

24-033
PLANNING AND PERMITTING COMMITTEE
MEETING REPORT
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2025 @ 6:00 P.M.

Attendees: Kit Collins, Council Vice President; Council President Isaac “Zac” Bears; Councillor Anna Callahan; Councillor Matt Leming; Councillor George Scarpelli; City Councillor Emily Lazzaro (non-voting Member); Clerk Adam Hurtubise; Alicia Hunt, Director of Planning, Development, and Sustainability; Senior Planner Danielle Evans; Emily Innes, Innes Associates; Paula Ramos Martinez, Innes Associates; other participants as noted in the body of this report.

Vice President Collins called the meeting to order on January 29, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. in the Medford City Council Chamber and via Zoom. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss zoning updates with the Innes Associates team (Paper **24-033**).

Vice President Collins thanked participants for attending. She said that this would be a multi-topic meeting. She said that there have been calls from members of the Council and from the community to enhance our messaging strategy.

Councillor Callahan arrived at 6:03 p.m.

Vice President Collins said that there would be a short briefing on a neighborhood residential proposal.

Ms. Innes said she would run through changes to the timeline. She said we are continuing to look at neighborhood and residential throughout February and into March. She said we would look at Wellington in May. She said we are going to talk about Green score at the CD Board Meeting next week. She said that she would request that Salem Street be continued to March 5. She said we are going to start grouping some of the topics so that they go together to the CD Board. She said we would also like to discuss the idea of an additional public comment period. She said we are looking at February 10 for a community meeting for a presentation. She said she would like to break down some of these topics into brief videos so that people can engage with the topics on their own time. She said she is suggesting five now. She said that the Green Score is not something that people have had a chance to hear yet.

Ms. Innes said that there would be a new public meeting on February 10.

Vice President Collins thanked Ms. Innes and her team. She said she got confirmation that the public Q&A would be at the Roberts Elementary School on February 10 at 6:30.

Councillor Scarpelli said that we are seeing what people said years ago in bringing these meetings to the neighborhood. He said he thinks we need to take a more proactive approach in regard to other zoning as well. He said residents have questions

and some of these questions could have been answered at the beginning. He said we can see that by the Mayor's letter that she is now going to involve her communications team. He said that these are questions that are simple to answer. He said that these are questions about understanding what people can access. He said when we first started the recodification the biggest thing was beefing up the RFP so that residents can be part of the process. He said he wants us to be more proactive and move these meetings into the neighborhoods. He said he has heard that there are neighborhood coalitions that are starting. He said he is getting e-mails from residents who feel that they are not being heard by our Council. He said that the Council Vice President has done yeoman's work in getting these meetings in order.

Vice President Collins said she agrees with a lot of what Councillor Scarpelli said. She said she is heartened to see that Innes has been working to schedule the public Q&A for this process.

President Bears thanked Vice President Collins. He said that this is a continuation of the comprehensive plan process from 2023. He said that the free market only works if everyone has perfect information. He said one of the first lessons we learn in economics is that this is impossible, and that's why we have rules and regulations and laws and processes. He said he thinks we have been incredibly responsive in hearing from residents. He said we've adjusted the process to try to answer more questions and get more information out there. He said we are under-staffed and under-resourced. He said we are working very diligently and he appreciates Vice President Collins's leadership.

Vice President Collins said that in the previous meeting there was a motion to involve the Mayor's Office and the Communications Office to reach out and involve people more effectively. She said we are working collaboratively with the Communications team and that the zoning page on the City website is a bit difficult to navigate. She said that this is not a criticism of Planning or of Communications, but it is more the function of being an under-resourced city with a two-person communication team. She said that this is a city-wide zoning review. She said that a neighborhood residential proposal would come after Salem Street.

Councillor Callahan said she is very excited that we will have meetings about zoning that are not in this room. She said she gets that we are under-resourced but she appreciates Councillor Scarpelli's push for us to do more to get information out to people. She said it has been close to 40 years since we have had zoning changes. She said deciding to not change anything is a decision. She said things change in the world. She said she has personally talked to many people who have been wanting a lot of the changes. She said that while change is hard, zoning needs to be updated. She said a lot of things we are doing is bringing things to the current non-conforming structures that exist. She requested that in some of our educational materials, it would be important for people to be able to see what the old zoning says, what currently exists and is non-conforming, and what the new zoning says.

Vice President Collins said that a slight downshifting was recommended. She said that triple deckers are not proposed for Lawrence Estates.

Ms. Innes said that she appreciates Councillor Callahan's comment about making this more visual and more graphic. She said that has been part of her internal conversations as well. She said that the support there from all parties involved, to add more public engagement, is something that we were all thinking about.

Ms. Ramos Martinez said that we are doing the implementation to zoning that comes from what was identified and published in the comprehensive plan that is available for everyone and published in January of 2023. She said we refer to this plan as the vision plan. She said we are trying to make it more concrete to see those densities and those boundaries. She said we are now working on residential. She outlined the zones. She said we have looked into the mixed-use districts or the non-exclusive residential districts. She said what we are doing is a more city-wide strategy. She said we want to look at what exists there right now. She said this helps us to look at what the density is in this district. She said we took considerations into account while looking at these districts. We looked at proximity to transit, lot sizes, topography, and more transition between these low, medium, and high density areas. She said that this proposal was amended by the Council in the last Planning and Permitting Committee meeting. She said we took all the considerations back into the studio. She said we asked what is the current zoning district and what happens when we underlay the existing residential types. She said we took this into consideration and we came up with a new proposal. She detailed the breakdowns of the proposed new neighborhood residential. She said we wanted to bring forward this new proposal and then give time to process this.

Ms. Innes said we appreciated the guidance the Council gave us last time. She said she wants to make sure that we are not unintentionally downgrading what's already there.

Vice President Collins said that there are a lot of goals in re-evaluating our zoning. She said one is looking at where we can have more density and another is to look at where we have a lot of non-conforming lots.

President Bears said he thinks this map is incredibly insightful. He said it gives us the picture, it shows citywide, it shows where corridors and squares are. He said he had some thoughts on these boundaries. He said we need to look at what some design and performance standards look like for three stories. He said he thinks we can be artful in what a third story looks like.

Vice President Collins said that this map is very helpful and she said she feels strongly that we should be downzoning nowhere in the City. She said we are talking about neighborhoods where there are single-family, two-family, and condo conversion. She said she is thinking of this as a 30-year map, not a next-year map. She said that there are a lot of places in the City where she would like to see two-family and three-family residential.

President Bears said that one thing worth noting is that on some of the Wellington district, south of the UR-1, it might be worth labeling some of the larger condos as nine-plus units, rather than condo conversion.

Ms. Innes said that the underlying data does come from the City Assessor's database.

Ms. Ramos Martinez said that the historic conversion is the same as last time, the conversion of an existing structure that was designed for one use, at a minimum of 70 years old, that was originally designed for one-unit use, to be converted into a multi-unit dwelling. She said that the goal is to preserve the cultural heritage and to increase the density citywide in small increments and to enable smaller and more diverse housing options. She said that the current dimensional standards are done by use and not by district. She detailed the dimensional standards. She said that the dimensions had a range of less than 3,000 in lot size to plus 10,000 square feet.

Ms. Innes said that the standards could help address existing non-conforming structures or lots. She said that it's important to understand that all dimensional standards work together.

Vice President Collins asked for some additional structures to be displayed in the diagrams. President Bears said some design standards such as what a three-story structure might look like would be helpful. He asked if there was any utility to potentially having different processes.

Ms. Innes said we are looking at buildings that are two and a half stories tall and there are variations between buildings as to what is two and a half stories. She said she previously worked on a project in Arlington. She said that we needed to have a little bit of an internal conversation to make sure we were set on boundaries.

President Bears said NR2 for the third story might be a solution. President Bears asked if the Council passed a tiered site plan review. Ms. Innes said we are still coordinating with Attorney Silverstein on this. She said we've looked at it but she doesn't think we've fully passed it at this point.

Councillor Callahan said that in the amended proposal, there is a part of the northern part of West Medford, that even in the before amended proposal one, was amended to be a larger portion. She said that there are no two-unit dwellings there. She said she wants us to be careful. She asked if we could roll back the discussion of the northern West Medford part.

President Bears said that there were discussions about lot size and parking availability. He said that there may be some spots at the north end of Grove Street, an out-down. He said that he tends to think that the district should probably be two districts.

Vice President Collins said that we are going to be considering these sub-districts in our next meeting on this topic.

Ms. Innes said that this is an iterative process, back and forth. She said a lot of what we're looking at is what's existing, but also proximity to public transit. She said we are more than happy to look at edge lines and boundary lines.

Councillor Callahan asked if there are any objections to the very northernmost part of West Medford up Grove Street that the furthest north part be residential 1.

Vice President Collins said that while we are talking about sub-district boundaries, there is a dog-leg of NR 2 south of Boston Ave. She said she's also curious about what Somerville zoning borders that area. President Bears said it is NR3 everywhere.

Councillor Scarpelli said he doesn't want to get too far away from what has been said. He shared a message that said that it was appreciated that there was clarification that there would be no vote. Vice President Collins said we are not taking any votes tonight and this paper is not going out of committee tonight. She thanked Councillor Scarpelli for clarifying this.

President Bears said that for him, the NR3 district, almost right in the center of the map on the west side of Forest Street, he said he would be more comfortable seeing that as an NR2.

Vice President Collins said that our main step at this point is to be considering these sub district boundaries, and that there will then be an evolved version of this map. Ms. Ramos Martinez said that we are not looking at just today, but also the next 5, 10, 15, and 20 years. She said we will continue to look into this parcel by parcel.

Ms. Innes said the concerns and frustrations about zoning are that it never happens as quickly as people think it's going to happen. She said we do want to have a public meeting with these maps.

Vice President Collins said that we can expect to see an updated version of this proposal in two weeks and we would also have additional discussions.

Gaston Fiore, 61 Stickney Road, said that he agrees with Councillor Callahan's change of Northwest Medford from NR2 to NR1. He said he thinks the same treatment could be applied to Lawrence Estates south of Lawrence Road. He said he would encourage the planners and the Councillors to re-look at the NR2 portion. He made additional comments about the map. He said he would encourage people to raise their concerns.

President Bears said that this is the square box that he was suggesting should not be marked as NR3.

William Navarre, 108 Medford Street #1B, said he wanted to talk about replacing max building covering with max building plus parking. He said that if the goal of this is to protect the environment, we could have incentives to encourage less parking or underground parking. He discussed duplexes and other housing options. He said you could image a super-historical conversion where maybe you're allowed to make modifications on the back or something.

Michael Cabral, 11 Jackson Road, said he is also a land use and zoning attorney who appears before Medford boards from time to time. He discussed the boundaries and asked the Council to consider some changes. He said that what matters here is getting into the dimensional controls. He said he is hoping that part of the goal is to relieve owners and developers from having to go before the zoning board looking for variances to go before zoning or community development. He said the historical conversion may need a tweak to allow some minor modifications.

Ren Bean, 37 Woodrow Avenue, said he agreed with what was just said about a central place to find all these changes rather than materials for a particular meeting. He asked for an accompanying table showing the maximum amount of change. He said people are assuming a scope of change much greater than what is being proposed. He said that this proposal is generally great and thoughtful.

Ms. Innes said we are looking at frontage but we are focusing on some of the other dimensional standards.

Vice President Collins said that the next meeting would be February 12. She detailed additional upcoming meetings.

President Bears moved to adjourn at 7:48 p.m. (Councillor Callahan second)—adjourned.

Vice President Collins adjourned the meeting at 7:48 p.m.