



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

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PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

May 19, 2020

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Jennifer Steel, Senior Environmental Planner
John Lojek, Inspectional Service Commissioner;
Holbrow, Community Engagement Specialist
Zachery LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning
Claire Rundelli, Assistant Environmental Planner
Jini Fairley, ADA Coordinator
Andrew Lee, Assistant City Solicitor
Luis Perez Demorizi, Open Space Coordinator
Katy Hax Holmes, Chief Preservation Officer
Nathan Giacalone, Committee Clerk

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

Other Councilors Present: Councilors Kelley, Markiewicz, Kelley, Bowman, Laredo, Greenberg, Downs, Gentile, Malakie, and Humphrey

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

1. Joint meeting with the Zoning and Planning Committee on City Council docket item #178-20: Adoption of the Open Space and Recreation Plan update

Chair Crossley opened the meeting at 7:00 pm. She explained that the Zoning and Planning Committee has been asked to submit a letter confirming they reviewed the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). She further recommended the adoption of the OSRP as an amendment to the City's 2007 Comprehensive Plan

Ms. Steel clarified that the state does not require a letter of approval from City Council in order to conduct its review of Newton's OSRP, but it does require letters of review from the Mayor, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and the Planning & Development Board. Ms. Steel further explained that once the state approves the plan, it is not involved in any way in the implementation of the OSRP.

Ms. Steel explained that the present draft includes stronger language linking open space to public health. Public comments received have ranged from an emphasis on improving maintenance and field upkeep, an expanded role for Friends' groups, and suggestions for additional projects. Ms. Steel said that all public comments have

been reviewed and will be acknowledged within the plan, but the implementation phase is where priorities will be set and implementation strategies formed.

Ms. Steel said that Newton has adopted many Open Space Plans in its history, but this is the first time there will be a team dedicated to implementation. The OSRP Implementation Team will draw from the model established in the Climate Action Plan Implementation Team, which is composed of city staff who create working groups with stakeholders from the community to undertake individual efforts.

Ms. Steel said that prioritization of individual actions will be determined through the strategic implementation process. She explained that under normal circumstances, looking ahead seven years is challenging and that the COVID-19 pandemic has added extra uncertainty to which the Implementation Team will have to adapt. Ms. Steel said that she has been studying the issue of coordination between the Conservation Commission and Parks, Recreation and Culture (PRC) which has been raised over the years and appears in past OSRPs. She claims that conversations between Conservation and the PRC are needed to ensure that the most efficient management structures and practices are being followed.

Committee member and Councilor questions, answers, and comments are as follows:

Q: When will the OSRP be submitted the state?

A: Conservation and PRC are going to meet on May 22nd and May 29th (if needed) to finish reviewing public comment and coordinate final edits to the current version of the OSRP. Once the OSRP maps are completed (with an estimated date on those for May 29th), the draft will be ready to be submitted to the state.

Q: What is the best way to design the Implementation Group?

A: Based on prior conversations in Committee, public comment, and input from the Mayor's Office, the best approach has been determined to be a staff-based team.

Q: As the P&D Board has discussed the OSRP, it has further questions on the role of neighborhood groups and more aggressive strategies to expand open space. What is the best way and time schedule and time frame for the P&D Board to get its comments on the OSRP to the drafting committee?

A: If Councilors or P&D Board members still have comments, they can email them as soon as possible to either Ms. Steel or Ms. Rundelli. The public comment period is closed as staff members need time to incorporate the changes. The P&D Board can share these comments with Ms. Rundelli as they move to the Zoom breakout room later in this meeting.

Q: With the current OSRP expiring at the end of May, is there any way to extend the existing plan to cover any gap in funding eligibility?

A: No, the current plan cannot be extended. However, the next grant deadline is not until July. Provided there is swift conditional approval from the state this will not impact Newton's grant eligibility.

Q: Are there any pending applications for private conservation grants?

A: No

Q: How does the OSRP address public/private partnerships?

A: It supports expansion of such partnerships.

C: The extent of invasive species present in Newton's open spaces, as well as stormwater management, are two worrying issues that should be addressed.

A: The Conservation Office and PRC are aware of this. There are efforts underway to address both. More education on invasive species will help support greater removal of them. Invasive species education is

not specifically addressed in the OSRP, but ecological health and trail maintenance are addressed, and so invasive species removal will be addressed.

The Committee divided item #178-20 into subsections: 1) Recommending the City Council send a letter to the state stating that it has reviewed the OSRP; 2) to consider adoption of the OSRP as amendment to the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, and 3) to discuss how to structure the implementation team.

The Zoning and Planning Committee voted 8-0 to approve #178-20(1) and 8-0 to hold items #178-20(2) and #178-20(3)

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

At 8:02pm, Chair Doeringer opened this portion of the public meeting in a Zoom breakout room. He discussed some of the changes that have been made in the OSRP, including a revision of a portion in Section 7 which refers to the division of management responsibilities between the Conservation Commission and the Parks and Recreation department. This change removes several site suggestions and the language regarding the management efficiency review will be edited.

Ms. Molinsky relayed that she had emailed back and forth with Ms. Steele regarding ways to better incorporate volunteers and Friends groups on the OSRP plan. Chair Doeringer brought up a question from last week raised by Ms. Parisca about potential avenues to expand or acquire new public space areas. Ms. Rundelli confirmed that the city is investigating ways to create more open space. Ms. Parisca inquired about the status of funding and public-private partnerships. Ms. Rundelli explained that there is enough funding to implement these plans, although COVID-19 has created uncertainty about some future funding sources. She also said that public-private partnerships are in use in some projects in the city, but they can be difficult to predict. Chair Doeringer recommended the city investigate incentives for such partnerships used in other cities. Mr. Brown asked how accountability and reporting would be handled. Ms. Rundelli explained that the implementation committee would likely be the body to handle this work, sharing data and metrics to City Council.

Chair Doeringer then read a draft letter confirming that the Board has read the OSRP plan and supports it.

Upon a motion by Ms. Parisca, seconded by Ms. Steele and unanimously approved, the Board voted 6-0 in favor to submit the letter of review and support for the OSRP to the state.

5. Adjournment

Upon a motion by Ms. Parisca, seconded by Ms. Molinsky and unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:54 p.m.