



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

1000 Commonwealth Ave.
Newton, MA 02459
T 617-796-1120
F 617-796-1142

www.newtonma.gov

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

September 21, 2020

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Zachery LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning
Cat Kemmett, Planning Associate

Other Councilors Present: Councilor Wright and Malakie

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

1. Minutes: Approve meeting minutes from June 1, July 6, and September 3, 2020

Chair Doeringer opened the meeting at 7:03 pm. Upon a motion by Mr. Brown and seconded by Ms. Molinsky the minutes for the meetings on June 1, July 6, and September 3 were approved with 6 in favor and Mr. Heath abstaining.

2. Recommendation on Landmark Designation for 1251 Washington Street

Chair Doeringer then opened a discussion regarding the report he had prepared for the discussion at the previous meeting regarding 1251 Washington Street. Ms. Molinsky said that the report captures the Board's sentiments well. Mr. McCormick recommended adding wording encouraging not just future developers of the property but also the current owners to try to preserve the building's façade if possible. Mr. Brown noted that it might prove difficult to combine this structure with others in a larger development in a way that can respect its façade and unique qualities. He said that he is of the view that though it would be nice to preserve, since it does not rise to the level of a local landmark, there should be nothing that bars developers from pursuing a plan even if it might impact the façade in the future.

Mr. Brown then asked for clarification on the demolition delay for the structure. Mr. Heath confirmed that the demolition delay for this building expires in November. Ms. Parisca asked if there was a way that the city could incentivize preservation through some other means, since it did not meet the standards for a local landmark. Mr. Heath confirmed that in the Washington Street Vision plan, there are recommendations for some bonuses in terms of density or building height in some

village centers if historic features are preserved, but it is only a recommendation at this point. Chair Doeringer said that based off of the Board's discussion, he would make a slight alteration to the report to soften some of the wording regarding 1251 Washington street being a strong candidate for preservation.

Upon a motion by Ms. Molinsky, seconded by Ms. Maheshwari, the report was adopted with Chair Doeringer's minor edits with 6 voting in favor and Mr. Heath abstaining.

3. Zoning Redesign Update

Mr. Heath provided an update on the ongoing Zoning Redesign project. The Planning Department is currently in the process of discussing several topics outlined in Article 3 with the Zoning and Planning Committee with a goal of getting closer to agreement on several key aspects before moving onto the next section of the ordinance.

He also discussed ongoing community engagement with the public regarding Zoning Redesign, which has largely consisted of biweekly Office Hours throughout the summer. Though moving over to virtual format on Zoom has proven challenging, it has had the benefit of making meetings more accessible to people who can't come in person. Mr. Heath explained that the department is looking into switching thing up in autumn and trying out a new engagement format. He explained that this might take the form of a large initial meeting that then splits into breakout rooms with facilitators in order to foster a more free-form freeform dialogue.

Mr. Heath provided an update on what was discussed at the previous ZAP meeting, which largely focused on reviewing standards and dimensional requirements in Article 3. Mr. Heath asked if the Board had questions or felt comfortable moving on to the next topic according to the planned timeline for ZAP.

Chair Doeringer asked for clarification on which standards staff wants feedback on. Mr. LeMel said that it would be helpful to hear the Board's thoughts on lot coverage, setbacks, building types, and any other material discussed in the latest ZAP memo.

Chair Doeringer stated that this plan will increase setbacks for SR2 and SR3 lots. Looking at the big picture, he wondered whether this might be helpful for those who fear that zoning changes will bring neighbors in too close to their property. Mr. LeMel shared some data from latest memo that breaks down real world setback numbers compared the current rules and emphasized the need to strike a balance between the two.

Mr. Brown relayed that he was less worried about what will be politically feasible, since the City Council will be heavily invested in that question, and that this Board should focus on making the best plan possible. He said that he believes the current districts and standards are largely irrelevant since very few people are familiar with the current ordinance. The focus should instead be on how to foster more of the kind of development that we want through careful assessment. He then asked why setbacks are still so large.

Mr. LeMel said that the Planning Department has received a lot of feedback that new residential development has encroached too far into side setbacks, so they are trying to thread the needle to move from more restrictive near transit to less restrictive, while also respecting those with that concern.

Ms. Molinsky said that what works in one neighborhood might not work in another, and we can't create an infinite number of districts. Mr. LeMel explained that a house in the R2 district that currently has a 7.5 foot setback will be given all of the rights of a legally nonconforming building, but new construction would need to comply with the 12.5 foot setback, so hopefully this should help preserve some buildings constructed under the 7.5 foot setback.

Mr. Brown asked about the definition of lot coverage and how driveways and other impervious surfaces would be counted in that. Mr. LeMel said that ZAP and staff have not yet come to a definitive conclusion on this. Mr. McCormick asked if you include driveways in lot coverage, does that force someone close to the edge to have a driveway close to street? Mr. LeMel responded that using pervious pavers means that it won't count toward the total footprint, but that a ribbon driveway could also be used.

Ms. Molinsky said that the website is looking better, but it is still hard to find definitions and know where which document lives on the site. She also brought up the possibility of using interactive models which might be helpful to visualize and better understand the potential impact of zoning changes. Mr. Heath agreed and said that because zoning is very complicated, the Planning Department is very interested into looking at ways to make these changes engaging and understandable to the public. Mr. LeMel added that walking tours could be a great way to move people through neighborhoods and explain the analysis of the built environment. Though facilitating these has an added layer of difficulty with the public health crisis but it might be possible to facilitate digitally or in such a way that people do it on their own. Ms. Parisca suggested looking at the MIT Media Lab, which has an algorithmic zoning application where you can play with zoning variables to see the impact.

M. Parisca then asked how the permitting process will be streamlined. Mr. Heath responded that these standards will be determined later. Mr. LeMel added that some changes in the previous draft to this one cut down some opportunities for Special Permits which should hopefully streamline the process somewhat.

Mr. McCormick relayed that explaining why we are making these changes is important. Decreasing teardowns is very important to many and if we can convince people the plan will do that, it will be a selling point.

Mr. Heath said that there are still outstanding questions about the Garage Ordinance, but that will be discussed at the next ZAP meeting. The October 1 ZAP meeting will begin with a public hearing on deferral of the Garage Ordinance and later in the meeting ZAP will discuss how garages will be handled moving forward under the new zoning proposal.

Ms. Parisca said that under COVID-19, outdoor and indoor spaces are being used in different ways. We should be thinking about the long-term impacts of people working and teaching from home, office spaces shrinking, and how that might impact our thinking as we evaluate zoning changes. Mr. Brown added some of these changes are outside the scope of zoning but do still fall under the purview of planning and the Board. Ms. Molinsky expressed an interest in the Board considering the role of accessibility and adding in better ways to age in place and facilitate single floor living. Chair Doeringer said that there seems like there is an interest in pursuing planning challenges other than just zoning. Mr. Steele concurred, and said there is a need to discuss the development of subsidized affordable housing, and that that will help complement proposed changes in the zoning redesign process.

Chair Doeringer requested a time to discuss the Board's role in reviewing CDBG funds. Mr. Heath said that can be discussed at the October Board meeting.

4. Officer Nominations/Elections

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Mr. Kelley, Mr. Doeringer was nominated as Board Chair with 5 voting in favor and Mr. Doeringer and Mr. Heath abstaining.

Upon a motion by Ms. Molinsky, seconded by Mr. Steele, Ms. Parisca was nominated as Board Co-Chair with 5 voting in favor and Ms. Parisca and Mr. Heath abstaining.

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Maheshwari, the slate for the upcoming year was accepted 6 voting in favor and Mr. Heath abstaining.

5. Upcoming Meetings

Mr. Heath highlighted some upcoming meetings.

- Thursday, October 1 at 7:00 p.m. ZAP—Review of Article 3 (Required)
- Monday, October 5 at 7:00 p.m. October Planning Board Meeting (Required)
- Tuesday, October 6 at 7:00 p.m. Joint Public Hearing with Land Use Committee (Required) –
- Thursday, October 15 at 7:00 p.m. ZAP—Review of Article 3 (Optional)
- Monday, October 26 at 7:00 p.m. ZAP—Review of Article 3 (Optional)

6. Adjournment

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Molinsky and unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:06 pm.