

**MELROSE PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Joint Public Hearing with the Appropriations Subcommittee of the City Council
Monday, April 29, 2021
7:30 PM
Remote Meeting**

PRESENT: Beth Delahaij, Anne DeSouza-Ward, Paul King, Robert Mercado, Carla Morelli, Sharon Petrillo, Greg Sampson & Jack Welch

ABSENT: John Sadowski

STAFF PRESENT: Denise Gaffey, Director, Emma Battaglia, Senior Planner & Lori Massa, Planning Coordinator

CITY COUNCILORS PRESENT: Chris Cinella, Cory Thomas, Jack Eccles, Jeff McNaught, Jen Grigoraitis, John Tramontozzi, Leila Migliorelli, Mark Garipay, Maya Jamaledine, Robb Steward, Shawn MacMaster and Clerk Kristen Foote.

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 PM.

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Melrose Planning Board was conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. Meeting access and the general guidelines for remote participation by members of the public and/or parties with a right and/or requirement to attend this meeting was found on the City of Melrose's website, at www.cityofmelrose.org/remote-meetings. No in-person attendance of members of the public was permitted, but every effort was made to ensure that the public could adequately access the proceedings in real time. An audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of proceedings was posted on the mmtv3.org website as soon as possible after the meeting. A link was also available on www.cityofmelrose.org.

INCENTIVE ZONING AMENDMENT

Public Comment related to the zoning proposal

Ellen Katz, a member of the Melrose Energy Commission, was glad that there is a proposal for incentive zoning. She discussed climate change and recommended requiring a high level of building performance to get the incentive. The ordinance could require a larger building to use less energy than what the building would have generated without the incentive. The requirement would not be a huge burden. The building could be net zero ready, passive house, or LEED certified. There has to be a rigorous review process. There will be lower energy costs for the residents.

Susan Murphy of 24 Poplar Street and a member of the Melrose Energy Commission created Melrose's greenhouse gas inventory. The residential buildings are the biggest generators of greenhouse gas. It is difficult to retrofit old buildings and new buildings are not being built as efficiently as they should be. The zoning amendment is a huge opportunity for buildings to be built to the standards that they should be but it does not have a requirement for buildings to meet these standards.

Finn McSweeney of 160 W Wyoming and of the Pedestrian Bicycle Committee said that housing is a human right and there is a housing crisis. There should be more opportunities for people to live near transit and amenities. He supports the reduced parking requirement. He said that offering greater development in exchange for a public good will be more clear. The streetscape improvement fund will fulfill the need for infrastructure to feel comfortable walking and biking in the city. Wyoming Hill is the densest residential district and this zoning will hopefully bring more businesses and a rejuvenation of the area. He recommends the removal of parking minimums.

Garrett Nelson of Pleasant Road said that transit was the reason that he moved to Melrose and the city has a great amenity with access to transit. He is in support of the amendment. It will improve the streetscape and opening opportunity for development where it makes sense.

Brian Gregory of 146 W Wyoming Ave in support. He said that the proposal funnels housing in the right place.

David Bliss of 16 Howard Street supports the incentive if net zero ready construction is a requirement. The costs of green building practices are trending downward and there are incentives to help pay the extra costs. There are clear standards that should be followed to be able to access the incentive.

City Council and Planning Board Discussion

Mr. Sampson introduced the zoning amendment. He said that the Zoning Subcommittee started working on the amendment last June. They had several meetings and spoke with various stakeholders. The Planning Board feels that this is a balanced approach that is consistent with the City's Master Plan. After the public hearing they will reconvene and respond to comments.

Ms. Gaffey gave a presentation on the amendment and answered questions.

The City Councilors comments and questions and Ms. Gaffey and Mr. Sampson's responses were captured in the City Council's minutes and are as follows:

President Cinella asks if the changes impact any current proposals or those in the pipeline. Ms. Gaffey does anticipate some projects will take advantage of the zoning should it be approved. Chair Sampson adds this does not negatively impact projects that have been recently permitted because it doesn't affect the underlying zoning of projects that have already gone through review.

Councilor Grigoraitis as Ward 6 representative, one of the proposed zone shifts, would like to hear more about why we aren't looking at more aggressive net zero ready incentives as these are passing by wide margins in communities around us. Seems to be the right moment in time where we have robust legislation coming out of the state and federal levels to address climate change. Chair Sampson references the recently passed climate bill requiring the development of an energy building code within 18 months but generally zoning is not a tool for regulating building code - there's tension there. Proposed a balance approach; to encourage development in transit areas where there's a strong likelihood in reduction in transportation greenhouse gas emission. Ms. Gaffey notes they will take all the comments heard this evening into consideration.

Councilor Stewart is interested in the size of dwelling units being targeted in the area. Any preliminary sizes available or are these proposed incentives to compensate for the various factors being negotiated? Ms. Gaffey indicates specific granular details of actual unit size have not been drilled down into at this time - this tool doesn't affect the square footage. Chair Sampson adds zoning can't regulate the interior footprint of residential dwellings. One of the most restricted factors in the downtown is the floor/area ratio. There's no economic ability to redevelop some of the properties at that level. Councilor Stewart asks about the active buildings in the medical district area; are these businesses in support of this? Ms. Gaffey says medical use is still an allowed use by special permit. Existing locations won't be effected. Councilor Stewart asks what are like Massachusetts communities doing consistent with this proposed rezoning - less aggressive? more aggressive? Ms. Battaglia says some communities referenced are the most well-known, Cambridge and Somerville; bit more aggressive. We are aware we don't have the same market as these. Councilor Stewart says from a practical standpoint there is very little parking along West Wyoming/Berwick and that could be significantly impacted, particularly in a mixed use make-up. How will that be addressed? Ms. Gaffey explains the current requirement which is one parking space per unit is not changing. The existing provision that allows for reduction or shared parking has never been used by a developer yet. The location referenced is a transit rich location and there is opportunity for market savvy/mission driven developers to target residents who don't need cars.

Councilor Eccles asks how the affordable housing incentive works in conjunction with this proposal and whether anyone has been granted a variance for less than one parking spot per unit. Ms. Gaffey explains affordable housing is a requirement of projects with 5 or more units versus the incentive zoning discretionary tool. Developers can always ask for a variance. Councilor Eccles asks about building inspector involvement in approval.

Councilor Garipay questions the current projects before the ZBA for variances; have they weighed in on the changes? Ms. Gaffey says they were sent the proposal but OPD has not received feedback. Ms. Massa notes applicants go through a two-phased process and hopefully this simplifies / streamlines efforts. Councilor Garipay asks about provisional minimums to receive incentive zoning approval. Ms. Gaffey says there are threshold minimums. Chair Sampson notes the analysis also demonstrates the value of the benefits provided by the developer to the community. Councilor Garipay references the proposed mapping area and noticed the expansion stopped at the municipal lot next to the Caruso

building; any thought on extending the area to include the one block of four properties. Ms. Gaffey says they can take a closer look when reporting back.

Councilor MacMaster has a general incentive zoning question; is there a reason why the lower Washington street corridor area was not considered for this zoning? Ms. Gaffey says the targeted area was the station area and downtown locations as the tool works for these locations. For other areas we'd have to take a different approach to the overlay. Chair Sampson says they would be happy to add this area to the to-do list. Councilor MacMaster asks about stakeholder engagement. Beyond the subcommittee meeting, was there other stakeholder engagement outreach, specifically to the Historical Commission, Energy Commission, Zero/Waste Melrose, Melrose Affordable Housing Co-op. Ms. Gaffey mentions that generally zoning is afforded the public hearing process; OPD received some unsolicited energy commission feedback and some bicycle advocate feedback. Chair Sampson adds as part of the housing production planning they did receive input on incentive zoning.

Councilor Migliorelli looks to clarify the public input process - going forward are there other opportunity for members to weigh in? Ms. Gaffey explains the order remains with the council for 90 days after the public hearing. Within the 90 days the Council can accept all input/comments. The planning board will summarize the comments and any recommend changes into a report for the Council. Councilor Migliorelli says zoning is a powerful tool to shape our environment; good way to revitalize. Looking ahead, could we incorporate some additional sustainability requirements and some higher inclusionary provisions for affordable housing?

Councilor Jamaledine asks for timeline regarding the proposal and when we can expect to see some of the changes happen in the locations. We should see more residents - will we see safety accommodations for families and residents? Ms. Gaffey says it depends on the approved proposed development plans; she does expect to see a range of housing units with accommodations.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Planning Board is scheduled for Monday, May 24, 2021.