



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
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MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, January 8, 2014 7:30 AM
Charles River Room PSAB

Present: Matt Talcoff, Chair; Bruce Herman; Tom Jacob; Marty Jacobs; Bob Hentschel; Michael Wilcox; Elizabeth Grimes; Bill Day; and Devra Bailin, staff
Not Present: Glen Cammarano; Moe Handel; Janet O'Connor; Damon Borrelli; Matt Borrelli; and Brian Nadler
Also Present: Rick Putprush; Denise Garlick

I. Approval of Minutes

The members approved the minutes for the meeting of December 4, 2013.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting and Hearing Dates

Our next meeting will be on February 5th. Our future meetings will continue to be held on the first Wednesday of each month, unless it is a holiday. All meetings will be in the Charles River Room at PSAB.

III. Update on Mixed Use-128 Residential Overlay

No update was available.

IV. Update on Home Rule Petition for Restaurants with Less Than 100 Seats

No update was available.

V. Update on Babson Marketing Study/Plan

Devra explained that the MCFE students made their final presentation on December 13th. Devra explained that the consensus is that the students did an excellent job. She apologized for the fact that the final report is still out being printed. She indicated that she is looking to file a second application to seek greater specificity on how to achieve the niche identified by the students. The Subcommittee was comfortable with the draft prepared. Devra also noted that the presentation was videotaped but she has not yet received a copy. Marty asked whether restaurants are having financial problems like the retailers. Devra indicated that some are doing very well but others are just hanging on. Marty asked

whether the focus of the students on technology is really what is needed. Devra indicated that the merchants are very concerned about the aging of their clientele and that younger consumers (25-40) are going online or to regional shopping areas and not shopping locally. Bill and Liz agreed. Rick suggested that he had contacts in the commercial real estate business who focus on small downtowns. He will provide Devra with contact information so she can talk with them about trends in downtown development and provide ideas about the kinds of stores we need to attract to create an inviting environment.

VI. Update on Needham Crossing Work

Devra has been in touch with Mike Panagako about finalizing the branding work. He will be working on signage, taglines, and gateway identification for us. Mike noted that there are four signs identifying the New England Business Center with maps; each carries the name of its sponsor. He wondered who put these up and can we reface them with Needham Crossing logo etc. Matt believes these were the result of committee work with Jack Cogswell. Devra will contact Mark Gluesing and find out if the signs were permitted (or put up by the Town as directional) and how we go about refacing them.

VII. Discussion on the Medical Marijuana Overlay District

Before the Subcommittee began discussion of the addition of a portion of Highland Commercial-128 to the proposed medical marijuana overlay district, Marty and Liz explained that the hearing date has changed from January 21st to February 4th. It is the first item on the Board's Agenda. The two Planning Board members did not participate in the discussion of whether the CEA should take a position and, if so, what position; nor did they vote on the matter. Devra noted that she had taken the liberty of preparing a draft of the CEA position. The members discussed the addition of this area at the Planning Board hearing to be included in the overlay and approved the draft opposing the inclusion. Devra will ascertain whether the Board of Selectmen approves of the CEA taking a position and, if so, whether they want that position to be forwarded to them or directly to the Planning Board. [Devra was advised by Town Manager to send it directly to the Planning Board.] It was noted that certain members of the CEA will be attending the Planning Board hearing to voice their opposition, including Bulfinch Companies which owns 50 Cabot Street, which is adjacent to the proposed location. Rick noted the positions taken by other communities. It was pointed out that a sensitive area map has been prepared which may rule out other areas presently in the overlay proposal being advertised.

VIII. Update from Downtown Streetscape Working Group

Tom explained that the group is targeting a February presentation to the BOS. In order to meet that deadline, the Group is next meeting on January 15th from 8:00-10:00 a.m. in the Charles River Room. Parking remains the biggest issue, especially the loss of on-street parking spaces necessitated by the proposed roadway improvements. The number of spaces being lost on-street has been reduced to three at each end of Great Plain. He noted that the plan proposes wider sidewalks on the Theater Block and a few parklets for seating (probably for takeout food uses). It was noted that HP parking will be created on Great Plain in front of the Town Common. Devra circulated the latest set of drawings. There was discussion again of the need to open the Garden Street lot to public parking, especially for the merchants along the Michelson's block. It was discussed that 10-20 permit spaces should be designated

public and the additional permit parking put in the Lincoln Street lot. It was agreed that public parking needs better signage. There should be gateway signage as one enters the Center (from either end of Great Plain and Highland/Chapel/Chestnut/Dedham Avenue. Tom explained that they are looking to create kiosks in the parking lots and on the Common to let people know where things are. There are also discussions with the Church to allow direct access from the Chestnut Street lot to Great Plain/Dedham Avenue, which seem to be possible now that the shrubs have been removed. There was also discussion of the Chapel Street poles (need to underground) and plowing of entire area (and not into store backs). It was noted that the dumpster consolidation proposal is before the Town. Although the timing of the work (and where it will start) is not clear, the funding source is Chapter 91 funds. Presently the Town has put aside around \$2 million to get the project underway.

Tom also mentioned that there is a proposal to increase the parking meter fees and members questioned the rationale; was there a causal relationship between increased meter fees and length of time at the meter? Apparently, it was being proposed at least in part based on the argument that an increase in fees would result in higher turnover, but the members were skeptical. Perhaps it made more sense to improve enforcement of the two-hour maximum? And if employee parking is the issue, increasing fees by 25 cents an hour doesn't seem to be the solution.

IX. Update on Industrial District Subcommittee

Devra noted that the Subcommittee has been reviewing the areas of Town zoned Industrial or Industrial 1. The review has revealed a number of recurrent problems: split lots, Route 128 zoned as SRB or SRA (creating setback etc. issues), streets zoned residential or ambiguously zoned, railroad tracks zoned residential or ambiguously, and 50' setback from residential zones (some of which are on the property itself) and transition zones. Because some areas have at present little or no real likelihood of development, it was thought that the subcommittee should not focus on rezoning them at this time. A few zones need to reflect current and surrounding uses; suggestions as to how to deal with split lots may be approached differently depending on the zone. Focus will be on Industrial 1 and Industrial along Route 128/Reservoir Streets, where development is most likely to occur in the near future and have the greatest economic impact.

X. Update on Downtown Subcommittee (Streamlining Suggestions)

Liz and Marty explained that the Planning Board has discussed two of the Streamlining suggestions. They agree that the off-street parking requirements of Section 5 should have higher triggers—less than 10 additional spaces in Downtown, Avery Square and Chestnut Street business will not trigger special permit/site plan review waiver requirements. Lee is drafting the revisions as discussed.

The Planning Board also agrees that the Design Review Board should have decision making authority for façade modifications. They did not, however, think it necessary to include an appeal to the Planning Board because appeal exists by the applicant applying to the Building Inspector for a permit not consistent with the DRB decision, which denial would go to the ZBA. Devra explained she didn't agree that a decision of the DRB on a façade modification (once the DRB is given authority to determine) would result in an appeal to the Building Inspector if there is a dispute. There is no reason for someone to file an application with the Building Inspector to build what the DRB did not approve; if

they did so, the Building Inspector would be required to deny the application—he could not substitute his judgment for the DRB’s; and any appeal to the ZBA would be restricted to whether the Building Inspector erred in failing to issue the permit requested (which he had no choice but to deny if the DRB didn’t approve it). Further, that mechanism would not work for a nonapplicant allegedly aggrieved by the board’s decision. And, even if a substantive appeal were actually possible, the ZBA is not the entity which created the Design Guidelines; that would be the Planning Board. In her opinion, if no appeal procedure is provided in the By-Law, the appeal would have to be to court via a complaint in the nature of a writ of certiorari. Devra also suggested that, although the DRB’s decisions on design issues have been pretty much approved by the Planning Board, the DRB’s decisions have been advisory, which may be perceived to be more of a give and take with applicants. We don’t know who will serve on the DRB in future or how final decision-making authority may change the current practice. Devra suggests leaving an administrative appellate procedure via the Planning Board.

XI. Discussion of Local First Initiatives

None

XII. Other Business

None

XIII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:30 a.m.