



# Zoning & Planning Committee Report

## City of Newton In City Council

**Monday, June 11, 2018**

Present: Councilors Albright (Chair), Baker, Danberg, Brousal-Glaser, Downs, Leary, Kalis and Krintzman

Also present: Councilors Crossley, Kelly and Greenberg

City Staff Present: Barney Heath (Director, Planning Dept.), James Freas (Deputy Director, Planning Dept.) Rachel Nadkarni (Long Range Planner), Lily Reynolds (Community Engagement Manager), Marie Lawlor (Assistant City Solicitor), Jonathan Yeo (Chief Operating Officer), Karyn Dean (Committee Clerk)

**#300-18**      **Appointment of Sudha Maheshwari to the Planning & Development Board**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing SUDHA MAHESHWARI, 118 Lowell Avenue, West Newton, as a full member of the PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD for a term to expire February 1, 2022.

**Action:**      **Zoning & Planning Approved 7-0 (Councilor Krintzman not voting)**

**Note:** Sudha Maheshwari joined the Committee. She explained that she is excited to serve on the Planning & Development Board. Her professional experience and interests are in urban planning and she has a Masters degree and a PhD in Planning. She has also worked in local government before. Ms. Maheshwari noted that her family has been living in Newtonville for 6 years, her children are in the public schools, and her husband is a Professor of Planning at Northeastern University. The company she currently works for does catastrophe modeling for the insurance industry, which requires planning and land use to develop the models they build and how the industry uses them, but she is excited to be more directly involved, in this capacity, for the city she lives in.

A Councilor noted that the Planning & Development Board has a great deal of responsibility. He asked how she might react to those who do not agree with her, based on her professional experiences. Ms. Maheshwari said she appreciates having the different points of view of the various members of the Board and listening to their ideas. She feels that is where the best outcomes are found, and offering her opinion is part of that process. This sort of listening and exchange of ideas and opinions happens in all areas of life.

A Committee member stated that the City is at a crossroads with the various developments being undertaken and how those will shape the future of how people live and move around. She is

looking forward to Ms. Maheshwari's contributions. It was also asked if he had attended a meeting of the Board, and she stated that she has not.

A Councilor said that the Planning Board can provide a variety of perspectives with some members identifying as pro-development or anti-development. He asked Ms. Maheshwari how she would align herself in that regard. Ms. Maheshwari said that smart growth is important and there is some need for economic development and the ability to expand the revenue and tax base. At the same time, she likes the small town feel and a balance needs to be found. Understanding the impact on transportation, housing prices, schools and other infrastructure is important, as is bringing the community together in visioning,

The Chair noted that the results presentation of the Hello Washington Street events is tomorrow. She urged the Planning Board appointees to attend.

The Committee thanked Ms. Maheshwari for her willingness to serve.

Councilor Kalis moved approval and the Committee voted in favor, unanimously.

**#301-18      Appointment of Kevin McCormick to the Planning & Development Board**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing KEVIN MCCORMICK, 52 Madison Avenue, Newtonville, as an alternate member of the PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD for a term to expire February 1, 2022.

**Action:      Zoning & Planning Approved 7-0 (Councilor Krintzman not voting)**

**Note:** Kevin McCormick joined the Committee and explained that he had spent 30 years as a project manager in software and then changed his career to affordable housing in 2003. He spent 10 years in Cambridge as an associate housing planner coordinating federal grants, working in the home improvement program and other areas as well. He retired in November and would like to contribute to the City and has had great interest in the issues in Newton. His experience and knowledge are a good fit for the Planning Board and he is open to learning more.

A Councilor stated that he is impressed that Mr. McCormick is willing to serve in this capacity and while he has not always agreed with his point of view, he has respected his ability in articulating his positions. The Committee thanked Mr. McCormick for his willingness to serve.

Councilor Danberg moved approval and the Committee voted in favor, unanimously.

**#302-18      Appointment of James Robertson to the Planning & Development Board**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR appointing JAMES ROBERTSON, 158 Newtonville Avenue, Newtonville, as an alternate member of the PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD for a term to expire February 1, 2023.

**Action:      Zoning & Planning Approved 7-0 (Councilor Krintzman not voting)**

**Note:** Jim Robertson joined the Committee and said that he has been involved in various ways in the City, volunteering in the public schools when his children were students, as well as serving as the Ward 1 and 2 Recreation member of the Community Preservation Committee. His work experience has been in real estate, including finance, management and development and he has taken courses at Harvard in Planning. He wants to continue serving the City and his work and life experience match well with the Planning Board. He is being appointed as an alternate member, but he plans on attending all the meetings and being available when called upon.

The Committee thanked Mr. Robertson for his willingness to serve.

Councilor Downs moved approval and the Committee voted in favor, unanimously.

**#309-18**      **Re-appointment of Peter Doeringer to the Planning & Development Board**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR re-appointing PETER DOERINGER, 35 Pulsifer Street, Newtonville, as a full member of the PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD for a term to expire February 1, 2023.

**Action:**      **Zoning & Planning Approved 7-0 (Councilor Krintzman not voting)**

**Note:** Councilor Danberg moved approval of Mr. Doeringer's re-appointment to the Planning & Development Board and the Committee voted in favor, unanimously, with thanks to Mr. Doeringer for his continued service.

**#220-18**      **Discussion relative to the Washington Street Corridor Action Plan**  
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING requesting monthly progress discussions on the Washington Street Corridor action plan.

**Action:**      **Zoning & Planning Held 7-0 (Councilor Krintzman not voting)**

**Note:** Lily Reynolds, Community Engagement Manager explained that the work on the Washington Street Corridor with Planning staff, the Principle Group and the public has been ongoing. A pop-up space was opened at 1239 Washington Street (Hello Washington Street) on June 7 and will stay open until June 12, with the final event that evening on Jackson Road. She said the process has been exciting and the method of having the Principle Group and Planning staff at the storefront on Washington Street has been very fruitful. Seventy-five hours of staff time, so far, have been spent in the storefront, along with multiple designers, architects, planners, transportation experts, fiscal impact analysts and economists, working collaboratively. Approximately 350 individuals have come into the space and some have come multiple times. She also noted that some City Councilors have dropped by as well. Ms. Reynolds noted that, the various posts on the Facebook page for this project have reached about 5,000 people. Each topic session was recorded and posted and there have been 89-178 views of the various videos. Staff is currently working on getting those downloaded to the City website and NewTV is in the process of producing a story about this as well.

Several Councilors were amazed by the process and were impressed by the number of people stopping by, commenting and asking questions. Some went to many of the topic discussions and found a wide range of points of view and feelings. Councilors felt that this model has been extremely successful in engaging the public and mining the various points of view.

Ms. Reynolds said the biggest gain so far has been the level of understanding and participation. People have been coming into the studio and really learning that this process is not being led by a developer, but instead is an opportunity for the City and residents to grapple with these complex questions as a community and to share their thoughts and ideas with people on the design team. While there is not total consensus on everything, it is getting easier to see that they are on the right track and can see that many people share the same concerns.

A Councilor asked if Mr. Korff, whose company, Mark Development, is developing much of Washington Street, came into the studio. Ms. Reynolds said he did drop by one afternoon and had a chance to speak with Russell Preston of the Principle Group. Mr. Chaviano, also from Mark Development, attended the block party at Family Access with his family and was present for the Creative Arts and Culture discussion on Saturday morning as well. Many of the arts leaders in the City were present at that event and it was a great opportunity for Mr. Chaviano to hear from them and for him to express support for a vibrant arts community along Washington Street. He would like to see a baseline requirement put into the zoning ordinance for developers to contribute to a fund for the arts.

A Councilor noted that Washington Street serves as a transit system for the City going east to west. Part of the challenge is that the project must be looked at as a whole for the City and not just from the perspective of the local area. Narrowing the road may work well for the local neighbors, but may not work well for general traffic flow for those traveling around and through the City. Ms. Reynolds said that staff realize that Washington Street is indeed a key east/west connector for Newton and other communities nearby, but they want to maintain the village feel as much as possible, and in its current configuration, Washington Street is not safe in many areas for cyclists and pedestrians. They are looking at several concepts for how the roadway could be allocated (number of lanes, bike lanes, etc.) and the scope of work for this project will take those concepts further. Ultimately, there will have to be a more detailed traffic study and data collection to get to a plan. As traffic is mitigated through this process, people want to know how it will affect their adjacent street. Preliminary results have indicated that Washington Street is much wider than it needs to be to accommodate current and projected traffic growth based on other data counts they have for other roadways in the area, but looking systemically at those neighborhood roads to discourage cut-through traffic will be an important step in the planning process.

It was asked if environment and resilience is something that is being thought about in the process. Ms. Reynolds stated that as new roads and buildings are implemented, people want and expect the highest quality standards in building and design that are available, including environmental standards. As far as setting goals of resiliency, that has not come up as an emergent theme.

Looking at the roadways and different options for people to move about is a key link with environmental sustainability and quality of life.

Barney Heath, Director of Planning, explained that this is currently a very intense period of community participation. The preliminary results of this process, which are being presented tomorrow night, will mark the beginning of the next phase - they will be presented as choices that are available and that there are many options and scenarios. There will be opportunity to provide feedback, in real time, at that meeting as well.

A Councilor wanted to understand if Newton Corner was going to be involved in the Washington Street visioning plan. Ms. Reynolds explained that Newton Corner is complex and has been looked at in general and some preliminary ideas have been considered, however, the main focus of this project is from West Newton to the Craft Street area. It was difficult to decide where to end the project, but the dialogue right now is focusing on the stretch of Washington Street that has the most development potential in the near-term. Newton Corner will need its' own master planning effort in the future, which will be informed by the current project.

Ms. Reynolds showed the Committee some pictures on the project's Facebook page. Information on the project and a link to the Facebook page may be found at [http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/lrplan/washington\\_street\\_vision.asp](http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/lrplan/washington_street_vision.asp)

The Committee voted to hold this item.

**#185-18      Discussion and adoption of Needham Street Vision Plan**

DIRECTOR OF PLANNING requesting discussion and adoption of the Needham Street Vision Plan as an amendment to the 2007 Newton Comprehensive Plan.

**Action:      Zoning & Planning Held 8-0**

**Note:** Barney Heath, Director of Planning addressed the Committee. He explained that a short memo and a detailed document on the Needham Street Area Vision Plan were included in the Friday packet for the Committee's review. The document included visions for environmental health, transportation, land use, design and implementation. It can be found online at <http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/90292/06-11-18%20Planning%20Memo%20#185-18.pdf>

Mr. Heath thanked the community engagement group members who spent a lot of time thinking about how to reach out to the community and how to find individuals who would come to the process with an open mind and a desire to dialogue on the issues. The goal was to have a wide geographic area in and around Needham Street represented by participants and they were able to achieve that. They also identified at-large interest groups who could contribute to the conversation as well. The participants continued to show up and provided amazing feedback, which was essential for this process.

Mr. Heath also thanked his staff who went above and beyond for every session that was held. Their thoughtfulness and ability to use the information was outstanding. They designed group exercises and found multiple ways to open up the conversations and elicit feedback. This process was able to take on contentious and complex issues and deliver positive results.

A Committee member asked if undergrounding utilities was possible or not. She has heard that there is not enough room under the streets to accommodate all the necessary functional and safety equipment. Mr. Heath said he has heard from various sources, including Mass Department of Transportation, that undergrounding utilities is challenging because of the existing infrastructure there, which has been described as a “mess”. Stantech has laid out a map which shows what exists underground. Mr. Heath said he has heard that undergrounding could cost \$1M a mile. It would be a tremendous undertaking at a tremendous cost. The engagement committee felt strongly about it, and they were informed that it could significantly delay the completion of the entire project. Mr. Heath would prefer not to risk that. Mr. Freas, Deputy Director of Planning, stated that the space issue is problematic because electrical wires generate heat and need to be insulated in a cooling element when underground. There is also an access issue for workers to get to the equipment underground and those two components lead to restricted space issues.

A Councilor asked if the issues related to MU1 and MU2 as stated in the document, should be addressed in the shorter term. Currently, those zones do not allow typical community gathering and entertainment uses such as museums, theatres, galleries, etc. and so would be prohibited on Needham Street. Mr. Freas said staff is thinking about that and considering incorporating them in the draft zoning ordinance that will be presented in October. The genesis of MU1 and MU2 on Needham Street was to develop office space, so changes do need to be made and bears revisiting.

It was noted that while there was a great deal of information about transportation, there was not much addressing the issue of crossing the street. Councilor Downs said that the Mass DOT plan would be adding sidewalks, bike lanes and crosswalks. Mr. Heath said he would add a reference to this in the document. Another Councilor felt there could have actually been more information on transportation and would like more details. Yet, another Councilor would like to see a good number of electric car charging stations. It was suggested that enlivening some existing areas could be done inexpensively. It was also mentioned that any shuttles in the area should be electric and not diesel which is dirty and polluting. Parking will be a serious issue, so a Councilor would like to see as much shared parking as possible.

A Councilor was very pleased to see cultural and artistic places included in the vision plan. Galleries are badly needed throughout the City and developers should be asked to contribute spaces for art. Related to that, allowing small businesses by-right is needs to be implemented.

A Councilor said there are opportunities to work with developers to provide more plantings and other pervious surfaces. It was also noted that high quality design and architecture needs to be implemented.

A Committee member noted that on Needham Street, there are many land owners and there is not a decision structure as there would be in an area with one large property owner. It was asked if the City might use eminent domain in some way to allow the city to unify the design. Zoning can determine what can be built, however, each land owner can control their design to a certain extent. The collection of regulatory and ownership tools the City can bring to bear to make the quality of life that is desired, should be considered. Another Councilor felt the special permit process helps shapes projects and allows the Council to have a great deal of control over design.

A Committee member asked if congestion pricing could be implemented on Needham Street. Mr. Heath said he was not sure. Ms. Nadkarni said they are looking at congestion pricing for parking. Boston and San Francisco have been experimenting with this and municipalities are looking into it more. Councilor Danberg said that Newton Centre is looking into implementing zone and congestion and demand pricing. A Committee member said the best way to reduce congestion is to decouple the cost of parking from housing units, so people who need parking have to pay a fee for that and those who do not, can save that cost.

Committee members and other Councilors present were very pleased with the Vision Plan and were impressed with the detail and the amount of useful and thoughtful information. The consensus of the group was well represented.

The Committee voted to hold the item. A public hearing is scheduled for June 25h.

**#76-18**      **Discussion relative to the draft policy content outline of Zoning Ordinance**  
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING requesting review, discussion, and direction relative to the Zoning Redesign Project on a draft policy content outline of the new Zoning Ordinance.

**Action:**      **Zoning & Planning Held 8-0**

**Note:** The outline of the draft Newton Zoning Ordinance, based on work with the Zoning and Planning Committee and the Zoning Redesign Event Series, was distributed to the Committee in the Friday packet. The outline reflects work with the consultant, Sasaki Associates and the many different ideas that have been discussed in public meetings and Committee. It can be viewed at <http://www.newtonma.gov/civica3/filebank/documents/90293/06-11-18%20Planning%20Memo%20#76-18.pdf>

The draft zoning map will be presented at the June 25<sup>th</sup> meeting.

A report of the two presentations will be included in the June 25<sup>th</sup> report.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Susan S. Albright, Chair**