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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

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PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

May 7, 2020

Members Present:

Peter Doeringer, Chair
Sonia Parisca, Vice Chair
Barney Heath
Jennifer Molinsky
Chris Steele
Kelley Brown
Kevin McCormick
James Robertson

Zoning and Planning Committee Members Present: Councilors Crossley (Chair), Danberg, Albright, Baker, Krintzman, Leary, Ryan, and Wright

Other Councilors Present Present: Councilors Kelley, Greenberg, Markiewicz, Malakie, Kalis, and Downs

City Staff:

Jennifer Steel, Senior Environmental Planner
Claire Rundelli, Assistant Environmental Planner,
Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development
Nicole Banks, Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture
Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer
Luis Perez Demorizi, Open Space Coordinator
Katy Hax Holmes, Senior Planner
Carol Stapleton, Rec Program Manager
Nathan Giacalone, Committee Clerk

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

1. Public Hearing on City Council docket item #178-20

Adoption of the Open Space and Recreation Plan update:

Zoning and Planning Committee Chair Crossley opened the meeting at 7:00 PM. Ms. Steel gave a presentation on the high-level goals and objectives of the 2020-2027 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). This is an update of the previous plan, formed through an analysis of needs, research, and a robust public engagement process. A few key goals outlined in this plan include making open space accessible to all, creating a body to implement this plan, creating greater connectivity to ensure safe access to parks and conservation areas, and protection of vulnerable conservation areas.

Ms. Steel explained the next steps in the adoption process. The plan is currently in the public comment period, which spans from April 30 to May 14. Once the comment period ends, staff will have time to incorporate comments and send a revised draft to the state, the Mayor, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council for preliminary review. The state Division of Conservation Services will then review and grant conditional approval for the plan, which will allow the city to be grant

eligible. The City Council will then vote on adoption, staff will incorporate edits and comments from the Division of Conservation Services into the final draft, and staff will send the final draft to the Division of Conservation Services for final approval.

Chair Crossley then invited questions from the Committee. Committee members inquired whether it was possible to extend the public comment period by a week. Ms. Steel shared that the deadline was important in order to get the plan in on time but extending the public comment by a week was possible. Councilor Baker relayed interest in having the plan come before the full Council before being sent to the state if that was possible. They also questioned whether the plan considers utilizing unused parking lots for future conversion to open space. Ms. Steel explained that the plan does not get into that level of specificity, but that does not preclude such development from happening.

Chair Crossley then opened the meeting to comments from the public. Kathleen Kouril Grieser, speaking on behalf of the Bullough's Pond Association, voiced support for the OSRP and agreement with the request to increase the period for public comment. Alan Nogee said the draft exhibits a clear commitment to stewardship, maintenance, and protection of land. He also supports greater dialogue between city agencies that manage public to avoid duplication. Jeff Zabel relayed that he thinks the most important step to ensure success in the plan is the implementation committee and agrees that the Council must pay attention to how this Committee is formed and run. Rena Getz also agreed with earlier requests to extend the period for accepting public comment. Harry Sanders said that formalizing a plan does not ensure efficient implementation and fears the public health crisis created by COVID-19 can lead to more unfunded mandates and thus more uncertainty. Carolyn Kraft shared concern that this plan might open a loophole that would allow open spaces to be developed.

Bob Jampol liked all the projects described in the OSRP but was concerned that there would not be enough funding for them all. Nicole Banks, the new Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture, said that she has worked to review the OSRP and has had many positive interactions and conversations with city departments regarding the OSRP. Joyce Leonardo asked whether Ms. Steel has studied the impact on personnel from transferring the maintenance responsibilities from Parks, Recreation and Culture to Conservation since Parks, Recreation and Culture uses more city employees and Conservation utilizes private contractors? Ms. Steel explained that the OSRP has one action stating that all stakeholders in open space management gather for conversations about best management practices going forward, but that the OSRP does not determine that course of action.

The Zoning & Planning Committee then voted 8-0 to close the public hearing. Councilor and Committee members questions, answers, and comments are as follows:

How do the priorities account for parks that do not currently have Friends groups to take care of them?

A: The Conservation Office has organized a group of volunteer stewards for individual conservation parcels. They serve a variety of functions such as monitoring and direct upkeep. There are also other programs and initiatives currently in place that Newton residents can use to get involved in open space management.

Would it be possible for the OSRP draft to go before the full Council for approval before it gets submitted to the state?

A: Yes, City Council adoption and the associated process is entirely up to the City; DCS does not require any such adoption. All that the state requires is a letter of support from the "Planning Board" (i.e. P&D).

A letter from the Mayor is required. A letter of support from the Council is recommended but not required.

Once the Implementation Committee is formed it can make recommendations on a variety of subjects. Does it need an official ordinance or is it done through the mayor's office?

A: The Climate Action Plan serves as a good model for structuring the Implementation Committee. Staff will better articulate that model within the OSRP.

The difference between the groups behind the OSRP and the Climate Action Plan is that the Citizens' Energy Commission worked with the city as an official group on the Climate Action Plan. How best should the Implementation Group for the OSRP be made official?

A: An official designation for the OSRP Implementation Group would be ideal. It is important to keep in mind that the language in the plan is intentionally broad as the state is not looking for the same level of specificity that the city would be. The most important step right now is to get a broad plan to the state for approval so that the city has more flexibility in how it deals with the plan.

When does the old OSRP expire? If the Zoning & Planning Committee votes to recommend the OSRP at its May 19 meeting, what happens when it moves to the full Council?

A: The current OSRP expires on May 31. The vote is first on whether P&D supports the OSRP so that a letter of support can accompany the submission to the state. If the Council supports the OSRP it can also submit a letter to the state, which is advised. Secondly, Council will vote on whether to adopt the OSRP as part of the Comprehensive Plan.

Provided it would not interfere with the work of the Planning Department on the OSRP, the Committee should hold the item so that further questions on the current draft can be answered.

The OSRP should not delve deeply into the details of the Implementation Team. The Implementation Team is a critical component that should be set up carefully and with input from many players. How much does Newton typically receive every year in open-space related grants?

A: The exact figure is not available now, but it is significant.

Is it possible for the Council to extend the applicability for the current plan to account for any gap?

A: No, this deadline is a state requirement. A request can be made of the state to change this deadline, but no guarantee can be given.

The Committee came to consensus to extend the public comment period through Monday, May 18, one day ahead of its next meeting.

The Committee voted to hold the item and reconvene on May 19.

2. Possible Vote on Recommendation to City Council on adoption of the Open Space and Recreation Plan update

The Planning and Development Board then continued discussion about the OSRP in a breakout room. Chair Doeringer opened the meeting for public comment. Kathleen Kouril Graser expressed support for the plan overall, but relayed that some believe that the public has not had time to take in the whole plan and would appreciate more time, and she is concerned that the potential loss of Parks and Recreation management of certain properties would have a negative effect.

Upon a motion by Chair Doeringer, seconded by Ms. Parisca and unanimously approved, the public meeting was then closed.

Members of the Board then discussed the OSRP with Ms. Steel. Ms. Parisca inquired whether Ms. Steel would be making edits to the presentation after hearing comments from tonight's meeting. Ms. Steel explained that she probably would not edit the presentation itself but would clarify language in the plan itself. She identified coordination between different stakeholder groups and the of creation of the implementation committee as two elements of the plan that members of the public and the joint committee had a lot of questions and comments about, so she plans to review those elements. She also plans to review the portions that relate to volunteer and Friends groups involvement to see if they need to be edited.

Mr. Steele relayed that his inclination was to hold on a vote to adopt until the Board can see a red-lined version of the draft, and voiced support for extending the public comment period. Mr. McCormick said he believed this is a good plan, but it makes sense to hold to see the revisions. Ms. Molinsky agreed that it would be good to see clarity around the role of the Parks department and encouraging the involvement of volunteer and Friends groups in the plan, and to provide more time for public comment. Mr. Robinson said he felt ready to write a letter of support before the end of the public comment period.

At this time Mr. Steele motioned to hold, seconded by Ms. Molinsky. The Board voted unanimously to hold.

3. Adjournment

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Parisca and unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:35 pm.