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Barney Heath
Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Councilor Joshua Krintzman, Chair of Programs & Services Committee
Members of Programs and Services Committee

FROM: Barney Heath, Director, Department of Planning and Development
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director of Planning and Development

RE: **Docket Item #164-22 Request for amendments to the Council Rules**
COUNCILORS GENTILE AND MARKIEWICZ requesting that:
(1) City Council rules be amended to make it clear that City Councilors have the right to attend DRT meetings.
(2) That the Council consider changing its rules to ensure that all Councilors have the right to attend Working Group and other similar committee meetings.

DATE: March 18, 2022

Cities and towns offering to convene informal interdepartmental meetings with prospective developers (ranging from individuals to large developers) is a well-established and proven best practice. Here in Newton, the Development Review Team (DRT) process is outlined in the Planning Department's and City Clerk's Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) regarding Special Permits. The DRT approach is also outlined in the City Council Rules and Orders Article X Section 2 (page 25) pre-application, scoping and review descriptive narrative.

The explicit purpose of offering a homeowner or prospective developer an opportunity to meet with internal city staff is quite simply to hold a candid conversation in an informal setting. Where we see tremendous value in offering this format is the following:

- Providing both excellent customer service and setting clear expectations with homeowners and developers around the City's development rules and regulations including but not limited to zoning, historic, wetlands, sustainability, fair and affordable housing, and accessibility.
- Bringing in relevant departments to the discussion (i.e., DPW, Fire, Conservation) for their expertise with projects that involve aspects of their jurisdiction.

- Providing early direction to potential applicants that they should endeavor to consult with neighbors and the Ward City Councilors to get their feedback on the project prior to a formal submission.
- Having projects that do end up being formally submitted devoid of glaring omissions, likely as a direct outcome of the DRT process.

Here in Newton, we do take the additional steps of posting both the address and brief project snapshot of the planned DRT session in the City Council's Friday packet (see sample attached). This advance notice serves to both inform the public of a potential forthcoming projects and importantly alerts and allows for City Councilors to provide Planning staff with questions in advance of the DRT or request a project overview following the DRT discussion. Very often we speak with City Councilors prior to a particular DRT or debrief afterwards following the discussion.

The DRT process has proven to be a successful and well used process. We do believe that one of its principal benefits lies in the confidence and candor with which a discussion can take place. We would have great concerns that the participation of an eventual decision maker in that process, however subtle, would fundamentally effect the willingness to share information in this setting and change the entire tenor and content of the discussion to the detriment of the entire process.

Development Review Team (DRT) Meeting Snapshot

Week of March 14, 2022

This week we have *virtual* DRTs on the following addresses. Please contact any land use planner at the Planning Department if you would like additional information on any of these projects.

Address	General Description of Project
49 Winchester St	Special Permit to allow a for-profit educational facility (MU1, Ward 5)
225-227 California St	Proposed change of zoning from Manufacturing (MAN) to Business (BU) (MAN, Ward 1)
51 Page Rd	Special Permit for a detached accessory apartment (MR1, Ward 2)
24 Wilson Circle	Special Permit for Single Family Attached Dwellings (MR1, Ward 6)
1807 Commonwealth Ave	Special Permit to construct oversized dormers (SR2, Ward 4)

Please note this list was compiled before these meetings will take place and that projects may evolve over time. Cancellations do occur and the Planning Department is sometimes able to schedule another project in its place. Not every project has a DRT – DRTs are generally done only where some type of site plan review will likely be required.