



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

Barney Heath  
Director  
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

September 3, 2020

**Members Present:**

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

**Staff Present:**

Zachery LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning  
Katy Hax Holmes, Chief Preservation Officer  
Cat Kemmett, Planning Associate

**Other Councilors Present:** Councilor Albright

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

**1. Landmark Report on 1251 Washington St (Cate Funeral Home)**

Chair Doeringer opened the meeting at 7:02 PM. Mr. Heath explained the landmarking ordinance has been updated since it was suspended earlier in the year, and one of the changes made was to clarify the role of the Planning and Development Board in the landmarking process. Chief Preservation Officer Katy Hax Holmes explained that the report discussing the landmark nomination for 1251 Washington Street will be presented to the Newton Historical Commission (NHC) at a meeting later in September, but that the official public hearing will take place in October.

This property, the Brezniak-Rodman Funeral Home in West Newton, was nominated by Councilor Malakie in January, and the NHC decided the nomination warranted further review and research. They used the new criteria for the newly adopted local landmarking ordinance to evaluate the property. The conclusion of the NHC was that this building did not meet the criteria for a local landmark under the new ordinance.

Ms. Holmes explained that the new ordinance gives the Board the opportunity to evaluate landmarks and consider how a landmarking designation for a particular building would serve the greater planning goals of that area. The thinking here is that the Board would be able to take into account how this property and its historical significance might be viewed holistically with other buildings in that area, rather than focusing strictly on its historical and architectural significant.

Chair Doeringer then opened it up for questions. Mr. Heath read aloud the portion of the ordinance that clarifies the Planning Board's role in the new ordinance.

Frank Stearns, acting as counsel for the owners of 1251 Washington Street, addressed the Board. The property owners have hired the firm Epsilon to evaluate whether this building fits the criteria to be a historically landmarked building, and their report concluded that it does not meet Newton's landmark standards. Mr. Stearns explained that it does not have the requisite historical or architectural significance as outlined in Newton's ordinance.

Ms. Molinsky asked for clarity on one of the criteria measures – whether the building “stands alone.” Ms. Holmes explained that this tries to strike a balance between outstanding examples of architecture, but also an equal weight on its role in the wider context of the area. Councilor Albright, who served as a member of the group who created the new ordinance, added that the role of the Planning Board was strengthened in part because the Board is well situated to evaluate the historic value of structures in the bigger context of the goals of the city and the future plans for development for the neighborhoods in which each potential historical structure is located. Chair Doeringer referenced the goals outlined in the Washington Street vision plan, one of which is an interest in preserving iconic buildings. He asked other members of the board if they had comments about this building.

Mr. Steele said that in the instance of this particular building, the judgment of the NHC seemed sound. He further added that it would be good to have on the record a statement that the Planning Board does plan to weigh in on future landmark deliberations. Ms. Parisca asked for clarification on what would be preserved through this process- for instance, would the building be essentially frozen in time and required to be maintained exactly as-is, or could landmarked buildings have a change in use? Ms. Holmes explained that the Historical Commission would be able to weigh in on whether the building could be demolished. In order to make alterations to the exterior or an addition to the structure, any landmarked building would need to go before the Historical Commission for review.

Chair Doeringer asked how facades are treated in the historic designation process. Ms. Holmes explained that partial demolitions approvals can be granted by the NHC to change interiors of buildings while maintaining buildings facades. Since the facades are public facing, they are particularly important since the outside is what the vast majority of people will see.

The Board discussed the goals set by the city to move towards greater density and more mixed-use development forms near transit and how this structure fit into those goals. There was consensus from many members of the Board that this building is unique and visually interesting in the streetscape, and many would regret seeing the loss of the façade of the building. But in weighing both the goals of the city and the interest in landmarking only buildings that fit the criteria on the landmarking ordinance, Board members Molinsky, Brown, and Steel voiced agreement with the determination of the NHC.

Ms. Parisca added that even without the landmark designation, it was possible that the building could be altered in the future in such a way that the unique façade was preserved. Ms. Holmes concurred, and said that the NHC would certainly support any future developer interested in making alterations while maintaining the historic character of the structure.

## **2. Workshop on Zoning Redesign: Article 3 Residence Districts**

Mr. Heath said that this time would be used to get a sense from Board member about where they stand on Article 3 and hear their thoughts and questions about Residential Zoning thus far. Chair Doeringer expressed support for part of the Zoning Redesign draft that allows two-units across the city by-right. Ms. Parisca said she was in favor of multi-family housing options being expanded but thought this added density should be focused near public transit options. Ms. Molinsky voiced support for adding a multifamily option across as much of the city as possible, as long as the standards ensured that any new or altered buildings fit into the established neighborhood context.

Mr. McCormick agreed with that assessment, and that allowing multi-family housing by right should be allowed widely. He also said that this could be a way to make units smaller and more affordable- while also acknowledging that zoning changes like this alone are unlikely to have the kind of impact that inclusionary zoning and subsidized units can make in terms of affordability. Mr. Steel also underscored the importance of looking at housing affordability solutions wherever possible in zoning and in other city policies.

Ms. Maheshwari said that rolling out major changes in phases, rather than all at once, might be a more measured way to create change and ensure these changes create the impact the city wants. Mr. LeMel added that the impacts of zoning are inherently incremental, and that zoning generally has a very long time horizon, with change happening gradually. Mr. Brown said that the half mile walkshed seemed sensible, but the housing crisis is so severe that probably makes sense to allow more housing options citywide and not just limit it to near transit. However, making widespread changes means it's crucial to get the setbacks and lot coverage requirements right.

Ms. Parisca asked for clarification on parking requirements in residential districts under this draft. Mr. LeMel explained that as proposed, the draft recommends removing the requirement for parking for 1-2 family homes. Given the market in Newton it is likely most new homes would still have parking but including a spot would not be required. For buildings over 3 units and above, there would be a requirement of one parking spot per unit, and a maximum of two parking spots per unit.

Ms. Parisca asked what the dominant housing type is in Newton. Mr. LeMel confirmed that single-family homes make up 55% of Newton's housing stock, 2-3 family structures make up about 23%. Mr. Brown asked for clarification on how some of the dimensional standards were set, and whether they could ensure overly large single-family homes like ones over 10,000 square feet, would not be built under this draft. Mr. LeMel explained that the dimensional standards were set to strike a balance between allowing construction or renovation that fits in comfortably with the established neighborhood context. However, under this plan it would not be allowed to build to the uppermost extreme limits of size that exist now in Newton.

The Board then discussed some of the ways in which making these proposed zoning changes would impact the feel of neighborhoods and the importance of ensuring adequate setback requirements. Ms. Parisca said that there are several uses that should be allowed by right that are not allowed in the current zoning. She also added that many of the changes proposed in this plan are politically divisive, but ultimately in order to respond to climate change and housing pressures, Newton should make moves towards change to address those issues. Chair Doeringer agreed that this plan would create change, and that the uncertainty of change can be very alarming for people. This is why looking hard at the fine details of the plan is important, and understanding what aspects scare people, so the Board and

ZAP can make sure that those concerns are addressed. He also added that zoning alone cannot address or fix all planning problems the city is facing, so it was important to keep in mind where zoning can help and where other policy changes might be more appropriate.

### **3. Planning Department Updates**

Mr. Heath provided some updates about Planning Department. He relayed that they are in the process of hiring a new community engagement specialist who will be starting on the first week of October. He also informed the Board that the Planning Department office spaces are going through some reconfiguration in city hall and will be located on the second floor soon.

### **4. Future Zoning Redesign Workshops**

Mr. Heath discussed current engagement efforts related to the Zoning Redesign process. He brought up the idea of having members of the Planning and Development board assist in hosting some engagement meetings with the public to foster more dialogue in addition to public meetings and the biweekly office hours hosted by the Planning Department. Chair Doeringer asked for clarification on how the office hours work and how many speakers typically participate. Ms. Kemmett explained that the current format for the Zoom meetings has participants sign up in advance to speak or ask questions of the Planning Department for 15-minute slots, with an average of 6 speakers per session. However, there are often as many as 40 participants who listen in or just ask shorter questions with a more free-form dialogue.

Chair Doeringer said that this was a good idea and it would be worth brainstorming to find a format that would work, and particularly in finding ways to foster a more open dialogue. Ms. Parisca voiced support for inviting in guest speakers that can explain the goals and methods in the plan well to help debunk fears or misconceptions people might have about the plan.

### **5. Minutes**

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Parisca, the meeting minutes from April 6, May 4, May 7, May 19, and June 1 were unanimously approved.

### **6. Upcoming Meetings**

The next ZAP meeting will be on Monday, September 14 at 7:00 p.m and will focus on a review of Article 3- Residential Districts. The next meeting of the Planning and Development Board will be on Monday, September 21 at 7:00 p.m.

### **7. Adjournment**

Upon a motion by Chair Doeringer, seconded by Mr. Steele and unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:19 pm.