

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

November 2, 2020



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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Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Amanda Berman, Director of Housing & Community Development
Tiffany Leung, Senior Community Development Planner
Cat Kemmett, Planning Associate

Others Present: Councilor Malakie

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

1. Public Hearing on City Council docket item #30-20(2), Ordinance amendment to repeal Zoning Ordinance 3.4.4 Garages

Chair Doeringer opened the meeting at 7:00 P.M. At 7:01 P.M., Mr. Steele motioned to open the public meeting, seconded by Ms. Molinsky.

Mr. Heath explained that the Zoning and Planning Committee has voted to take up the Garage Ordinance as a separate item from the rest of the Zoning Redesign process. This docket item would serve to defer the Garage Ordinance until April, at which time staff will be able to present the Board with a revised Garage Ordinance. The previous deferral of the Garage ordinance was to July 1 of 2020, but the vote taken at that time did not have the proper majority necessary. This docket item would serve to correct the structural defect in that vote.

Councilor Malakie spoke in favor of pursuing a revised version of the Garage Ordinance separate from Zoning Redesign. She pointed out that a number of large garages out of scale with neighborhoods are being built while the ordinance is deferred.

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Molinsky and unanimously approved, the public hearing was closed at 7:08 PM.

Ms. Molinsky asked members of staff whether addressing the Garage Ordinance separately from Zoning Redesign would require a duplication of effort down the road. Mr. Heath responded that it is possible that certain elements of the Garage Ordinance will need to be revisited later on in Zoning Redesign, but the city is confident that putting forth a separate Garage Ordinance can help address problems with garages being built in the meantime. Chair Doeringer pointed out that the proposed version of the Garage Ordinance is pared down to exclude some of the more complicated aspects of the Zoning Redesign.

Mr. McCormick said that he is not in favor of addressing the Garage Ordinance as a standalone item due to the substantial amount of staff time required to create and revise a

new ordinance by April, which diverts time and focus from the bigger Zoning Redesign effort. Chair Doeringer asked staff if there was a timeline for when the Garage Ordinance Draft might be available. Ms. Kemmett explained that because it seems likely that the City Council will want to take this up as a separate item, staff have already begun the revision process and expect to have a full draft available publicly by the end of the year.

Chair Doeringer said that members of the Board could decide to vote in favor of taking up the item standalone while also sharing their frustration at the amount of time resolving the Garage Ordinance separately will likely require.

At 7:31 Chair Doeringer motioned to vote in favor of the recommendation to extend the deferral of the ordinance to April 2021, which was seconded by Ms. Maheshwari. The Board voted 5-1-1 in favor, with Mr. Heath abstaining and Mr. McCormick voting against. The Board's recommendation was then sent to the City Council.

2. Discussion of CDBG Human Service Program Priorities and RFP Review Process

Chair Doeringer then introduced the next item and explained that he had prepared some questions about the Human Service Program review process and priorities. The Planning & Development Department had also shared a memo prior to the meeting addressing some of those questions.

Chair Doeringer shared a presentation that illustrated some of his questions and thoughts on the Human Service program. He explained that though staff had provided a lot of information about the beneficiaries of these programs, it was less clear how the funds were allocated and how those decisions were made and how funds are distributed among different types of beneficiaries.

He said that by focusing much of this funding on safety net projects, there is less funding going towards programs that are more clear pathways out of poverty, which are more expensive. He posed questions about whether the categories we have now for this program should be shifted a bit, whether there should be more funding put toward targeted age groups for each priority, and also given the limited funding available whether it made sense to try to incorporate programs that are more focused on creating pathways out of poverty. He also asked whether the reduction of racial and ethnic disparities should be included as an explicit goal in the Human Services program and reflected in the allocation of funds.

Chair Doeringer mentioned that additional data will probably be needed in order to set priorities for defining these assessment measures. He also asked if there is a better way for the Board to understand the perspectives of service providers and how Planning staff assess these programs outside of reviewing the details of the RFPs. In the past, service providers have come to Board meetings to discuss their programs, and it might make sense to bring back some kind of system to get more feedback from providers and from Planning staff.

Chair Doeringer then opened up the topic for wider discussion. Ms. Molinsky questions how systematically the push and pull between safety net and other programs is evaluated and wondered whether there are other ways in which the Board can be helpful in that process. Mr. Steele said that most of these programs are doing good work, and we want to keep the door open for other opportunities. However, we don't want to assume there are other programs we are missing out there if we don't know they exist.

Ms. Maheshwari added that this is not a big pot of money available to these programs, and by splitting it up even more or requiring even more categories and divisions, it can make it more complicated and difficult for some of these organizations to get access to the funding. Mr. Brown said that seeing the income distribution and racial composition of beneficiaries is important here. We want to make sure to continue that reporting and make sure we are checking in over time and seeing if the breakdown makes sense based on the population and needs of the city. It might not be the best use of our time to get too granular about relatively small amounts of money.

Chair Doeringer said that maybe allocation of funds should be more balanced among these groups, and that it could be possible that some beneficiaries might be getting a very small share of the funds. The same service providers come up every year. Should we ask those that serve multiple age groups to focus more on particular age groups? Are we tracking emerging needs as well as we should? He also added that it is unclear what is happening with a lot of programs prior to COVID-19. What about after school programs and summer camps that were approved for funding but had to shut down?

Mr. Heath responded that the Planning Department does regular reporting and checks in with service providers. The vast majority do a good job of carrying out their mission and fill needs in the community

Ms. Berman added that staff does a deep dive at least every 3 years into programming of subrecipients which does help with accountability. It is time consuming and complex but should allay some fears that the money is not being used in the way it was intended. If we took away money from some of these programs, the community would see and feel that. Even small amounts of funding are critical to the bottom line for many programs, and these support systems are especially critical for low to moderate income residents. She said that it is good to think about flexibility but adding in further categorization and monitoring requirements could prove challenging.

Ms. Leung said that staff always work to ensure equal opportunity. She provided an example of a program that had been funded in the past but was denied funding in the latest round because it wasn't working, and the results weren't there. She confirmed that there are a few programs, including childcare scholarships for summer camps, that were impacted by closures or shifts in programming due to COVID-19. They were able to use some funds for summer camps and childcare, but in some instances were able to transition to scholarships for remote after-school care. These programs were a bit different, but still in the spirit of the original plan.

Several members of the board expressed interest in having greater involvement in evaluating these programs and better understanding the process of allocation and distribution of funds. Ms. Berman suggested it might make sense next year to devote more time to the CAPER plan, which includes a lot of this information. Since the department annually evaluates a lot of this data, it might just need to be presented more fully and in depth to the Board. She also agreed that it was a good idea to have Board members participate in RFPs to really understand that process.

3. Zoning Redesign Update/Community Engagement Strategy for Zoning Redesign

Mr. Heath then introduced Ms. Pilipovic-Wengler and the next item. Ms. Pilipovic-Wengler gave a presentation about two upcoming outreach events the Zoning Redesign team will be holding to connect with community members, provide information about the current status of Zoning Redesign, and solicit input about methods of engagement from the public. She also asked Board members if they were interested in participating either on the day of these events as co-facilitators with city staff, or by reviewing outreach materials in the future.

Ms. Maheshwari said that there is a need for events that explain what zoning is and a readily available bibliography of past documents, educational materials, and case studies. Ms. Molinsky relayed that she has been concerned about the hard job of educating people about zoning. There are a lot of materials out there so linking to what is happening in other cities could be powerful. She said she would be happy to review materials. Mr. Brown said he would be happy to facilitate a breakout room for the event. He also recommends updating the website and that it is important to be transparent about how the redesign process has evolved and changed over time, and that some people have a large body of knowledge about the history of zoning in Newton but others know very little.

Chair Doeringer agreed that differing levels of understanding can be challenging and said that it might be good to have some 101-level engagement first. He asked what the size and number of participants for these events would be. Ms. Pilipovic-Wengler said that the optimal size would be 6-8 people per group, but that depending on the number of people it may end up being more than that. She agreed that it is important to keep much of the information at the introductory level for now and get feedback for how to proceed in 2021.

Ms. Molinsky also added that other options for participation should be available. Ms. Pilipovic-Wengler explained that the department plans to put a video recording of the presentation from these events on the website, along with a survey and other materials for those not able to attend these events.

4. Minutes: Approve meeting minutes

Upon a motion by Ms. Molinsky, seconded by Ms. Maheshwari, the meeting minutes from September 3 and October 5 were unanimously approved.

5. Adjournment

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele and seconded by Ms. Molinsky, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:03 pm.