



TOWN of NEEDHAM  
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
**Economic Development**  
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**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS**  
**WEDNESDAY, May 2, 2018 7:30 AM**  
**Charles River Room PSAB**

Present: Adam Block, Vice Chair; Rick Putrush; Michael Wilcox; Peter Atallah; Moe Handel; Bob Hentschel; Glen Cammarano; Stuart Agler; Marty Jacobs; Virginia Fleisher; Ted Owens; Matt Talcoff; and Devra Bailin.

Not Present: Jack Cogswell, Chair; Bill Day; Russ MacTough.

Also Present: Anne Weinstein, District Director for Rep. Denise Garlick.

**I. Approval of Minutes**

The Minutes of April 4, 2018 were unanimously approved.

**II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates**

Our next meeting is scheduled for June 6<sup>th</sup> in the Charles River Room. Future meetings will be scheduled for the first Wednesday of the month (unless a holiday) in the Charles River Room at PSAB. As to our meetings in July (11<sup>th</sup>) and August (1<sup>st</sup>), Devra will send out an email to members to ascertain their availability.

**III. Discussion of Central Avenue Neighborhood Business District (May TM)**

Town Meeting begins on Monday May 7<sup>th</sup>. The zoning to allow mixed residential multifamily use in the Central Avenue Neighborhood Business District is on the TM Warrant. As a reminder, the CEA's letter to the Planning Board recommending the change was submitted. The Planning Department intends to put a copy of the CEA's letter for the TM member handout table. Planning Board members indicated that the Board is planning to reopen its review of the SRB and NBD boundaries—an ongoing neighborhood issue.

In conjunction with Town Meeting, a short discussion was had about the retail sale of marijuana articles. Members sought clarification of the two articles—one a general bylaw amendment and one a zoning bylaw amendment. It was explained that the municipalities which voted no on the referendum allowing retail sales of marijuana could pass a bylaw banning such sales. It was unclear and remains so whether the bylaw required is a general (requiring only majority vote) or a zoning (requiring 2/3 vote)

bylaw. If neither passes, then the Town will have until December 31, 2018 to adopt zoning amendments, if desired, limiting the locations for such sales. It was noted that voters could have voted against the referendum but not be opposed to the retail sale of marijuana. Moe, in response to a question, said that the Town would get 3% of the revenue from sales or approximately an estimated \$200,000 annually.

The Planning Board members advised that they voted last night to withdraw the articles relating to the changes to the Chestnut Street overlay. The provision per Ted would have expanded the boundaries of the overlay and increased the ability to provide more housing. He noted that the Planning Board received good feedback and will be moving forward with future study in order to incent development along the corridor. The members indicated that they would be happy to assist the Planning Board should its board members so decide. It was noted that there will likely be resistance on Lincoln street to changing the 50' setback and the split lot situation along Chestnut Street. The Planning Board would like to bring articles forward in the fall; Moe indicated that members of BOS have historically been opposed to having zoning articles in the fall, especially if they would require a second day.

The provisions dealing with Route 128 residential setbacks went well at warrant meetings once explained.

Ted indicated that he believed that the Planning Board would bring forward—not in the fall but in May 2019—at least some proposals to the Industrial districts identified by the CEA. It was suggested that there be Chair/Vice Chair meeting between the Planning Board and CEA, perhaps in June.

#### **IV. Discussion of Riverside Neighborhood**

Moe did not believe that the CEA needed to weigh in on anything here. There was discussion of the issues facing the neighborhood, in terms of derelict buildings. Moe noted that the Town has been working on this for some time and some properties have been improved.

#### **V. Discussion of CEA priorities/future goals**

It was felt it would be helpful to frame these more clearly after the Chair/Vice Chair meeting with the Planning Board.

It was noted that the Kindred/Avery Crossing property poses unique opportunities. It is owned by a real estate investment trust. Devra noted that she has had inquiries regarding the property—not surprisingly, most questions relate to multifamily residential use. She noted that the overlay would allow some housing (like that over the framing store and dry cleaner) but a zoning change or friendly 40B would be required to convert it fully to multifamily housing. Ted noted that he would be supportive of that, as it is a real SMART growth project. What is the highest best use of that property? Peter suggested an innovation center perhaps; it was noted that parking is an issue on that site. Moe pointed out that school enrollment, which the School Committee expects to peak in 2025, may dictate whether additional housing growth is possible without building a new grammar school. That, in turn, could influence decisions to allow further multifamily residential growth.

In connection with redevelopment of the Kindred buildings, there was discussion of connecting Needham Crossing (and Needham Heights) with a Green Line extension. This isn't likely in the near future but the concept plan for rapid bus from Newton Highlands to Wexford (and then someday over the highway to Needham Heights commuter rail) is a possible solution. Monica Tibbitts from the 128 Business Council is still trying to find funding for the engineering feasibility and planning for such a project. There is money for concept plans and for construction but not for planning. Devra noted that part of NBCUniversal's TIF Host Community Agreement requires it to look into improving shuttle access to Needham Crossing and connection to the Needham Heights commuter rail.

Matt asked that we create a priority of focusing on Needham Heights.

Virginia suggests the CEA get back to looking at the downtown and how to incent more appealing retail options. Despite all the infrastructure work, the area looks stale. How do we incent private landowners to bring in businesses that contribute to a vibrant downtown without offering tax incentives? Reference was made to the Reimagine Needham efforts, which have stalled. Devra noted that she has tried to get New England Mobile Book Fair and an artist collaborative into the downtown, both of which would be unique offerings, but without success with landlords. She also thinks a cheese shop could do well. Devra noted that the Town is involved in discussions with Soofa about signage in the Center and Needham Crossing to display public information, including train and bus schedules, and advertise local businesses. Newton is in those discussions as well.

Moe noted that the BOS just granted French Press a license to sell wine and beer so that the owner can stay open later and provide more offerings. Devra noted that this raises the question about changing the Zoning By-Law to allow small food providers to open up without going through a full special permit process. Can we create an alternative simplified process to the special permit for small food vendors? Perhaps limited site plan review? Another topic to discuss in the downtown is: how do we turn a restaurant destination location into a place which increases business for our retailers?

It was decided to reestablish the Downtown Subcommittee. The following members have agreed to serve: Stu, Rick, Peter, Virginia, and Adam. Devra will send out an email inquiring of these new subcommittee members days which will work for them to meet regularly.

**VI. Update on Needham Crossing/N<sup>2</sup> Innovation District (Streetscape/ river walk grant; consulate outreach)**

Due to time constraints this topic was not discussed.

**VII. Update from the Downtown Subcommittee (Streamlining Initiatives)**

Due to time constraints this topic was not discussed, except as noted above in Section V.

**VIII. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing and Downtown,**

Due to time constraints this topic was not discussed.

**IX. Other Business**

Due to time constraints this topic was not discussed.

**X. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:05 a.m.