



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
781-455-7550 x213

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, September 4, 2013 7:30 AM
Charles River Room PSAB

Present: Glen Cammarano; Marty Jacobs; Moe Handel; Tom Jacob; Janet O'Connor;
Elizabeth Grimes; Bruce Herman; Michael Wilcox; and Devra Bailin
Not Present: Matt Talcoff, Chair; Bob Hentschel; Walter Collins; Bill Day; Damon Borrelli; Matt
Borrelli; Brian Nadler; and Lee Newman

I. Approval of Minutes

The members approved the minutes for the meeting of June 5th.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting and Hearing Dates

Our next meeting will be on October 2nd. 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. Narrowing options for the Needham Crossing Logo

Devra explained that we now have the logo designs (ignoring the color) from the consultant, the High School graphic design students submittals from Teacher Robyn Briggs, Bob Larson's take on his selection from the consultant logos, and a design submitted by another High School student. The Board of Selectmen expects the CEA to make a recommendation. She suggested that we hold another public meeting to discuss the options—perhaps in conjunction with our next meeting. She noted that to date she received Justin Krebs choice as E of the consultant's work. Moe asked what the purpose of the logo is and what if we can't agree—can we simply use just the words "Needham Crossing" with some font on which we can agree? Tom pointed out that, not to complicate things further, but we now have three areas of Town and the logos should be somewhat coordinated. He suggested we choose a font and put "Needham" on one line and "Crossing", "Center" and "Heights" below. We could use the Town crest although most members felt that symbol was too busy. Maybe each area of Town would have a different symbol—Town cupola, bridge crossing, etc.

Moe asked Devra to find out if the Town utilized any particular font. (Devra was told by Sandy Cincotta through Nikki that the Town does not.) He also asked if MassDOT had a particular font. (Devra tried to find the information online but finally directed the inquiry to Giles Ham. Giles is getting in touch with a contractor who makes federal highway signs for precise information.) Marty asked for

clarification as to whether the name “Needham Crossing” is just the NEBC or includes the entire area. Devra explained that the CEA and the BOS chose the latter approach. There was discussion of providing a directory in the business park but also in the downtown. Even if digital, Mike pointed out, such a directory needs to be updated frequently. Tom agreed that, of the choices we presently have, he likes the consultant’s E best. Liz felt it looked like a bar code and Devra was concerned it looked like Hyatt’s.

It was agreed that at our next meeting we will invite all of those parties who expressed interest in the branding of NEBC and the public to attend to weigh in on the logo. A question was raised about where we stand on the infrastructure in the area. Devra explained that we still do not have any commitment from MassDOT about getting the Kendrick Street interchange done by the time TripAdvisor comes online. Tom commented that Bruce raised a good point about having input in the design of the bridge so that it contains decorative elements like the Winter Street Bridge in Waltham. Devra explained that there is now an issue with our four-lane cross-section on Highland Avenue. The newest plans from MassDOT show the same narrowing just past Second Avenue, allowing only one lane to the bridge. This was done to accommodate two lanes over the bridge from Newton, which has opted for a three-lane cross-section except right before the bridge. Devra has notified the Needham Crossing businesses and has urged them to get their new organization to fight this. The problem stems from MassDOT’s decision to leave the existing bridge, which DPW thinks has limited viability and which everyone knows is inadequate to support the traffic flow. It was pointed out that trucks making turns into and out of Second Avenue (and out of the Panara parking lot) cannot make the requisite turns into just one lane. The traffic congestion occasioned by the narrowing is bad even in late August in off-hours; it doesn’t and won’t work.

IV. Request by Restaurants to all full alcohol licenses if under 100 seats

Moe explained that the BOS seems disposed to allow full alcohol licenses to restaurants with seating capacity under 100 seats. He noted that several current restaurants have an issue because they don’t have seating for 100. Last month the CEA voted to recommend that the BOS proceed with licensing restaurants with under 100 seats for full liquor service so that we can encourage small boutique high quality establishments. It was noted that wine and beer is available for restaurants with seating capacity under 100 seats. Moe anticipates that the BOS will target next April or November for voters approval—they do not want to hold any special elections.

V. Update on Mixed Use-128 Residential Overlay

Devra noted that we do not yet have any information from the consultant (Phil Herr) on the residential overlay for Mixed Use-128. Devra was unsure whether Phil has received all of the information he requested. Given this, it is extremely unlikely that we will be able to have this on the Fall Town Meeting Warrant. Members expressed disappointment that this is once again delayed, as this was designated a priority for THIS year.

VI. Update on Summer Intern’s Work

Devra reported that her intern, Hongling, a student at Babson, worked diligently throughout the summer collecting information about locally-owned independent businesses. Hongling conducted

about 25 individual interviews and pulled together the information in a format which can be readily used by the Babson students working on the downtown marketing study and plan this Fall. Marty had suggested inviting Hongling to the CEA meeting in September, but she is doing a semester abroad back at home in China and, therefore, unavailable. Devra explained that a major obstacle was getting merchants and restaurants to cooperate in providing information. Many claimed not to be able to spare the 15 minutes for the interview and Devra expressed concern that this will also hamper the marketing plan. CEA members, including Liz, agreed to assist Babson students in coordinating interviews with merchants and restaurants they know well.

VII. Update on Babson Marketing Study/Plan

Devra explained that she met with the graduate student who will be coordinating the Babson student efforts, Jingsi Zhang. Devra gave her a copy of Hongling's work product and had a very informative discussion with her about the goals of the project. Jingsi and Devra also discussed possible impediments to the goals, including lack of cooperation from merchants and other stakeholder groups. Devra will be attending the kickoff meeting with Jingsi and the students on September 12th at 5:00 at Babson. Jingsi seems very organized and excited about the project.

VIII. Update from Downtown Streetscape Working Group

Tom explained that the group took the summer off. They have been working via special group on the use of Town Common, which has also looked at sidewalk crossings in the vicinity. The Group is still working on the questions of left-hand turn from Chapel onto Great Plain and a right-hand turn only in the CVS block on Great Plain. Timing of the lights is critical to making the traffic move through the Center, especially when trains come through. Pedestrian safety, including intersection bump-outs, is a high priority. Glen noted that the crosswalk on Highland and Webster is neat. There has not yet been a decision whether to narrow Great Plain past the Dedham Avenue intersection—so that there is only lane leaving the Center past Dedham Avenue. Tom asked Devra to set up a meeting with the businesses to update them. (Devra raised the issue at the Needham Merchants Meeting on September 6th and was told that they could not even discuss scheduling a meeting until after the Adirondack Chair event on September 21st.) There was discussion of the need to direct people into public parking lots with better signage. There was also discussion of a directory; Devra noted merchants were considering a digital one on the Town Common. There was discussion of the use of parking pay machines vs meters. It was noted that the Town just purchased new meter heads and Moe noted that Brookline just removed the machines because the public didn't like them.

IX. Discussion regarding Study of Industrial Zones

Devra noted that we have antiquated zoning in Industrial 1 and in the Industrial districts throughout the Town. We had agreed to take this up. At the direction of the CEA, Devra will send out an email requesting members volunteer to serve on this new subcommittee.

X. Update on Downtown Subcommittee (Streamlining Suggestions)

Devra noted that it was over a year ago that she met with Downtown Landlords individually, all of whom identified permitting—the Planning Board—as **the** major problem in the Downtown. Devra then met with attorneys who do the permitting and they were able to distinguish issues as relating to the Board, the Department, or other Departments. The result of those interviews was a memorandum detailing the issues and a memorandum suggesting changes to address them. The Planning Board has not taken up the issues during the year the results were reported to them. Liz wants to move these along and requested that the Downtown Subcommittee be reconvened. As this is a priority for the CEA, the Subcommittee needs to address it. Liz pointed out that there needs to be a shift to more administrative approvals/action; the minor changes or issues coming to the Planning Board take up way too much time. Liz will bring the suggestions of the Subcommittee directly to the Planning Board. If zoning changes are required, we need to get to work on them. Tom feels the problems are institutionalized; Moe agreed and pointed out that there needs to be leadership to resolve them. Marty doesn't necessarily agree with Liz and said the Planning Board is not aware of the problems that Devra cite which arise after the Planning Board renders its decisions. Devra and Moe agreed that they were also unaware of such issues when they were PB members. Underlying many of the complaints/criticisms, Devra explained, is the failure to understand that the Town is a service organization and it needs to assist people processing permits and moving things along through construction and occupancy; the “us” vs. “them” mentality, which is instilled in the process and requirements, hurts us in promoting development.

XI. Other Business

No other matters were discussed.

XI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:20 a.m.