

Town of Needham, Massachusetts
Housing Needham Advisory Group (HONE)
Meeting Minutes
September 7, 2023

Place: Hybrid Meeting, Charles River Room, PSAB, 500 Dedham Avenue, Needham
The Board will attend in person. The public may attend in person or via Zoom.

Present: Co-Chair, Heidi Frail; Co-Chair, Natasha Espada; Michael Diener; Liz Kaponya;
Kevin Keane; Joshua Levy; William Lovett; Jeanne McKnight; Ronald Ruth

Remote: Karen Sunnarborg, Community Housing Specialist

Staff: Katie King, Deputy Town Manager; Lee Newman, Director of Planning & Community
Development; Alexandra Clee, Asst. Town Planner; Amy Haelsen, Director,
Communications & Community Engagement

Guests: Eric Halvorsen, RKG Associates; Emily Innes, Innes Associates

Call to Order

At 7:00 pm., H. Frail called the meeting to order disclosing the meeting is being video recorded.

- I. N. Espada welcomed everyone. Members and guests introduced themselves.
- II. H. Frail reviewed the HONE Advisory Group Purpose and Charge as stated in the enclosed Meeting Packet <https://www.needhamma.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/11949>

Needham will comply with the MBTA Communities Act. The group's work is to make zoning compliance work for the Needham community. Members and the community were reminded to respect different views of one another, speak thoughtfully, civilly and with kindness.

III. Status of Housing in Needham

K. Sunnarborg, Community Housing Specialist

This presentation was developed from the Town's Housing Plan.

- Massachusetts is confronting a housing crisis shortage according to a 2022 national study.
- Needham is not susceptible to zoning overrides since surpassing the 10% Chapter 40B affordability threshold.
- The recent Housing Plan documented a wide range of unmet housing needs.

The hope is that the rezoning will boost housing production leading to some greater housing diversity and affordability over time and address some community housing needs.

IV. Overview of MBTA Communities Act

Eric Halvorsen of RKG Associates presented an overview of the Act and compliance guidelines available in the meeting packet. E. Halvorsen and Emily Innes of Innes Associates worked with EOHLIC (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities) formerly known as DHCD.

The presentation helped members to understand what Chapter 40A, Section 3A is and is not and how to interpret the guidelines. Tests for land area and unit capacity will measure how the community moves forward with compliance requirements. EOHLC determines guidelines, calculations and regulations for each community.

MBTA Communities Act MGL c. 40A Section 3A

The law established zoning requirements for each of 177 designated MBTA Communities (MGL c. 161A Section 1).

The purpose behind the new law:

- Massachusetts has a housing shortage; we need to produce more housing.
- Placing housing near transit is good policy for housing, economy, transportation, and climate.

What the MBTA Communities Act is NOT

It is a zoning mandate, not a building or construction mandate. The Town has to zone to allow for the targeted number of units. It is not restricted to affordable housing but housing needs across the spectrum. The MBTA Communities Act is not optional. Per Section 3A, Needham would be ineligible for certain grant programs if it does not comply.

The deadline to submit the compliance application to EOHLC is December 31, 2024 or earlier.

Alexandra Clee suggested we understand how this requirement can be tailored to address housing and economic development needs.

MBTA Communities is a tool, it is not the tool.

The Continuum of Housing and Supportive Tools – communities have a number of tools available for those unsheltered, those extremely/low income, and those moderate income/workforce, market rate.

Zoning is not housing production. Additional factors guide production such as: market strength, financial feasibility to build, developable sites, sellers, available labor, community desirability.

E. Halvorsen detailed the compliance requirement process and how things are measured and modeled. The presentation is included in the meeting packet.

Multi-family housing was defined under Section 3A.

Members discussed present minimum square footage for lot size in business zoning versus MBTA Communities zoning. The push and pull between district size, district location, excluded land, zoning regulations and unit capacity all impact the final density metrics.

E. Innes described zoning and existing units. Needham does not presently comply with MBTA Communities. The community needs to understand what is happening with MBTA Communities.

Zoning Guidelines and Requirements

In addition to the district and unit capacity tests, the MBTA Guidelines place additional restrictions on the zoning which are described in the presentation in the Meeting Packet.

Affordable Housing requirements cannot exceed 10% of the total units offered at no less than 80% of the area median income. If you want to go above 10% and/or below 80% AMI, the Town must complete an **Economic Feasibility Analysis** to prove the requirement will not create a financial hardship for new development.

E. Innes described new mixed-use guidelines (not mandatory mixed use) and how to keep a mixed use district and get a bit of credit for the number of units zoned elsewhere as well as how to incentivize mixed use in exchange for extra height or density.

Members discussed zoning for multi-families compared with other zoning.

V. Review of the Scope of Work and Finalize Timeline

Lee Newman, Dir., Planning & Community Dev.; Eric Halvorsen, RKG Assoc.; Emily Innes, Innes Assoc.
L. Newman described the scope of work and timeline in the Meeting Packet.

The **Scope of Work** includes compliance testing, develop zoning scenarios, conduct a build-out analysis of proposed MBTA districts, a fiscal impact analysis of future housing development, produce 3-D renderings of districts, test financial feasibility implications of changes to the Town's inclusionary zoning, develop a draft of the zoning bylaw, design guidelines that apply to MBTA districts, develop a draft zoning bylaw, and design guidelines that apply to MBTA districts. Consultants will review with Town Staff and HONE Advisory and provide a draft and final report detailing project components.

Timeline

September 2023	HONE Kick-off
September/October	MBTA Modeling
October 2023	EFA Analysis
November 9, 2023	Public Meeting 1
November/December	Advanced Modeling
January 17, 2024	Public Meeting 2
February 15, 2024	Draft Zoning presentation to HONE Advisory
March 2024	Public Meeting 3
April 4, 2024	HONE Advisory meets to review final zoning and final report
April 2024	Close-out

K. King suggested HONE can submit to EOHLC in April 2024 to give the State 90 days to tell us if we would comply before going to Town Meeting. If we hear from the State by the end of June,

we have July-September 2024 for the Planning Board's formal process to vet zoning before Town Meeting. If the State tells HONE we would not comply, we have that Planning Board timeline to make adjustments to comply. We should be ready for October 2024 Town Meeting.

H. Frail suggested using time after HONE submits to EOHLC for community engagement and education. We can cross-examine experts and explain subjects of interest to the community.

VI. Review of Housing Plan Identified Compliance Strategies

N. Espada reviewed the **2022 Housing Plan** - Preliminary MBTA Study in the Meeting Packet.

The Housing Plan map was used to help members understand the corridor of Highland Avenue from Webster Street to the Center, and then the Chestnut Street corridor to the Junction. That area is designated by the zoning group to achieve some of the goals with modification.

- The Needham Heights district area is shown at the top of the map.
- The center of the map is the Center district, which is recommended to not be included.
- The lower district is the Chestnut Street district.

She reviewed the four starting points recommended last year by the Housing Plan Working Group as stated in the Meeting Packet.

- Allow multi-family housing by right at existing Apartment A-1 dimensional limits.
- Location focused on areas along Highland Ave. to Chestnut St. corridor near transit and where higher density development already exists. Needham Center had been intentionally excluded given former State requirements, but now things have changed.
- Rezoning identified some existing Single Residence B (SRB) and General Residence (GR) areas to change to A-1 requirements by right.
- Change to A-1 provisions in business areas that currently allow multi-family housing and others, including some industrial areas that do not. Minimum lot area would be 10,000 sq. ft. as opposed to 20,000 sq. ft.

See page 33 of the Housing Plan for updated information.

VII. Public Engagement Process - Amy Haelsen, Director, Communications & Community Engagement

Educate stakeholders on MBTA Communities Law. Avail them of opportunities to provide input.

- Stakeholders: homeowners, renters, commercial property owners, developers, businesses, employees, group subsets, seniors, Town Meeting members, persons with disabilities.
- Identify what the community wants and needs to know.

She described methods and venues by which information will be shared with stakeholders.

K. King reiterated HONE is a community engagement visioning process. Information on MBTA Communities can be found on the Town web site **NeedhamMA.gov/** Search **MBTA Communities** or scroll down to **Hot Topics** then **MBTA Communities**. Sign up for the **NotifyMe** group so you receive emails only about this work. Email HONE until April at: **planning@needhamma.gov**

Within two weeks, HONE will announce this effort via postcards making people aware of the first Community Meeting November 9 and how to contact and engage HONE.

VIII. Questions and Comments

What about infrastructure (schools, fiscal, drainage)?

- Get results of the build-out, analysis and susceptibility to change. Ask department heads to review impacts on infrastructure, traffic, police service, fire service, schools as part of the build out analysis.

Does the Planning Board have the 2016 Economic Analysis?

- A fiscal analysis has not been done on what consultants think will be the build-out scenarios along this corridor as a function of this rezoning. That is part of the project scope.
- L. Newman will make available older fiscal impact analysis done for the Muzi site, also for the Needham Center, and Chestnut St. corridor. The rezoning does mirror that analysis. A conversion from the special permit use to an as of right use would be comparable. It was suggested the industrial zoning done along Gould St. could be a good computational model. Members discussed cost factor considerations.

Help us come up with a Site Plan Review Bylaw for this kind of housing.

- The sample zoning which E. Innes worked on with EOHLC includes a Site Plan Review section which communities can adopt or modify; if they have their own, the consultant will use that.

A map of Needham commuter rail stops with the half circle is in the Housing Plan.

IX. Next Steps:

Focus on preparing for the October 5 HONE meeting. Have the final plan ready for the November 9 Community Meeting. Members were urged to be familiar with the Housing Plan.

Consultant work October-December:

- Work on fiscal impact, EFA, build-out, and 3-D renderings before January
- Present Scenarios 1 and 2 to department heads; weigh before HONE Advisory.

MOTION: K. Keane moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:27 am.

SECONDED: J. McKnight

VOTE: Unanimously approved

MOTION CARRIES: 9-0

Informational - The Meeting Packet is available at: <https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx>

Respectfully submitted, Dale Michaud