

24-033
PLANNING AND PERMITTING COMMITTEE
MEETING REPORT
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024 @ 6:00 P.M.

Attendees: Council Vice President Kit Collins, Committee Chair; Councillor Matt Leming, Committee Vice-Chair; Council President Isaac “Zac” Bears; Councillor Anna Callahan; Councillor George Scarpelli; Councillor Emily Lazzaro (non-voting); City Clerk Adam Hurtubise; zoning consultant Emily Innes; Alicia Hunt, Director of Planning, Development, and Sustainability; Building Commissioner Scott Vandewalle; other participants as noted in the body of this report.

Vice-Chair Leming called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. on March 13, 2024 in the Medford City Council Chambers on the second floor of Medford City Hall and via Zoom. The purpose of the meeting was to address upcoming zoning ordinance updates with the Innes Associates team.

Vice-Chair Leming thanked participants for attending.

Vice President Collins said that this is an important day because the Council has been advocating this zoning reform effort for several terms. She gave an overview of work to be done in committee and also be the Council.

Ms. Innes thanked the Committee and said she is excited to be working with the Council on this project. She introduced her team, and also introduced Attorney Jonathan Silverstain, from Blatman, Bobrowski, Haverty, & Silverstein, LLC. She worked through a rough timeline for the first year of the project. She said it would take two fiscal years, with the first year ending June 30, 2024 and the second ending June 30, 2025. She said she would be soliciting planning staff recommendations and recommendations from the ZBA, CD Board, and Building Department this fiscal year. She laid out a variety of potential meeting topics, meeting twice per month through June.

President Bears gave some context to the timeline. He said he hears from everyone that we need more economic development and business growth. He said it is one of the pillars of this project and it is a pillar of the work of this Council. He said it is smart to set a June 30, 2025 goal for the project, and he said that also gives the Council the last six months of the term. He said that this is a really strong start.

Councillor Callahan said she is excited to be working on this. Vice President Collins said one great use of our time would be to make this concrete for ourselves. She said we have a lot we are trying to do by the end of June, 2025.

President Bears said he would like to hear from planning staff and the Building Commissioner. Director Hunt said that the Planning staff has been compiling a list of things that are inconsistent, unclear, or have unintended consequences. She said she

shared this with Ms. Innes and with President Bears and Vice President Collins, and also shared it with the Mayor. She said some of these things are simple, some are language, some are unintended and just need to be fixed and cleaned up. She said that there are a lot of interesting old uses. She said that there are two definitions for restaurants: eating establishments and eating establishments with drive-through. She said we might want to consider different rules for coffee shops and fast food. She said she would like to be able to make this more flexible for businesses. She said the use table predates the recodification. She explained dimensions for various zoning districts. She said we don't have all the solutions right now.

Director Hunt said that in order to change the zoning, there needs to be a couple of public hearings. The exact language to be changed has to go before the Council, be referred to the Community Development Board for a public hearing, and then the CD Board has to make recommendations to the Council for another public hearing. She said that she is working with the Donoghue Institute at UMass Amherst. She said that there is also a Climate Policy Planner onboard.

Commissioner Vandewalle said that zoning is a daily issue in his office. He said his team understands the minutiae of it and the enforcement of it. He said he enjoys zoning. He said he looks forward to working on this.

Councillor Callahan said that folks working from home would appreciate having a mini office space or micro office available near their homes, perhaps combined with a coffee shop or lunch place.

Vice-Chair Leming asked about projects brought forth by individual Councillors such as auxiliary dwelling units. Director Hunt said that if items clearly fit in zoning, we should move items through staff members.

President Bears said that we need input from a lot of people. He said people should communicate back through Director Hunt and through Danielle Evans in PDS. He said he would be making motions to send items to PDS and the Building Department. He said that this is similar to the way the Council worked with Attorney Mark Bobrowski on the zoning recodification. She said she gets a lot of requests for people who want to turn their homes into two-family houses.

President Bears said that a lot of these areas are coming from extensive planning process with a great deal of public input. He said that there are several plans over several decades for Medford Square. He said we are outlining an extensive public process with dozens of meetings ahead, on top of dozens if not hundreds of prior public meetings. He said that this is the culmination of extensive engagement in this community.

Director Hunt said that these plans are available on the City's website.

Ms. Innes discussed the Comprehensive Plan, which includes land use and zoning. She said that this very much is a public process.

Councillor Scarpelli said that he thinks the most important thing is community input and community-based meetings.

Vice President Collins said she appreciates Councillor Scarpelli's thoughts and said she thinks it might be appropriate to have Committee of the Whole meetings on these topics. She said ideas from community members should be put into our zoning ordinances. She said that there will be additional meetings on this on April 10 and 24, and it would be great to have a better idea for the 10th to have an idea of what some of the smaller tweaks to the zoning ordinance would be, and she said she would support a motion to have committee members submit ideas on this to PDS.

Councillor Callahan said it would be helpful to see the list of minor changes that have been asked for by the Zoning Board. Director Hunt said that it is messy and it has commentary on it. She said she could send the list to Councillors and they could bring comments to a public meeting rather than commenting on a shared document.

President Bears said that community meetings should involve not just the major squares and corridors. He said that this is a great way to continue to be out in the community. He said we have occasionally been able to have on-site meetings.

Patty Caya, 1 Monument Street, said she would like to be here to advocate for the Council and consultants to have in mind that ease of consumption is critical to facilitating public participation. She said she would like to see the old documents and the proposed changes side by side. She said ease of access is important for public participation. Vice-Chair Leming said he fully agrees on the transparency goals.

President Bears said we could look at some of the climate resiliency items for the April 24 meeting.

Vice President Collins said that there are several options here. She said she would like to have a more granular discussion on the tenth of April. She said she thinks we could be ambitious on this and perhaps begin speaking about some of this on the 10th.

President Bears moved to request that the Building Commissioner, the Chair of the Zoning Board of Appeals, and Chair of the Community Development Board submit comments on issues they are seeing with the Zoning Ordinance and any proposed amendments they would like to see by Friday, April 5 to Director Hunt and Vice President Collins (Councillor Callahan second)—approved on a roll call vote of five in favor and zero opposed.

President Bears moved to have Councillors submit policy issues that they would like to see addressed under each major topic area for the zoning project included in the presentation by Innes Associates by Friday, April 5 to Director Hunt and Vice President

Collins (Councillor Callahan second)—approved on a roll call vote of five in favor and zero opposed.

Vice President Collins thanked Innes Associates. She said she looks forward to working with that team on a lot of public meetings moving forward.

Vice President Collins moved to keep the paper in committee, and to adjourn, at 7:06 p.m. (Councillor Callahan second)--approved on a roll call vote of five in favor and zero opposed.

Vice-Chair Leming adjourned the meeting at 7:06 p.m.