



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
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MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, April 1, 2015 7:30 AM
Charles River Room PSAB

Present: Matt Talcoff, Chair; Marty Jacobs; Moe Handel; Michael Wilcox; Peter Atallah; Bob Hentschel; Elizabeth Grimes; and Lee Newman and Devra Bailin, staff
Not Present: Rick Putprush; Janet O'Connor; Brian Nadler; Glen Cammarano; Tom Jacob; Bill Day; Bruce Herman; and Matt Borrelli
Also Present: John Connery (Connery Associates), Simon Boyd (Winhall) and Jeanne McKnight (Planning Board member)

I. Approval of Minutes

The members approved the minutes for the meeting of March 4, 2015.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates

Our next meeting will be on May 13th, as the members attending had conflicts for the regular meeting date and opted to change it. Future meetings are still thereafter scheduled for the first Wednesday of the month (unless a holiday) in the Charles River Room at PSAB.

III. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing

After the discussion on the Mixed Use-128 Residential Overlay, Devra briefly explained the measures that have been and will be effectuated by the Town with the input of MassDOT and its traffic engineer, Gary McNaughton from McMann Associates. Devra is forwarding MassDOT updates to the owners/business group and they are being placed on the Town website under Needham Crossing.

IV. Update on Mixed Use-128 Residential Overlay

Devra introduced John Connery from Connery Associates, who discussed his preliminary fiscal analysis for the residential overlay and general zoning issues with us over the past two months, to speak about the actual zoning initiative. John said that he used Devra's draft, which outlined the procedures well, and revised it to include the substantive provisions we discussed. He noted that he removed from the purposes the reference to senior housing and the mandate for mixed use (i.e., commercial uses on the first floor) in the Highland Commercial-128 portion of any project. He noted the process as proposed mandates the filing of a Concept Plan followed by the filing of a MUOD special permit. He also added

an FAR of 3.00 (which corresponds to the other dimensional regulations) but doesn't feel it's really necessary to include it.

He noted that any development opportunity inherent in creating multifamily housing must be fiscally positive in effect and provide work force housing. Other benefits we hope to create are an economic benefit to the entire area and incentives to develop other uses within the corridor. Housing in this context is really a redevelopment tool to spur development.

Matt noted that the zoning seems consistent with our discussion but he wondered about incenting true mixed use development. Devra noted that, in her opinion, we can't compel the mix; we can create incentives to do so by providing density bonuses for doing that. Lee felt that, as a policy, land in the Highland Commercial-128 should remain commercial on the first floor and the zoning should mandate mixed use; residential should not be on the first floor of developments in that zone. Simon noted that retail would likely remain along Highland Avenue—it's prime retail space—and we would likely see office and/or residential above. Having said that, he would not mandate the requirement. John and Devra felt the zoning should be as open as possible, leaving it to the market.

Moe commented that, with all of our efforts to streamline, are we creating too much process by mandating a 90 day concept plan process? John likes the idea of a preliminary process so that input can be received from the Planning Board before plans are finalized. Lee commented that she felt it would expedite the actual special permit process and it would reduce the investment at the outset. Devra felt that the provision should expressly indicate that there is no appeal from the Concept Plan. Marty asked what does it mean to be merely advisory? Devra said that the process is akin to the process for preliminary subdivisions. Simon expressed concern about formal public input prior to concrete plans. Marty suggested that the Concept Plan process should be at the option of the developer—why should the process be mandated? Lee felt that it should be required so that issues can be resolved prior to a formal more detailed filing. Moe felt that the Planning Board should create design guidelines like was done in the Downtown. John agreed that it would be very helpful if the Planning Board adopted rules and regulations which detailed their design guidelines.

Jeanne noted that in her private opinion, there is value in requiring a Concept Plan and she thinks that the mix of uses should be compelled on Highland Avenue. She felt the use of the words "shall" seem to imply a public hearing process. She noted the considerable delays of the theater project in the Downtown ultimately created a much better project.

Bob noted that the requirements for the Concept Plan are considerable as proposed. He also noted that less detail would be sufficient to make the process meaningful. He would make it optional. Marty concurred. Liz felt that informal discussion is helpful but it may not be necessary to formalize the process to do so. Devra noted that Jeanne's comment on the word "shall" seems correct—the idea was not to require hearing notice for a public hearing; just discussion at a public meeting. Devra also agreed with comments that the draft contains too many requirements for filing.

Lee noted that one of the issues arising in the NEBC is the use of garage structures and inactive space. John and Devra both noted that this could be addressed through developed design guidelines via regulations. Devra noted that putting this detail in the zoning itself constrains design and makes it

impossible to address changing design initiatives and creative development without going back to Town Meeting to amend the zoning.

Moe noted that the operative word is “concept” so we need to reduce the technical requirements listed. John agreed and again suggested that the Planning Board draft a paragraph or two to indicate its design preferences. Devra reiterated that for this the Planning Board should use the regulation approach which provides far greater flexibility. John will rewrite the Concept Plan sections, reducing the filing requirements and making it optional as that appears to be the consensus of the members.

Mike commented that five years is a long time for a permit to be outstanding. Someone could preclude another project simply by sitting on an outstanding permit. Members agreed so John suggested reducing the time to two years which, as was noted, is more standard time frame.

Finally there was discussion of the parking requirements. Jeanne asked if it was intended that the 25% waiver apply to it. It was decided that the parking waiver requirements should follow those allowed by Section 5. John will revise the draft.

John will revise the draft in accordance with our discussion and present it at our next meeting. At that time we will take a formal vote and then forward it to the BOS with our recommendation.

V. Update on Industrial District Subcommittee

Due to time constraints, this issue was not discussed.

VI. Discussion of N² and Needham Crossing Branding

Devra noted that we received a response from the State rejecting the use of Needham Crossing on the Highway exit signage. Moe indicated that the BOS may try to address this politically.

VII. Update on N² Innovation Corridor

Due to time constraints, this issue was not discussed.

VIII. Update on Babson MCFE Downtown Marketing Plan

Due to time constraints, this issue was not discussed.

IX. Update on Needham Crossing (Signage at Entrances)

We addressed this topic out of order (i.e., before the discussion of the Overlay zoning). Mike Wilcox presented possible signage which Tina Snyder from his office worked up. The members discussed the various proposals and chose the third with revisions, which Mike will request from Tina. We will need to confirm ownership of the land on which the signs are proposed to be installed. It is thought the signs will go on private property but we need to confirm that the signs proposed for Kendrick Street are not within the Town’s ROW. We will need to seek DRB approval of the signage and secure additional funds for the fabrication and installation—perhaps from the Owners’ fund. Moe

will ask the BOS if they require approval of the signage before we go forward. Mike will provide revisions for our next meeting.

X. Update on Downtown Subcommittee (Streamlining Suggestions)

Due to time constraints, this issue was not discussed.

XII. Other Business

Due to time constraints, this issue was not discussed.

XIII. Adjourn

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