



Zoning & Planning Committee **Report**

City of Newton **In City Council**

Tuesday, May 19, 2020

Present: Councilors Crossley (Chair), Danberg, Albright, Leary, Wright, Ryan, Krintzman, and Baker
Also Present: Councilors Kelley, Markiewicz, Kelley, Bowman, Laredo, Greenberg, Downs, Gentile, Malakie, and Humphrey

Planning Board: Peter Doeringer (Chair), Jennifer Molinsky, Sonia Parisca, Sudha Maheshwari, Kevin McCormick, and Kelley Brown

City Staff: Jennifer Steel, Senior Environmental Planner; John Lojek, Inspectional Service Commissioner; Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development; Gabriel Holbrow, Community Engagement Specialist; Zachery LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning; Claire Rundelli, Assistant Environmental Planner; Jini Fairley, ADA Coordinator; Andrew Lee, Assistant City Solicitor; Luis Perez Demorizi, Open Space Coordinator; Katy Hax Holmes, Chief Preservation Officer; Nathan Giacalone, Committee Clerk

#178-20

Discussion of Implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan Update

DIRECTOR OF PLANNING requesting discussion of the 2020-2027 Open Space and Recreation Plan, a letter stating that the Zoning and Planning Committee reviewed the Plan, and adoption of the plan as an amendment to the 2007 Comprehensive Plan.

The Zoning & Planning Committee split item #178-20 into three parts:

- 1. Send a letter to the State that it has reviewed the Open Space and Recreation Plan, Approved 8-0**
- 2. Adopt the Open Space and Recreation Plan as an amendment to the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, Held 8-0**
- 3. Further discussion on implementation for the 2020-2027 Open Space and Recreation Plan, Held 8-0**

Notes: Chair Crossley introduced the item, saying that the Zoning and Planning Committee has been asked to submit a letter saying that they reviewed the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), the only step the state requires of the Committee. She recommended that this would be voted on as #178-20(1). She further recommended that adoption of the OSRP as an amendment to the City's 2007 Comprehensive Plan be voted on as #178-20(2). The Council's decision is not related to grant funding eligibility from the state.

Ms. Steel clarified that the state does not require a letter of approval from City Council in order to conduct its review of Newton's OSRP. The state requires letters of review from the Mayor, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and the Planning & Development Board (P&D Board). A letter of support from the full Council would be helpful but is not required in order to receive state approval. The Zoning and Planning Committee may recommend to the full Council a letter from the Council stating that it has reviewed the OSRP and recommends the state approve it. State approval is necessary to make the city eligible for grant funding. Ms. Steel further explained that once the state approves the plan, it is not involved in any way in the implementation of the OSRP.

In response to comments received, Ms. Steel explained that the OSRP is designed to be a "living document" and that implementation will need to adapt to meet Newton's changing open space needs. The present draft includes stronger language linking open space to public health. Another stated priority is that the OSRP works in conjunction with goals set forth in other City plans such as the Climate Action Plan (CAP) and the Climate Vulnerability Plan. Public comments received have ranged from an emphasis on improving maintenance and field upkeep, an expanded role for Friends' groups, and suggestions for additional projects. Ms. Steel said that all public comments have been reviewed and will be acknowledged within the plan but emphasized that the implementation phase is where priorities will be set and implementation strategies formed.

A summary of public comments received as detailed in Ms. Steel's memo is attached to this report.

Ms. Steel's memo also addresses how the final OSRP will address three issues raised at the previous ZAP meeting, which she also summarized as follows:

Implementation Team:

Ms. Steel said that Newton has adopted many Open Space Plans over decades but has never had a team dedicated to their implementation. The CAP's Implementation team has proven successful in transforming its goals into results. The CAP implementation is led by city staff members who are responsible for ensuring that the CAP goals are being met. The CAP implementation team is composed of city staff who create working groups with stakeholders from the community to undertake individual efforts. The OSRP Implementation Team will imitate this model.

Prioritization:

Ms. Steel said that prioritization of individual actions, will be determined through the strategic implementation process. She explained that under normal circumstances, looking ahead seven years is challenging and that the COVID-19 pandemic has added extra uncertainty to which the Implementation Team will have to adapt.

Efficient Management:

Ms. Steel said that she has been studying the issue of coordination between the Conservation Commission and Parks, Recreation and Culture (PRC) which has been raised over the years and appears in past OSRPs. Rather than having a planned outcome, Ms. Steel said the OSRP notes that periodic

conversations between Conservation and the PRC are needed to ensure that the most efficient management structures and practices are being followed.

Committee member and Councilor questions, answers, and comments are as follows:

Q: When will the OSRP be submitted the state?

A: Conservation and PRC are going to meet on May 22nd and May 29th (if needed) to finish reviewing public comment and coordinate final edits to the current version of the OSRP. Once the OSRP maps are completed (with an estimated date on those for May 29th), the draft will be ready to be submitted to the state.

Q: What is the best way to design the Implementation Group?

A: Based on prior conversations in Committee, public comment, and input from the Mayor's Office, the best approach has been determined to be a staff-based team.

C: The OSRP can be a significant benefit for Newton. This was demonstrated recently as the then-current OSRP was used to help justify acquisition of the Webster Woods parcel and other trail maintenance expenses.

Q: As the P&D Board has discussed the OSRP, it has further questions on the role of neighborhood groups and more aggressive strategies to expand open space. What is the best way and time schedule and time frame for the P&D Board to get its comments on the OSRP to the drafting committee?

A: If Councilors or P&D Board members still have comments, they can email them as soon as possible to either Ms. Steel or Ms. Rundelli. The public comment period is closed as staff members need time to incorporate the changes. The P&D Board can share these comments with Ms. Rundelli as they move to the Zoom breakout room later in this meeting.

Q: With the current OSRP expiring at the end of May, is there any way to extend the existing plan to cover any gap in funding eligibility?

A: No, the current plan cannot be extended. However, the next grant deadline is not until July. Provided there is swift conditional approval from the state this will not impact Newton's grant eligibility.

Q: Are there any pending applications for private conservation grants?

A: No

Q: How does the OSRP address public/private partnerships?

A: It supports expansion of such partnerships.

C: The extent of invasive species present in Newton's open spaces, as well as stormwater management, are two worrying issues that should be addressed.

A: The Conservation Office and PRC are aware of this. There are efforts underway to address both. More education on invasive species will help support greater removal of them. Invasive species

education is not specifically addressed in the OSRP, but ecological health and trail maintenance are addressed, and so invasive species removal will be addressed.

The Committee divided item #178-20 into subsections: 1) Recommending the City Council send a letter to the state stating that it has reviewed the OSRP; 2) to consider adoption of the OSRP as an amendment to the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, and 3) to discuss how to structure the implementation team.

Note: The P&D Board voted 6-0 in favor to submit a letter of review and support for the OSRP to the state. Their letter is attached to this report.

The Zoning and Planning Committee voted 8-0 to approve #178-20(1) and 8-0 to hold items #178-20(2) and #178-20(3)

The meeting adjourned at 10:40 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Deborah J. Crossley, Chair