

**West Newton Armory JAPG**  
**Notes from November 10, 2020 Meeting**  
**Zoom Meeting**  
**7:00 – 9:15 p.m.**  
**FINAL**

**In attendance:**

JAPG: Kelley Brown, Jonathan Katz, Anita Lichtblau, Ted Hess-Mahan, Susan Parsons, Mitchell Fischman, Larry Bauer, David Koven, and Barry Abramson.

Newton Planning Department: Amanda Berman, Director of Housing and Community Development, Eamon Bencivengo, Housing Development Planner, Barney Heath, Director of Planning.

Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer

Members of the Public & Councilors Danberg, Malakie, and Wright.

**1. Review of 10/28/20 Meeting Summary:**

- Barry noted on page 3 of minutes that the efficient use of City funds should be added to his comments. Also noted that in the table that Jonathan had created he (Barry) is indifferent as to saving the head house. He also indicated that having the project proceed quickly was not necessarily a priority for him.
- **Moved to Approve: Mitchell. Second: Susan. Approved**

**2. Appointment of Rotating Secretary**

- David volunteered.

**3. Affirmative Investments Updated Analysis and Narrative**

- Barney noted some revisions to the AI draft, based on JAPG comments, and the revisions were summarized on page 1 of the redraft.
- There was much discussion, primarily exchanges between Barry and Jonathan, regarding the use of a 20% hard cost contingency vs. arguably high direct construction costs, Jonathan indicating that the 20% contingency was standard at this schematic stage and Barry saying he thought AI's new construction cost estimates may already include such cushioning, especially given Barney's noting that their estimates were based on the actual cost of comparable projects. AI should be asked to clarify. Barry also question the \$56,000 per parking space figure as overly generous for what, given change of grade, could be naturally ventilated at grade structured parking.
- Three of four AI scenarios appear feasible, the exception being preservation of the entire existing structure.
- Jonathan questioned whether at \$600,000 per unit a project could be funded, and thought that budget would require too much City money. Jonathan noted that the JAPG had heard that DHCD would go above \$550,000 per unit and Kelly indicated that the state might be more flexible (vs. \$500,000 per unit cap) for family housing in the suburbs. A revised set of AI budgets stopped short of \$600,000/unit TDC. Barry noted that the relatively small development cost differential (total and per unit) estimated by AI

between Scenario 3 (family development with retention of headhouse) and 4 (total demo with all new construction), for a comparable number of units and building area, supports acquisition and redevelopment of the Armory likely being financially advantageous versus new development at an alternate comparably sized site, as the latter would also entail a substantial additional cost for site acquisition (or opportunity cost if a City-owned site).

- Some discussion regarding being clear as to number of stories in each scenario. AI should label each before the Reuse Committee hearing (12/16/20). Kelly was not in favor of limiting the number of stories, but Anita agreed with the language in Ted's drafted Recommendations regarding height. Mitchell also agreed, saying that the height issue would be considered as part of a special permit hearing vote. Ted noted that height and open space would have to be balanced, but that preserving the head house would constrain site-planning.
- Jonathan and Larry both felt the Environmental line item in AI's budgets was too low, especially in light of a HazMat report in the Appendix indicating \$47,500 for abatement of materials in the existing building, which would be separate from any soils cleanup costs.
- Barry asked that AI indicate that budget figures were in today's dollars and not inflated to reflect future pricing. It was agreed that this was a reasonable approach. He also suggested that AI show efficiency ratios for net SF vs. gross SF for new construction and preservation scenarios.

#### 4. Final Recommendation

- *NB: During the meeting Eamon edited the draft in real time to reflect comments. Notes in these minutes may not be complete, but revised draft should reflect JAPG consensus.*
- Jonathan wanted to make sure that there was language about the adequacy of parking. Kelly recommended an MAPC study and felt that <1.0 spaces per unit could be acceptable, as long as the neighborhood would not be burdened by added parking demands.
- Ted discussed the matrix that Jonathan had distributed after the 10/28/2020 meeting, indicating member's preferences/priorities on various issues. He felt that the range of opinions would be a useful and appropriate indication to be passed along to the City Council, but that the bottom line is that we do have a consensus that the City should acquire the property for 100% affordable housing, versus a municipal use or simply choosing not to acquire the site from DCAMM.
- Ted also talked about how the Washington Street Vision Plan also reflected a range of ideas and priorities, and Anita concurred.
- There was discussion generated by Susan and Kelly about taking the first two paragraphs of the Recommendations and, with some rephrasing, adding those to the Executive Summary.
- In response to a proposed edit by David, Ted noted that the legislation requires permanent affordability, so that the leverage of a ground lease with accruing ground rent would not be needed.
- Kelly suggested that we qualify the AI report as showing feasibility but not as preferring any scenario.
- Ted said that if this becomes a 40B, the ZBA and not the council will shape the unit mix (e.g., number of units by #BR).

- Barry asked to add financial feasibility to the “bullets’ on page 2.
- Jonathan wanted a mention of the development here being considered in the context of Dunstan East and the affordability mix there.
- The group agreed to not characterize the existing structure as “iconic”, but just historic.
- As in the previous discussion on the AI report, there was more exchange about the 20% hard cost contingency, and Ted suggested that the City should ensure that the contingency be adequate without dictating specific percentage in advance. Larry suggested that AI use 20% in its budgets. Barney felt that AI has suggested the budgets as it sees them. Ted and Barry thought the Reuse Committee should ask AI about this.
- Mitchell questioned why we would open the door with language about off-site parking. Larry suggested we simply indicate that there must be adequate off-street parking.
- Ted indicated that he felt that DCAMM might be inclined to work with City on another use if City acquired site and affordable housing was not developed, but this would come at a cost.

**Moved to Approve: Larry. Second: Jonathan. Approved unanimously.**

5. **Final Report:** Approved unanimously pending inclusion of the Final Recommendation into the Final Report, along with the addition of Kelley’s edits/suggestions where appropriate.
6. **Wrap Up:** Members reflected positively on their experiences on the JAPG and complimented staff on their fine work. Members also expressed appreciation for Ted and Susan’s work at writing the recommendations and other tasks as Chair and Vice Chair.

**Adjourned 9:15 PM**