

Stoneham Override Study Committee

Date:	August 11, 2025
Time:	5p
Location:	Stoneham Central Middle School Media Center
Present:	Joe Joffe – Chair Stephen Ternullo – Vice Chair Nick Stavre, Jackie Mahoney, Brendan Dowdle, Eric Scruggs, Heidi Bilbo
Absent:	Cory Mashburn
Guests:	Dennis Sheehan – Town Administrator, Cheryl Kozlowski – Director of Assessing, Nicholas Coscia – Assessor’s Administrative Assistant, Erin Wortman – Director of Planning & Community Development

	<p><u>AGENDA</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approval of Minutes from previous meetings - Vote Required 2. Stoneham Assessor's Office Presentation and Discussion 3. Director of Planning and Community Development Presentation and Discussion 4. Structure of the Report- review initial written section and feedback 5. Upcoming meetings 6. Other business - Non-Deliberative 7. Adjournment - Vote Required

1.	<p>Approval of Minutes from previous meeting - Vote Required</p> <p>There were no prior notes to review or approve.</p>	No votes needed
2.	<p>Stoneham Assessor's Office Presentation and Discussion</p> <p>Cheryl Kozlowski and Nicholas Coscia presented information about departmental staffing, demand for services, and budgetary data.</p> <p>Some highlights were:</p>	No votes needed

- There was a review of currently offered property tax exemptions including qualification requirements and exemption amounts.
- It was clarified that available exemptions, qualification requirements, and benefit amounts are determined by the state.
- There are optional exemptions that can increase exemption amounts by up to double the current amount. These optional exemptions would need to be voted on at Town Meeting to be put into place. Optional exemption costs would need to be absorbed by the town, as they would not be reimbursed by the state.
- Out of roughly 8,000 taxable parcels in town, there are approximately 200 parcels that have an exemption for a total of \$50,000 in exemptions (this amount is reimbursed by the state).
- The committee reviewed how new growth is calculated each year by reviewing data from the developments at 95 Maple St. and 164 Franklin St.
 - During construction, valuations are done based on percent completion and the cost of the project. For apartment buildings, once construction is complete, valuation is done based on income and expense data.
- There was also discussion that apartment buildings may run as a commercial business but are required to be taxed at the residential tax rate. Any changes to this would require state approval, which would take time and money to pursue changes with no certainty as to the outcome of that effort.
- Some current and future new construction was reviewed to gain an understanding of potential new growth items for the next few years. Other than the Woodland Rd. (Old Hospital Site) project, it was noted that known new construction is relatively small.
 - It was discussed that, over the next few years, new growth would likely be in line with recent years at roughly \$300k - \$500k with one potentially larger year of new growth as a result of the Woodland Rd. project (assuming the project gets off the ground).
- The committee reviewed data on average single-family tax bills and Commercial and Industrial Property (CIP) shift for Stoneham and several other communities.
 - Stoneham currently has a 1.75 CIP shift, the most allowed, to shift the tax base towards CIP properties and reduce the taxes paid by residential property owners.
 - It was noted that Stoneham is towards the bottom of the selected communities in terms of average residential property tax bill (in dollar terms).
- Data for the top 10 taxpayers was also reviewed.
- It was noted that the Assessor's office only has a staff of 2 people, augmented by some outside support.
- Mr. Ternullo provided some data from the Division of Local Services and there was a discussion of property value assessments including the process for assessment and the impact of assessed values on tax bills.
- It was discussed that new growth is residential and there is minimal new commercial growth.

<p>3.</p>	<p>Director of Planning and Community Development Presentation and Discussion</p> <p>Erin Wortman presented information about departmental responsibilities, demand for services, and budgetary data.</p> <p>Some highlights were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The department covers land use zoning, community development, transportation and mobility, and energy and sustainability. ● The department has only one staff member and a budget of \$172k, while similar communities' departments have staffs of 5-6 people and budgets that range from \$400k-\$800k. ● The department helps businesses determine areas where they could operate and real estate owners determine what types of business could use their real estate. ● There was a discussion of town-led initiatives including commercial improvement programs, tax increment financing, the Stoneham Shuttle, downtown parking study, zoning recodification, and downtown redesign. ● Tax increment financing (TIF) was used to help redevelop an area in Stoneham center to facilitate redevelopment and new growth. ● Stoneham received \$700k to help start and operate the Stoneham Shuttle, which has provided over 5,000 rides since January 22, 2025 to town residents and/or town businesses (service limited to a geographic area). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The grant is designed to fund the program for 3 years. Once the grant period is over, the cost will be \$330k/year to continue to operate the program. ○ The goal is that after the pilot program, the town may be able to get funding from local businesses (including advertising) or charge small fees for the rides to offset some or all of the cost of the program. ○ Shuttles are owned and operated by Circuit. ● The Town's current zoning code is outdated and a recodification recommendation is underway to facilitate ensuring Stoneham's zoning code reflects who we want to be and what types of business we want to attract. ● Stoneham recently received a grant to assist with funding a redesigned intersection in downtown Stoneham which reflects several improvements to enhance walkability and lighting. ● There was a review of a potential new bylaw regarding vacant storefronts in town to encourage filling the space. ● The committee discussed potential areas where additional staff would be helpful including additional economic development initiatives, applying for additional grants to support the town, its residents, and its businesses, and using available data to help drive decision making. ● Ms. Wortman has been able to successfully win grants in excess of \$8M+ in her time with the town in this position. 	<p>No votes needed</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was a discussion regarding how the town collaborates with the business community to attempt to be responsive to their needs and requests to facilitate business development and growth. 	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Structure of the Report- review initial written section and feedback</p> <p>The committee discussed the overall structure of the report along with how to initiate the writing process.</p> <p>Some highlights were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The committee reviewed draft summaries of town departments written by Mr. Joffe. The committee agreed on a shorter form summary for each department. There was a discussion of including a section for potential efficiencies that could be implemented by each department including any necessary initial investments required for long-term cost savings. The group then developed smaller working groups to draft initial summaries for town departments. The committee reviewed how to write the report with both the Select Board and town residents in mind. There was a review of how to comply with open meeting rules while operating in writing groups. 	<p>No votes needed</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Upcoming meetings</p> <p>The committee discussed agenda items, speakers, and topics for upcoming meetings.</p>	<p>No votes needed</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Other business – Non-Deliberative</p>	<p>No votes needed</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Adjournment - Vote Required</p>	<p>Mr. Ternullo then introduced a motion to adjourn; Mr. Dowdle seconded; all in favor.</p>