



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
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MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, March 5, 2014 7:30 AM
Charles River Room PSAB

Present: Matt Talcoff, Chair; Glen Cammarano; Marty Jacobs; Bob Hentschel; Elizabeth Grimes; Bill Day; Moe Handel; Bruce Herman; Tom Jacob; Michael Wilcox; Brian Nadler; Peter Atallah; and Lee Newman and Devra Bailin, staff

Not Present: Janet O'Connor and Matt Borrelli

Also Present: Rick Putprush

I. Approval of Minutes

The members approved the minutes for the meeting of February 12, 2014.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting and Hearing Dates

Our next meeting will be on April 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. Welcome New Member

The members introduced themselves to our new member Peter Atallah, who was recently appointed by the BOS.

IV. Update on Mixed Use-128 Residential Overlay

No update was available.

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

Moe explained that the BOS put the matter on the ballot for voter approval in the April election. Brian asked if an ad campaign was in the works to support the initiative and explain the reasons. The CEA voted to have Devra draft a letter to submit to the papers supporting the ballot question on the grounds that the Town has lost restaurant opportunities due to the restriction on licenses for 100 seats or more. Because the CEA is advisory to the BOS, Devra will get approval to do so from Kate (who will clear it with the BOS).

VI. Update on Needham Crossing Work

Mike Wilcox provided the members with a handout identifying the location of the five existing signs identifying the New England Business Center; each carries the name of its sponsor. A photograph of one of the signs was also provided. Mike asked Bullfinch Company's marketing person, Tina Snyder, to do possible designs for the re-facing of those signs and two possible designs are in the packet. Since the CEA voted last month to accept the consultant's proposal to forego the remainder of their contract, leaving the remaining almost \$4000 for re-facing the existing signs and getting a sign consultant to advise on gateway location signage on Highland Avenue, Mike has contacted Fast Signs of Needham. Mike received an estimate from Fast Signs for re-facing, but hasn't shared with them specific plans. The estimate was about \$1200. Devra had already contacted Mark Gluesing, Chair of the Design Review Board, who will work with us on re-facing designs and obtaining approval if necessary. The CEA voted its approval of the designs. The members expressed the view that, where efficacious, the sign should provide direction to the main streets. Mike will check with Maric, Inc. to see if Community Newspapers is still in the park. Mike and Devra will arrange to meet with Mark Gluesing to go over the designs and discuss any process which may be necessary to accomplish the task.

There was some discussion of signage along the highway. Moe will bring this issue to the attention of Kate and BOS so that we work with Newton and the State to make sure that signage recognizes Needham Crossing and potentially N2. The members noted the inaccuracy of the current signage. Moe will also make sure that David Montgomery is kept in the loop.

Bob asked if it were possible to rename the streets in Needham Crossing, especially in the Park. He noted they were confusing (numbers out of order, second turning into fourth...) and certainly not very creative. It was noted that the Planning Board usually names streets through subdivision but ultimately the issue would be with the BOS.

Marty wanted the CEA to know that, contrary to the reception here, the Planning Board was "warm to chilly" on the issue of the electronic billboards. The consensus seems to be that the benefits to the Town are not worth the unsightly use of billboards. Moe noted that there is a public hearing on the issue March 18th at 7:00. Devra noted that Matt B. said he would bring the CEA's position to the BOS and that no letter was necessary.

VII. Update on the Medical Marijuana Overlay District

The Planning Board received a copy of the CEA's letter regarding this issue. Lee explained that the Planning Board deliberated at its last hearing. Of the districts advertised (Mixed Use-128, Highland Commercial-128, Chestnut Street, Industrial 1 and Industrial on Reservoir Street), the Board appears to be leaning towards Mixed Use-128 and the northern side of Highland Commercial-128 next to the Mixed Use-128 district. Lee noted that the real issue with Chestnut Street is that these uses are regional ones and access in the middle of a congested area, with considerable pedestrian traffic, is not consistent with such uses. Moe noted that the BOS agrees that, given the regional nature of these businesses (each facility is designed to serve 200,000 people), Chestnut Street doesn't make sense. The Planning Board is still considering whether it needs to revise the distance requirements from "sensitive uses" or clarify the definition. The Board wants to make sure that the use can actually go into the areas designated. Matt

T. noted that the Mixed Use-128 area is one into which the CEA hopes to import residential uses and this should be considered.

VIII. Update from Downtown Streetscape Working Group

Tom noted that the Group made its formal presentation to the BOS on February 25th. The next step is for the designs to be further developed. The Group asked and the BOS seemed receptive to the idea of the Group continuing to be involved in any design questions or concerns that arise. The start of actual construction has not been set but the Group will also make sure that the timing of construction, to the extent possible, will minimize the impacts on businesses. Although outside the scope of its mission, the Group has recommended undergrounding of utilities, not only along Chapel and Highland next to Town Hall, but in the Chapel Street parking lot as well. The CEA suggested the Town explore possible monetary assistance to businesses faced with bringing undergrounding to their buildings.

IX. Update on Industrial District Subcommittee

Devra briefly explained that the Planning Department has finalized information about the Industrial zones the Subcommittee is targeting (including lot use and ownership information), with the exception of the revised area plans. Devra suggested and the CEA agreed that the Subcommittee can begin holding public workshops to get public input on dimensional and use changes for each zone. Focus will be on Industrial 1 and Industrial Districts along Route 128/Reservoir Streets, where development is most likely to occur in the near future and have the greatest economic impact. It was decided that we should hold the workshops in April—offering a morning and evening option to participate.

X. Update on Downtown Subcommittee (Streamlining Suggestions)

Liz and Devra are finalizing their work with the Planning Board on two principal streamlining suggestions. Devra explained that one is turning over review and approval authority to the Design Review Board for façade modifications in the downtown with appeal to the Board. The other is creating a threshold for changes in use which don't increase the cumulative parking demand to 10 or more in the Center Business, Avery Square and Chestnut Street Business Districts or 4 or more in other districts. If below these thresholds most projects would avoid the special permit/waiver process. There was some further discussion of details. The members (with Planning Board members Liz and Marty abstaining) voted to support these changes and notify the Planning Board accordingly. Devra noted that she could not attend the hearing on the 18th and asked that other members try to attend. Liz and Devra continue to work on other issues.

XI. Other Business

None

XII. Adjourn

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