY21 Consolidated Plan

The Board discussed the FY21 Annual Action Plan and FY21 Consolidated Plan. Ms. Molinsky requested the Board have more time to discuss the plan and its goals next year. Ms. Parisca asked for more consideration for emergency funds for future disasters in the community.

4. Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Molinsky, the Board 6-0-1 (Director Heath abstaining) voted to approve the recommendation adopting the FY21 Annual Action Plan and FY21 Consolidated Plan as presented to the Mayor.

5. Meet Devra Bailin, Director of Economic Development

Ms. Bailin, the new Director of Economic Development for the city of Newton, introduced herself to the Board. Ms. Bailin outlined some of the current projects she is taking on and provided a high-level overview of some of the challenges small businesses are facing in the pandemic. She explained some of the actions the Economic Development team is taking to help small business owners. The Mayor has tasked the Development Department to come up with recovery plan by June, and Ms. Bailin shared that she welcomed comments or suggestions from the Board on the plan.

Ms. Molinsky asked whether bigger businesses would be considered in this plan, or just small businesses. Ms. Bailin explained that many facets of the economy were likely to be impacted by the pandemic including real estate, major retailers, and shopping malls in addition to small businesses, and that those would be considered in their process of creating the report.

6. Zoning Redesign Update: Article 3 Residence Districts

Mr. Holbrow asked if the Board had questions or comments from case studies at the previous ZAP meeting. Chair Doeringer asked if any areas in particular were being targeted for substantial change in the revised zoning ordinance. Mr. Lemel explained that Neighborhood General districts are an example of a change and would be a new designation added to the periphery of some village centers to provide a gentle transition.

Ms. Molinsky asked about legality of setting a maximum house size to curb overly large building construction. Mr. Lemel confirmed that the Planning Department is looking into other form-based codes to learn from how other communities have tackled this issue.

Mr. McCormick inquired about the overall goals of the Zoning Redesign and asked if it was possible to ensure more affordable units through the redesign process. Mr. Heath relayed that a key goal of the redesign is to expand housing diversity and increase housing supply, which in concert with other tools in the zoning code should create more affordability. Chair Doeringer inquired whether it would be appropriate for members of the Board to send their thoughts regarding Zoning Redesign to the Planning Department, or requests for additional case studies. Mr. Holbrow directed members of the Board to send in ideas and comments about the Zoning Redesign to Mr. Holbrow and Mr. Lemel.

7. Planning & Development Department Updates

Mr. Heath reported that the Riverside project would go before Council soon. The Dunstan East project will be back before the Zoning Board of Appeals on April 22 with a focus on transportation issues. The Riverdale project will go before the Zoning board of Appeals on April 6.

Mr. Heath shared that the Zoning Redesign process is ongoing, and Open Space and Recreation Plan was scheduled to appear before the ZAP committee on May 7.

8. Minutes

Upon a motion by Chair Doeringer, seconded by Ms. Molinsky, the Board unanimously approved the meeting minutes for March 2, 2020, with Mr. Holbrow to edit a comment by Ms. Molinsky

9. Adjournment

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Mr. Brown and unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:39 p.m.

Draft minutes submitted by Gabriel Holbrow, staff to the Board