



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

July 11, 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; Liora Silkes, Energy Coach

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

#### 1. Embodied Carbon Discussion Presentation/Discussion

Energy Coach Liora Silkes and Mark Webster, a member of the Green Newton Building Standards Committee, gave a presentation on Embodied Carbon 101. Russel Feldman also joined them for the discussion.

Embodied carbon refers to the emissions associated with building construction, primarily in materials like concrete and steel. Building energy can be analyzed in several stages from materials extraction and production, construction, operation and ultimately demolition. Upfront embodied carbon focuses on the GHG emissions released before a building is constructed. These can also be thought of as supply chain emissions.

Energy efficiency and grid decarbonization efforts will decrease operational carbon over time. Embodied carbon contributes a higher proportion of life-cycle emissions in more energy-efficient buildings. structural materials – demanding better than average industry practice. As of March 2022, federal procurement regulations address carbon in concrete. Brookline MA targets a 10% reduction in concrete carbon for town projects, and Cambridge and Boston also have requirements.

Liora and Mark will continue to work with their team to refine the draft ordinance language and will present again in the future at ZAP. They plan to also discuss this with the EDC, Chamber of Commerce Real Estate Committee.

Chair Doeringer asked for clarification about the obligations municipally owned buildings have regarding embodied carbon. Liora said that we have committed to a number of different plans and strategies for city buildings and is working with

## City of Newton Planning and Development Board

Joshua Morse to determine the path forward for embodied carbon and city buildings. Chair Doeringer followed up asking what the obligation is at the state level. Russell responded that the state is looking into this and is likely to try to get at carbon through the state building code. In order to have a comprehensive approach to embodied carbon in construction, the manufacturing side needs to provide good data as well.

Ms. Breckenridge observed that embodied carbon is not very different from our standards for managing impervious runoff from new building sites and the need to retain it on site. She said that rather than regulating this via zoning, maybe it makes sense to regulate this via a performance standard for new buildings. Russell responded that there are legal limitations in terms of what a municipality can regulate- a lot of the rules regarding materials can only be limited in the building code at the state level. Special permits are where there is more flexibility though, and the rules that the city imposes upon its own buildings.

Mr. Brown asked for information about how LEED and other existing regulations fit into this. Liora confirmed that LEED has built within the framework a way to assess the impact of materials used. Liora said that this embodied carbon work might have a similar framework where different options or point systems could be used to come into compliance.

Board members also discussed the pros, cons, and challenges of taking a more comprehensive approach to sustainability measures, which are currently happening largely piecemeal.

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

Staff provided a brief overview of how the discussion of the village center zoning proposals went at ZAP. At the June 27 ZAP meeting, the committee discussed several of the 12 zoning proposals.

They first discussed replacing threshold for special permits from buildings greater than 20,000 sq. ft. to parcels with over  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre the proposal for the special permit threshold is to require a special permit for any projects on parcels greater than  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre, rather than parcels with development over 20,000 sq. ft. gross floor area. The change will increase by right development in village centers and will make developments more predictable located near transit hubs. Some Committee members were supportive of allowing the special permit threshold to be changed to parcels larger than  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres rather than buildings in excess of 20,000 sq. ft. of floor area. Others disagreed and shared concern that this would allow large developments by right.

The committee then discussed requiring Site Plan Review and incorporating by right design standards. The rationale for this is to allow an extra layer of review without the lengthy, uncertain, special permit process, thereby allowing more projects by right but with some amount of control over them. Committee members agreed that site plan review is appropriate and noted that many projects that come through the special permit process do not necessitate the review process. They also returned to a discussion of reducing parking minimums.

Though many proposals did not have unanimous agreement, all 12 proposals had a majority approval by straw vote at ZAP.

Mr. Brown asked if staff anticipate that this rezoning will bring the city into compliance with the MBTA communities requirements. Director Heath said that we do not have a full analysis yet, nor do we have final guidance yet from the state. He believes that if passed, the rezoning will get us closer to compliance, but likely not all the way there.

## City of Newton Planning and Development Board

Mr. Brown asked for clarification about the site plan review process now, and Director Heath said that this is part of the special permit process now. Staff does the analysis, but City Council ultimately votes to approve or not.

Board members brought up the lack of specificity regarding the Planning & Development's Board proposed role in site plan review under this plan. Chair Doeringer noted that some ZAP members were hesitant to grant that authority to the Board, because it is comprised of people who are not elected. Ms. Breckenridge noted that even of the site plan review process is simple and clear, there might be cause for concern about the level of staffing needed for this process, or training for Board members.

Director Heath said that in many communities site plan review falls under the purview of the Planning Board. But a better understanding of what is involved, how many projects would be part of this, is important. Mr. McCormick said that training would be helpful and wondered whether this additional responsibility would create a need for more frequent meetings.

Ms. Breckenridge said it would be important to get information about the expectations for the interaction between the UDC and Planning Board to make sure there is no duplication of workload.

Upon a motion by Mr. Brown and approved 4-0-1 with Director Heath abstaining and Ms. Dain serving as a voting member, the Board voted in favor of recommending the 12 proposals made by the Planning Department for #38-22 "Discussion and review relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance regarding village centers" in the May 27 Planning memo, but reserves approval of the proposed role of the Planning & Development Board to a later time when the zoning language is more fully developed to clarify the role of the Planning & Development Board.

### **3. Board Deliberation over Docket #259-22 Request to Rezone 7 parcels to BU4 (34, 36, 38, 48, & 50 Crafts Street and 19 and 21 Court Street) /Possible Vote**

Damian Chaviano from the development team confirmed that the details for this project remain the same as it was presented at the previous Board meeting.

Mr. Brown said that the proposed rezoning seemed appropriate to him for this neighborhood.

Mr. McCormick asked if the number of units was reduced with the reduction in height from 7 to 6 floors. Mr. Chaviano said that number of units dropped from 209 units to 185 units in the 6-floor plan. That reduction came from the independent living units.

Mr. Brown asked if the amount of money contributed to the affordable housing fund would go down as well. Mr. Chaviano said that that amount was going from 12 million to 10.9 million dollars with the reduction in size and units.

Upon a motion by Mr. McCormick, the Board voted 4-0-1 to approve Docket #259-22 (with Director Heath abstaining).

### **4. Process Discussion over Joint Meeting Protocols**

Chair Doeringer discussed some of the challenges that come with having joint meetings with ZAP, Land Use, and other committees. The efficiency of joint meetings is a positive, but these meetings often require quick and sometimes immediate action, leaving little time and space for Board deliberation.

## City of Newton Planning and Development Board

Members discussed the idea of, when time allows, holding items after joint public hearings to discuss in greater depth at the next Planning Board. Sometimes this might not be possible, but for many items that are not urgent, it is feasible to allow the time for the Board to deliberate after ZAP but before the full City Council takes on an item.

Some members also expressed interest in having more time and space to work as a Board to formulate a response when it comes to recommendations. One option could be that Chair Doeringer could poll Board members upon the closing of a public hearing to see if members are ready to vote, and if they are not, to hold the item until the next Board meeting. Director Heath said there might be a way to persuade City Council to wait to vote on an item until the Board has conveyed their recommendation, so long as there is enough time to meet the legal requirements. There is also the option of making a draft letter public and Board members coming prepared with edits, or live editing a draft document.

### **5. Planning Staff Updates**

Director Heath said that the department has a new Economic Development Director starting soon names John Sisson, a Newton resident who previously led the economic development department in Dedham. There is also a new Chief Preservation Planner who will be starting by the end of the month. There are also several new positions that will be advertised soon, including a Deputy Chief in Current Planning.

Upon a motion by Mr. McCormick and unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.