



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

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

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, January 9, 2013 7:30 AM
Charles River Room PSAB

Present: Matt Talcoff, Chair; Glen Cammarano; Tom Jacob; Michael Wilcox; Moe Handel; Bob Hentschel; Marty Jacobs; Janet O'Connor; and Devra Bailin

Not Present: Walter Collins; Matt Borrelli; Elizabeth Grimes; Bill Day; Bruce Herman; Damon Borrelli; Brian Nadler; and Lee Newman

Also Present: John Fantasia; Paul Good; Paul Shorthose; Rick Putprush; Tyler Young; Denise Garlick

I. Approval of Minutes

Upon motion by Glen with second by Moe, the members were approved the minutes for the meetings on October 3rd, November 7th, and December 5th.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting and Hearing Dates

The next meeting date is February 6th. 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. Discussion and Recommendations on Naming NEBC

Devra referred the members and invitees to the Memorandum she prepared for the Board of Selectmen dated December 3, 2012, which summarizes the work of the Branding and Marketing Subcommittee and consultant to date. It outlines resultant positioning, key messaging, analysis of existing brands, recommended branding and naming strategy, and finalist names (Needham Crossing, Needham Highlands, Needham Point and Needham Edge). Devra explained that she and Matt T. met with the BOS on December 18th and went over the information for the BOS. At that time the BOS also took public testimony regarding the new name. The BOS asked the CEA to review the Comprehensive List of names submitted as result of the Board's request for public comment, a copy of which was distributed via email and available at this meeting, and make a name recommendation to the BOS. Devra also explained that BOS Chair Jerry Wasserman asked whether the names proposed were for the NEBC only or the entire area. Devra relayed this question to Mike Panagako, who took the position that the name is for the NEBC and that, while it may become synonymous with the entire area, that was not the charge. With that the discussion was opened.

Paul Good commented that the property owners/developers will differentiate/name their buildings on the basis of their major tenants—that it wasn't of concern to them that the area was given a name which went beyond the formal bounds of the NEBC. Matt T. noted that he heard the same thing during the discussions—the name is not just for the business community but needs to represent the mix of uses present in the area. Tyler understood the need to put Needham in the name but wasn't sure of the preference of TripAdvisor. He agrees their building will be TripAdvisor at something, but asked why "Crossing" was the preferred choice. Moe noted that it accurately describes the area, which requires crossing 128 or the River to access. Devra noted that it is also a crossing in terms of the different vision from the rest of the Town it connotes—upscale, urban, not suburban, mix of uses—and it is natural, not contrived, name. Paul Shorthose noted that we have Needham Center, Needham Junction, Needham Heights, and Needham Crossing seems to fit with how we have names other parts of Town. Paul Good commented that the name also permits a lot of opportunity to market different aspects of the vision as well as current uses. Rick noted that this was not his favorite of the names at first but it comes as something natural. He noted that Needham Crossing, with its mix of uses and urban scale, shares a vision with and elements of Downtown Crossing. Matt T. commented that it wasn't his first choice either but did appear to be on almost everyone's list of agreeable names. Devra asked if everyone had had the opportunity to review the Comprehensive list. It was noted that many of the names had been rejected earlier and that some were simply inconsistent with positioning and strategy. Matt T. commented that that was certainly true of Needham Village, which was proposed by someone attending the BOS meeting, which was the antithesis of urban.

Marty asked how we respond to Jerry's question about naming the NEBC something other than Needham Crossing—Businesses, Business Park, the Business Center, etc. at Needham Crossing. Will we leave it for owners or tenants to name their individual buildings? Bob noted that how Needham Crossing gets used will be established over time—it certainly shouldn't be called a business park (contrary to the urban vision we have adopted)—and buildings will naturally be known by their principal tenants. Moe commented if we are trying to promote property in the NEBC, will the name Needham Crossing give sufficient splash? Bob thought that it did, especially since we are trying to create a mixed neighborhood and give it a presence, which includes businesses. Rick pointed out that it distinguishes the area from Newton, essentially creating a Needham identity for this area along 128 but isn't too gimmicky or edgy. Tom commented that he too hadn't been persuaded by the name at first but came to accept it as there are legitimate/natural reasons for the name and it distinguishes the area as Needham's. Mike commented that the logo is next on the list and that may serve to solidify the name with an appropriate marketing plan. Marty is not thrilled with the name but acknowledged that it is neither offensive nor odd, which the businesses warned against. Matt T. said that the name for him emphasizes the different elements of life and not the geographic divides. Tyler commented that he personally thought Needham Highlands was better but Needham Crossing is fine. Devra explained that many people thought the former was confusing with Newton Highlands and Highland Avenue, especially since the area is routinely referred to in the traffic reports as the Needham Flats.

Glen asked, since we are the economic development arm of the Town, should we think about selling the name? He noted that BC has a program, allowing people to choose an unnamed building and having it named for them for a price. Why not ask if someone will pay for the naming rights—e.g., _____ Center at Needham Crossing? Tyler commented that they will likely call their building TripAdvisor at Needham Crossing without paying for the right to do so. The idea of selling naming rights was not considered by most the way to go.

After completion of discussion, Tom moved that the CEA recommend to the BOS that the area on the other side of 128, including the NEBC, be called Needham Crossing. The motions was seconded by Bob. CEA members approved the motion, with Moe and Marty abstaining.

IV. Update on Retail Alcohol Sales

Devra reported that the Board of Selectmen created an open period for submission of applications from 9:00 a.m. on January 7, 2013 and 4:00 p.m. on January 18, 2013. As of today, no applications have been filed. Devra noted that she has had discussions with many people about filing but that at least two experienced vendors have expressed reservations about opening in Needham Downtown anyway because of the price per square foot being sought (\$35/sq. ft., which Devra thought was high). She has told people to expect the BOS to be very conservative in issuing licenses and that they will focus on location, impacts, business plan and experience. Moe said that the BOS is likely value heavily experience. It was discussed that the sites being looked at are Heights (Party Store, Hollywood Video—which will partially be used for an urgent care facility—), as well as Bertucci block, and some downtown spaces. Moe noted the BOS will be very deliberative as they don't want to create a misstep in the process. There will be a hearing for all applications on Saturday February 2nd on all applications filed during the window. Janet asked about future applications—Roche Bros. can't file for one unless they eliminate one in another store (as they already have 5) and they probably won't file in this window. Moe said future applications will likely be treated just like restaurant licenses—hearings within 30 days after receipt, but it is possible the BOS will set up another window.

Denise asked whether the landlords in Downtown have incentives to keep their spaces vacant and that's why they are charging such high rents. Members commented that there may be some sort of corporate tax write-off and possibly, if the condition continues for long periods of time, real estate abatements but on the whole it is not a profitable business model to leave space empty in order to derive tax benefits. Also it was noted that tenants usually pay taxes.

V. Update on Downtown Subcommittee

Devra mentioned that Kate has asked that the CEA have a member or representative serve on the Downtown Streetscape Working Group. Tom thought we should ask someone with design expertise and suggested, and the other members agreed, that Mike McKay would be an excellent choice. Tom agreed to ask Mike, who has agreed to serve as CEA's representative. Denise asked if the Town would be seeking State funds for the Downtown Streetscape and Moe said yes.

It was discussed that one of the priorities for the CEA next year is to move on the streamlining initiatives which came to light during the discussions with the landlords in the Downtown. Devra and David Roche are meeting with the Planning Board on Monday January 14th to discuss this and other zoning issues.

Devra noted that she continues to work closely with the Needham Merchants Association. Next program will be Go Red for Women and she will be approaching the restaurants to participate by offering a recipe for the red heart healthy item. She said that the restaurants have a really negative impression of the Town (permitting and signage issues—both of which Devra is working on) and NBA.

Problems have been exasperated by allowing outside vendors to serve food on the Common during special events. Moe suggested that restaurants need to present their issues to the BOS and Kate. Denise suggested that restaurants be allowed to have tables outside their businesses during those times instead of outside vendors, which does seem inconsistent with the Local First campaign. Denise and Moe suggested that the CEA start meeting with individual restaurant owners to discuss their issues. Marty and Bob noted that most restaurateurs play it close to the vest and don't communicate in groups.

Devra noted the difficulty in getting large numbers of merchants and restaurants to participate in programs to create critical mass, which is necessary for success. Out of all the businesses in the Downtown, only 11 participated in the Holiday Local First Passport program, which only cost the merchants \$25 towards the prize and \$15 towards the Local First stamp. Glen noted that it should have been expected that they wouldn't want to pay \$15 for a stamp to participate in a program sponsored by someone else. The NBA couldn't provide? Denise said that she hadn't considered that perspective. She also noted she found the program confusing. Devra said that was because so few merchants participated and publicity was difficult with no advertising budget. Tom commented that businesses should be able to use sandwich signs to advertise such events. Denise also suggested that the Town could help by providing all employees with Discover Needham cards. Moe suggested the outreach program discussed should help the CEA understand what the Town can do to assist in creating a vibrant Downtown.

VI. Update on Normandy/TripAdvisor Project

Devra explained that she has reminded Normandy of the need to get the owners group together with Denise and key Town departments/officials to create a strategy for expediting the Kendrick Street interchange and the Highland Avenue corridor project. Denise noted that the Town needs to be on top of the impacts such work will have on businesses in the area.

Devra noted that TripAdvisor stated at the Special TM in December that they thought they may be calling for second building before they move into the first. There was discussion of the possibility of reconfiguring the layout so that the first building runs parallel to 128 rather than perpendicular and the second building is behind it. Devra noted that she had advised Normandy that this may be difficult due to the TIF plan and designated area, which was the first phase building with garage structure. She was unsure how that could be amended without going back to TM and the State.

VII. Discussion of Zoning Initiatives for Annual TM

It was noted that Mixed Use-128 Zoning both dimensional amendments and residential overlay is a high priority for the CEA. Devra will be discussing these with the Planning Board on Monday. See Also Section V above.

VIII. Discussion of Priorities for 2013

See Sections V and VII above.

IX. Other Business

Moe noted that with all the activity in the Heights, the Town needs to stay active in making sure that improvements extend to that area as well, including streetscape improvements.

X. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:25 a.m.