

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

January 3, 2022



Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

Barney Heath
Director
Planning & Development

Cat Kemmett, Planning
Associate

Members

Peter Doeringer, Chair
Kelley Brown, Member
Sudha Maheshwari, Member
Jennifer Molinsky, Member
Chris Steele, Member
Kevin McCormick, Member
Barney Heath, Planning
Director *ex officio*
Lee Breckenridge, Alternate

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Members Present:

Peter Doeringer, Chair
Kelley Brown, Vice-Chair
Jennifer Molinsky, Member
Sudha Maheshwari, Member
Chris Steele, Member
Kevin McCormick, Member
Barney Heath, *ex officio*
Lee Breckenridge, Alternate

Also Present: Councilor Wright

Staff Present:

Cat Kemmett, Planning Associate

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

1. Zoning Redesign Updates

Zoning Redesign

Director Heath gave an update on the status of Zoning Redesign updates for Village centers. He said that staff anticipate a number of updates in the coming year to work through with the Board and ZAP. Ms. Kemmett said that staff are continuing to work with Utile on the next step of Zoning Redesign, which will include a deeper dive into potential tools for the city to consider achieving the changes prioritized through the quantitative analysis and community engagement thus far.

The first meeting ZAP meeting of the year will be on January 10, focusing on the calendar and identifying priorities for the coming year. The Village Center zoning discussion will be at the top of the agenda, and it is likely that a number of zoning items will be taken up and advanced separately as well.

One such item that will probably be split off and advanced quickly is updates to sustainability measures. City Council President Albright has expressed interest in forming a working group to evaluate potential changes, some zoning related, to improve sustainability rules and best practices. The exact parameters for this group have not yet been determined, but staff will provide updates as they are available.

Other potential zoning changes that are on the table include updates to the Sign Ordinance and Fence Ordinance, and discussion of creating a hospital zone.

MBTA Communities

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City of Newton Planning and Development Board

Staff will be presenting soon on the guidance released in December by DHCD for the multifamily zoning requirements for MBTA communities.

It was asked how public comment for this draft legislation could be submitted, and whether someone from Newton will be involved in finalizing the guidance. Director Heath responded that public comment can be submitted on DHCD's webpage, with the comment period lasting until sometime in March. To the best of his knowledge, he is not aware of anyone from the city associated with the process of finalizing the legislation.

It was asked whether councilors, staff, boards and commissions, and other groups typically organize their feedback and respond together in instances like this, or whether each person individually sends in their feedback. Ms. Kemmett responded that since the channel for sending feedback is just via written comment on the DHCD page, individuals can submit their own feedback, or groups could come together to share a collective statement as feedback. Councilor Wright noted that some groups, such as the Massachusetts Municipal Association, are coordinating efforts to respond, but to her knowledge at this time Newton does not have a group sharing feedback collectively.

A board member raised the point that it would be helpful to know whether there are any aspects of the draft guidance that are likely to pose a unique burden or barrier for Newton in particular to fulfill the regulation. Ms. Kemmett responded that it seems that the rules outlined in the draft guidance are by design flexible and adaptable to some degree, since they are meant to apply to dozens of towns in the state. However, staff will need to do a lot more research and analysis about the particulars of implementing any associated zoning changes from these rules so that we can ensure they are responding to the unique needs and conditions of Newton.

Veterinary Uses in BU-4

Director Heath said that at ZAP on December 16 there will be a public hearing and likely a vote on a petition to allow veterinary uses in the BU-4 district.

2. City Updates

Director Heath said that the City has chosen preferred developer to move forward with for the Armory. The chosen development team, a partnership between Metro West Collaborative Development and Civico Development, will be holding a virtual Meet the Developer Night event where people can learn more about the development team, their proposal for the site, and the timeline/next steps for the project on January 26.

It was asked what the relationship is between Metro West Collaborative Development and Civico. Director Heath explained that he expects Metrowest will take the lead on many aspects of this project, and knows Newton very well. Metrowest plans to house their offices in the headhouse of the Armory once the project is completed. Civico has experience developing housing units in many towns in the state.

It was asked what multigenerational meant in the context of this project, since the proposal mentions multigenerational housing. Director Heath explained that this likely refers to the mix of bedrooms in each unit, which will have a significant percentage of units that are 2 or 3 bedrooms and will not be age restricted.

3. CDBG/ ESG Reviewers

City of Newton Planning and Development Board

Director Heath asked if there were volunteers from the Board to serve as volunteer reviewers for this year's round of applications for CDBG and Emergency Service Grants. The expected time commitment for this process is between 10-15 hours. The rough timeline for this process is:

- February 2, 2022- all applications are due
- February 7-11, 2022- internal and P&D reviewers review and score all applications
- February 14-18, 2022- internal review committee meets to discuss and rank all applications. P&D reviewers review and score all applications.
 - February 15-21, 2022- P&D reviewers receive the average scores of each application from the internal review.
- February 21-25, 2022- P&D reviewers meet with the Housing and Community Development team to discuss the applications, the P&D scores, the subrecipients, and the internal ranking sheet.

Members discussed positive experiences participating in these reviews in past years and made suggestions for how the process could be more productive and a better use of the Planning Board's time and experience. Board members are not as steeped in the details and intricacies of how these programs work as staff members are, so they are not always as well equipped to come up with exact scoring methodology for these programs. In the future a better process could be to send Board members staff recommendation and commentary, and then based on that and reviewing proposals, Board members could then craft a recommendation. Director Heath agreed that that proposal made sense, and though it would require some tweaks to how the process currently works, it was worth working with staff to try to make changes to facilitate a better process.

Mr. Steele and Ms. Breckenridge volunteered to serve as reviewers for Human Services, and Ms. Molinsky and Mr. Brown volunteered to serve as reviewers for Emergency Service Grants.

4. Minutes

Ms. Maheshwari noted a needed correction for the minutes from December 13th, which incorrectly states that she was not present for that meeting. Upon a motion by Ms. Maheshwari, the minutes for December 13th were approved as amended 6-0-1 with Director Heath abstaining.

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, the minutes for December 16th were approved 5-0-0, with Mr. McCormick, Ms. Molinsky, and Mr. Brown abstaining.

5. Upcoming meetings

Director Heath explained that ZAP will be meeting on January 10th, and plan to discuss the upcoming year's agenda. This meeting is not required for Board members. The next regular Planning Board meeting will be on February 7th.

6. Adjournment

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele and unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 7:55 pm.