



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
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MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, October 3, 2018 7:30 AM
Charles River Room
Public Services Administration Building
500 Dedham Avenue

Present: Adam Block, Chair; Adam Meixner; Rick Putprush; Moe Handel; Peter Atallah; Bob Hentschel; Glen Cammarano; Bill Day; Stuart Agler; Virginia Fleisher; Matt Talcoff; Anne Marie Dowd; Michael Wilcox; Ted Owens; and Devra Bailin.

Not Present: Tina Burgos

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

I. Approval of Minutes

Introductions were made, including the welcoming of new member Anne Marie Dowd. The Minutes of September 5, 2018 were unanimously approved.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates

Our next meeting is scheduled for November 7th 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.

III. Discussion of Vice Chair of CEA

Members were again asked to consider stepping forward to serve as Vice Chair. Members were advised to let Adam B. or Devra know that they are willing to volunteer. The Vice Chair will assist the Chair in Chair/Vice Chair meetings with the Select Board and Planning Board. These will probably take place quarterly.

IV. Update from the Downtown Subcommittee

Adam explained that the reconstituted subcommittee is working to understand the challenges to establishing and growing a business in the Downtown. In light of the current and proposed Town

investment in the infrastructure, we need to understand the needs of businesses. Landlord and tenant canvassing is underway. Committee members are also visiting towns around the area to compare our downtown with them and to come up with ideas for our own. Stu and Virginia visited Canton and Norwood and felt that our downtown “was not so bad” comparatively. Virginia did bring to the group’s attention signage for public parking in Norwood which she and Stu felt would be an improvement to Needham’s.

It was noted that the Downtown Subcommittee has thus far place three items on the agenda for fast track: Signage for public parking lots (an ongoing complaint of businesses in the downtown); snow plowing of sidewalks in the downtown (ditto); and the red light on Great Plain at the train tracks as vehicles move towards Chestnut and Chapel intersection. Moe explained that the Select Board is trying to work with the MBTA to resolve the last issue; the MBTA claims that federal regulations preclude allowing vehicles to queue between the intersection and the track when the light at the intersection is red. He indicated that it would not hurt for the CEA to let the Select Board know about these articulated concerns. The members decided that there is no need to wait to present these issues to the Select Board. Devra was directed to draft a letter to send to the Town Manager to share with the Select Board.

The Downtown Subcommittee will compile its information from tenants and landlords and present it to the entire CEA membership. From the information received, the CEA will make recommendations to the Select Board.

V. Update on Industrial Zoning

Glen left the room during this discussion. It is Devra’s understanding that the Planning Board has agreed to put the corner (Muzi/Channel 5), which was designated Highway Commercial 1 in the proposed zoning, on for the May Town Meeting. Ted confirmed that was his understanding as well. [It should be noted that the Planning Board did not definitively commit to that at its meeting on Thursday morning. An additional meeting is scheduled for October 18th.] Devra also believes that plan has the support of at least three of the members of the Select Board based on informal discussions she had with them. Moe noted that his Board has not yet taken an official position on it.

The zoning initiative was explained for the benefit of new members, as well as the history of the work. Adam B. indicated this will be clarified at the Chair and Vice Chair meetings with both boards.

VI. Update on Chestnut Street Zoning

Ted noted that the Planning Board is reviewing a proposal for creating a new Transit Oriented Development Proposal for the Hartney Greymont parcel on Chestnut Street. It proposes a dense multifamily overlay. Density of development is the issue, especially as it relates to the tipping points for school enrollment and the possible need for new schools and/or additions to existing ones. Review of the remainder of Chestnut Street zoning will follow. Ted will let the members know if the Planning Board would like any assistance from the CEA.

A question was raised about Avery Square and the Kindred buildings in terms of TODD. Devra had reached out to Welltower, the owner of the property, and was advised that the use would remain some sort of elder services—assisted living, nursing, memory care, medical offices, etc. Welltower is

working with a developer to provide the appropriate product and is not interested in developing apartments, which Devra told them was an allowed use in the district.

It was noted that increased residential units in our downtown area and along Chestnut Street are critical to the vitality of the downtown, assuring the necessary foot traffic. Ted noted that is the goal of the TODD zoning.

VII. Discussion of Needham Crossing Branding

There was a brief discussion of where the Select Board stands on the logo for signage for Needham Crossing/N². Moe suggested that Devra meet with Marianne and him to talk about the issues. [Devra is arranging the meeting.] The Chamber provided the sample logo, which it had previously provided and which the Select Board did not like. Mike and Devra have located the places where such signage can go; we need to redo the existing signs and we could put up a couple of signs at the gateway into Needham Crossing on Kendrick. We can't install any on Highland Avenue until the corridor project is complete. Devra noted that we need to coordinate the look of the Needham Crossing/N² Innovation District signage with that proposed by Wells Office; it is critical to marketing that there be continuity. We have funding available to reuse the existing signs and put up a couple on Kendrick Street (--the funding is in the hands of the owner association which was funded by Normandy and controlled by Bulfinch Companies). Because Wells Office signage has been delayed, we have the chance to take the lead but we need guidance from the Select Board.

VIII. Discussion of CEA priorities/future goals

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

IX. Update on Needham Crossing/N² Innovation District (Streetscape/ river walk grant; consulate outreach)

The Kendrick has opened. The market rents range from \$2500 per month for a studio to \$5000 per month for three bedrooms. They are also charging for parking (\$125?).

PTC is looking to break up its space for sublease when it ceases to occupy. They are expected to be moved fully into their Seaport offices by January. Boston Properties does not seem interested in trying to locate a tenant at current market rents.

Due to time constraints, this topic was not further discussed. [Devra recently learned that MAPC did not approve on our streetscape design grant.]

X. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

XI. Other Business

The public safety building override is before Town Meeting next week and Adam B. felt that the CEA should support the call for an override. Members discussed the fact that this override for \$70 million has a significant impact on residential property taxes. It has an even greater impact for the commercial base if the Select Board again approves a split rate for commercial properties, which is twice the residential rate. Members reviewed the draft letter and felt the paragraph about businesses should be removed. One member expressed concerns about the CEA expressing support for a measure which increases taxes on businesses without getting their input. A motion was made and seconded approving the letter as amended. A majority of the members approved the letter, with one dissent and Moe, as a member of the Select Board, abstaining.

XII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 a.m.