



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

Barney Heath  
Director  
Planning & Development

Cat Kemmett, Planning  
Associate

**Members**

Peter Doeringer, Chair  
Kelley Brown, Vice Chair  
Kevin McCormick, Member  
Jennifer Molinsky, Member  
Barney Heath, *ex officio*  
Lee Breckenridge, Alternate  
Laxmi Rao, Alternate

1000 Commonwealth Ave.  
Newton, MA 02459  
T 617-796-1120  
F 617-796-1142  
[www.newtonma.gov](http://www.newtonma.gov)

# PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

June 6, 2022

**Members present:**

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

**City Staff:** Cat Kemmett, Planning Associate

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

**1. Continuation of Public Hearing on #259-22 Request to Rezone 7 parcels to BU4 (34, 36, 38, 48, & 50 Crafts Street and 19 and 21 Court Street)**

At 7:01 Chair Doeringer started the meeting.

Attorney Buchbinder and several members of the development team made a presentation explaining some of the details of the proposed project.

The site comprises seven different parcels, and currently has commercial and two-family residential uses. Together, the parcels contain 115,818 square feet of area and four existing buildings, two commercial and two residential. The parcels are split between two zoning districts, MAN and MR1. The development team is asking for the whole site to be rezoned to BU4.

Architect John Martin, of Elkus Manfredi Architects, said that though the Washington Street Vision plan recommends a lower height than the proposed project, they believe the proposed height is appropriate given the proximity to the MBTA. There is a primary entrance on Crafts Street that leads to an underground garage with about 135 parking spaces on a single level. Mr. Martin explained the details of the parking and circulation plan, which ensures there will be no need for vehicle maneuvering for deliveries on Crafts Street.

In the BU4 zone, this use requires a setback when the property abuts a commercial use. He showed images of what the setbacks on each side would look like, and some of the plans for buffering and screening. Mr. Martin showed images of the building and site design, and how the proposed building looks in context with the neighboring buildings.

## City of Newton Planning and Development Board

Attorney Buchbinder noted that the proposed use is not allowed in the parcels as they are zoned now. The Vision Plan suggests a variety of heights in different zones, so this plan is well suited to the site. The proposed height of just under 72 feet and 6 floors are allowed only in the BU4 district. This project also proposes to provide senior housing, which is needed in the city according to the Comprehensive Plan. For inclusionary housing, they plan to make an in lieu of payment to the city in the amount of \$10.8 million.

Ms. Molinsky asked for details about the two existing residential properties included in the plan and whether they were in common ownership. Mr. Chaviano said it was one home and two condos, and they have not yet acquired those properties, but it is under contract. That area will become the emergency-specific gated area providing rear access from Court St.

Ms. Breckenridge asked about how this plan supports the Washington Street Vision Plan and about the drainage at the grade change and whether there are buried wetlands on the site. Atty Buchbinder said that there is desire to revitalize the Washington Street Corridor. This plan represents an improvement on what is on the site now. Mr. Martin said there is a grade change from Washington Street entry back to the site, and there is a small brook culverted under the property. The planned setbacks should help with stormwater control, but they cannot daylight the brook since part of it lies on abutting property.

Chair Doeringer then reopened the public hearing.

Kathy Laufer of 26 Mosman St. spoke in favor of the plan for payment in lieu of providing affordable housing units, because affordable units in this type of development are often not truly affordable for seniors.

MaryLee Belleville of 136 Warren Street appreciated the discussion of the rezoning request but said that producing luxury senior housing is not a goal the city has, and she does not see a public benefit from this project. She said there is a criteria for establishing what an affordable unit should be in terms of cost, and believes affordable units should be provided instead of a payment.

Upon a motion by Mr. Brown and approved unanimously, the public hearing was then closed.

Ms. Molinsky said that the backsides of buildings on Washington St. that abut neighbors are important. 5-6 story buildings are appropriate in some instances, but the details that can make these projects good neighbors are important. She noted that in the ordinance inclusionary beds and inclusionary units are not exactly the same- the housing and the care are two separate topics. There is a great need for both care and housing across income levels, and solutions for lower- and middle-income people who can't afford the amenities in projects like this. It would be good to know that similar housing with services is part of the plan for these payments in lieu of affordable units.

Director Heath said that the money goes to the city to be distributed equally to the city and to the NHA. The NHA determines how they choose to use those funds. The prevailing sentiment is that the money that comes to the city will go to the newly created housing trust to allocate for future projects. The portion of the IZ ordinance regarding elderly housing is complex, and though not without its flaws, there are benefits to the payment in lieu in terms of the money the city gets for payment in lieu.

Chair Doeringer noted that though the Washington St. Vision plan is not prescriptive regarding zoning, it does provide important guidance, and he is glad that the team is moving forward with the 6-story plan.

## City of Newton Planning and Development Board

Mr. Brown said that the Board and Planning staff might want to consider the fact that the city is losing many existing manufacturing uses, and if there should be a plan for the future of manufacturing. Director Heath agreed and said that a planned study of California Street could surface some thoughts and plans for that.

Upon a motion by Mr. Brown and approved 5-0-1 with Director Heath abstaining, the item was continued.

### **2. Village Center Zoning Discussion**

#### Parking Requirements

Chair Doeringer acknowledged that parking is one of the more divisive and difficult topics of discussion. He would like to see more centralized parking options and flexible options for transportation management. There should be more proactive plans to handle parking centralization and undergrounding of parking. If we are going to make village centers denser, that is bound to put more cars on the street, so while there are compelling reasons to reduce parking requirements, the impact of more people coming through must be considered.

Mr. McCormick noted that Trio had their required parking reduced, and even at the reduced amount their parking is not at full capacity. He is in favor of lowering the minimums as a way to encourage car-free alternatives.

Ms. Molinsky agreed with Mr. McCormick and added that creating more flexibility for restaurant parking would make projects more realistic, and those parking requirements are regularly waived anyways. Mr. Brown agreed that lowering parking makes a lot of sense and could help support the vitality we are looking to see in village centers.

Ms. Kemmett said that Planning staff recently participated in an overnight parking count of residential developments in Newton which showed that many have significant amounts of underutilized parking that was required by the Zoning Ordinance.

Ms. Breckenridge said that the spillover effects of parking into neighboring areas can be significant, so careful consideration is needed if we are to lower parking minimums.

Board members discussed the need for further traffic studies that are more expansive than just the area right around an individual project. Additional centralized parking might be helpful at some point soon in some village centers, but there was not clarity on an exact location or funding source for such a project. There should be a way to proactively plan for parking management and other infrastructure concerns that may arise as village centers evolve.

Chair Doeringer asked for a straw vote to gauge support for this item. The Board voted in support of this item 5-0-1 with Director Heath abstaining.

#### Increasing Allowable Floor to Floor Heights

This proposed change would allow higher floor-to-floor heights for office and retail but reduce allowable residential floor-to-floor heights from 12' to 11'. The proposal would allow a modest increase in commercial building height in order to accommodate the required floor-to-floor heights for certain types of business, eliminating a barrier to desirable uses.

Members discussed the benefits of allowing flexibility for commercial buildings.

## City of Newton Planning and Development Board

Ms. Breckenridge noted that there is an energy concern that comes with taller ceiling heights, but otherwise a difference of a foot seems inconsequential for residential uses.

The Board voted in support of this item 5-0-1 with Director Heath abstaining.

### Setting Design Requirements for Half-Stories

Our existing zoning sets the maximum number of stories at whole numbers. Generally there are no design requirements for upper stories, but creating more visually interesting and varied top stories comes up in special permit review as a way to reduce visual bulk. This proposal would allow a half story forcing the upper story to pull in a bit. This reduces height as seen at street level and provides some visual interest.

Board members overall were in support of this proposal, and Mr. Brown said that a smaller setback for smaller buildings seems appropriate and reducing the setback from 10 feet to a slightly smaller number for those buildings could work.

The Board voted in support of this item 5-0-1 with Director Heath abstaining.

### Eliminate lot area per unit minimums

Board members discussed this item, and several members observed that this step seems appropriate and that the other dimensional controls in place should ensure that eliminating the lot area per unit minimum will not have a negative impact.

The Board voted in support of this item 5-0-1 with Director Heath abstaining.

### Remove minimum lot size

Board members discussed this item, with Chair Doeringer noting that many existing lots are smaller than the minimums we have now. Mr. Brown asked if we are proposing a frontage requirement along with this change, and Ms. Kemmett responded that as drafted there is no frontage requirement, but that is something staff could consider for the design standards.

The Board voted in support of this item 5-0-1 with Director Heath abstaining.

### Set maximum building footprint

Board members overall were in support of this proposal.

The Board voted in support of this item 5-0-1 with Director Heath abstaining.

## **3. Minutes**

The minutes for April 25 were approved 5-0-1 with Director Heath abstaining.  
The minutes for April 29 were approved 4-0-0.

## City of Newton Planning and Development Board

The minutes for May 2 were approved 4-0-2 with Ms. Breckenridge and Director Heath abstaining.  
The minutes for May 17 were approved 4-0-0.

### **4. Adjournment**

Upon a motion by Mr. Brown and approved unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 9:42 p.m.