



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD JOINT MEETING WITH LAND USE COMMITTEE MINUTES

February 9, 2021

Members Present:

Peter Doeringer, Chair
Jennifer Molinsky
Kevin McCormick
Kelley Brown
Barney Heath

Land Use Committee Members Present: Councilors Lipof (Chair), Greenberg, Kelley, Markiewicz, Downs, Bowman, and Laredo

Also Present: Councilors Ryan and Wright

Staff Present:

Chief Planner Neil Cronin, Senior Planner Katie Whewell, Senior Planner Michael Gleba

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

1. Continuation of Public Hearing to rezone two parcels from BU-2 to MU-4 at 1149-1151 Walnut Street

The Planning and Development Board joined the Land Use Committee for discussion on items #319-20 and #320-20. Attorney Alan Schlesinger represented the petitioner Newton Walnut LLC. Atty. Schlesinger presented details of the request to rezone from 13,200 square feet from BU-2 to MU-4. The project site is in the BU2 district between the BU1 and MU district on Walnut Street. Atty. Schlesinger noted that the center of Newton Highlands is all within the BU1 district. He reviewed details of the Planning Memo dated 01-05-21 which summarized portions of the 2007 Comprehensive plan indicating that mixed use centers can contribute to vibrant village centers, encouraged development of housing above retail, and indicated that increase in intensity could increase service and use for the public transit. The City Council adopted the MU4 district in 2012 to encourage growth in village centers, near transit and to provide support for village centers. The Newton Leads 2040 Housing Plan emphasizes the role of villages in providing jobs, services, housing, and transit hubs. Atty. Schlesinger showed comparisons between the BU2 and MU4 districts. He noted that the districts are similar but MU4 allows additional density.

Atty. Schlesinger provided contextual photos of the surrounding area in Newton Highlands. He noted that many buildings that contribute to the unique character and aesthetic of Newton Highlands that lie within the BU1 district are legally nonconforming. They are desirable and work well within the existing context, but many are taller than would be allowed by right, would not meet the side yard setbacks, or do not have enough parking, and would require a special permit under the current ordinance rules. In his opinion, the BU1 zoning in this area is not an accurate reflection of existing conditions, and the BU1 designation does not help foster the kind of mixed use and vibrant community form that the city hopes to see in village centers.

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

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

www.newtonma.gov

Mr. Gleba gave a presentation explaining some of the differences between elements of the BU2 and MU4 districts, including height, setbacks, and stories allowed by right or by special permit.

Members of the committee discussed the threshold required for a vote of this nature now that the 2/3 majority vote now only applies under certain circumstances.

Nathaniel Lichtin of the Newton Highlands Area Council voiced support for the rezoning of this site. He believes MU4 is a more appropriate designation for this area, which is adjacent to an MBTA stop. It is a good candidate for moderate density, so allowing for more density is appropriate here. Through the special permit criteria, any potential negative impacts in terms of height or traffic can be mitigated.

Kathy Pillsbury voiced support for rezoning this parcel, especially considering its proximity to the MBTA stop.

David Rockwell said that this rezoning is appropriate and would add needed housing to the area. He noted that the units proposed are small and he would like to see larger ones to support families.

Peter Barrer voiced support for this rezoning and hopes that the petitioner will consider a Passive House design.

Dennis Rieske also voiced support for this project.

Councilors Bowman, Downs, and Ryan stated support for this project.

The Committee voted 7-0 in favor of holding this item.

2. Adjournment

The meeting was concluded at 9:30 p.m.