



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

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

Present: Adam Block, Chair; Adam Meixner; Rick Putprush; Moe Handel; Bob Hentschel; Glen Cammarano; Stuart Agler; Virginia Fleisher; Matt Talcoff; Michael Wilcox; and Devra Bailin.
Not Present: Tina Burgos; Anne Marie Dowd; Ted Owens; Peter Atallah; and Bill Day.
Also Present: Anne Weinstein, District Director for Rep. Denise Garlick

I. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of October 3, 2018 were unanimously approved.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates

Our next meeting is scheduled for December 5th 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. Devra will send out next year's calendar invites to members.

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 if they are willing to volunteer. Adam B. advised that, since no members stepped forward, he will invite individual members to accompany him to the chair/vice chair meetings.

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. Committee members are continuing their visits towns around the area to compare our downtown with theirs and to come up with ideas for our own.

Pursuant to the CEA's last meeting, Devra drafted a letter to the Select Board regarding: 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 met with the MBTA, their engineering company, and BETA to try to resolve the RR crossing issue. They were told that there were no options to fix, as MBTA claims that federal regulations preclude allowing vehicles to queue between the intersection and the track when the light at the intersection is red. They were told it is necessary to use the signal even when the train isn't running. They are trying to see if additional timing adjustments can be accomplished to improve the situation. It was again expressed that vehicles, seeking to avoid the red light, are turning left onto Garden Street without regard to pedestrians, who may be crossing. Moe suggested the situation be brought to the attention of the Traffic Management Advisory Committee.

The Downtown Subcommittee will compile its information from tenants and landlords and present it to the entire CEA membership. They will also compile observations from visiting other Towns. Members who visited Walpole were impressed with the construction of two large multifamily housing projects right near the train station. They felt these large scale projects added vitality to the downtown area and constituted the implementation of the town's downtown action plan. 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. Devra advised the members that the Planning Board does seem committed to moving along with zoning for Highway Commercial 1. She indicated that at least one member wanted to include residential in the mix, which Devra has tried to discourage given the Select Board's 2025 study with respect to the impacts of already constructed, under construction, and allowed (Mixed Use-128 Residential Overlay for 250 units) multifamily units. The Select Board is concerned that we may have already crossed the threshold of requiring additional schools and/or additions. Bob indicated that mixed use residential/commercial is the most economically feasible, but acknowledges it is politically problematic. Members concurred that we don't want to propose anything which will jeopardize the commercial up-zone. The CEA members do not want to see the necessary commercial incentives embedded in the proposed zoning jeopardized by adding housing, for which there is no fiscal impact analysis. It was noted that if a residential project was desirable, it could be brought as a friendly 40B.

VI. Update on Chestnut Street Zoning

Ted was not present to give an update on the Planning Board's proposal for creating a new Transit Oriented Development Proposal for the Hartney Greymont parcel on Chestnut Street. It proposes a dense multifamily overlay. It is unclear if a project that far down on Chestnut Street will be able to create or incent vitality to the downtown.

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 did so and Moe and Marianne will bring the issue to the Select Board.]

It was noted that Verastem had expanded at 117 Kendrick and yet not much has been heard about it or indeed other successful businesses in the N² Innovation District. Devra explained that the N² steering committee is aware that we are not telling our success stories very well and a program is underway to get these individual success stories out as a sales pitch for the District.

VIII. Discussion of CEA priorities/future goals

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

IX. Update on Needham Crossing/N² Innovation District

It was noted that Coca Cola is shutting down its processing plant and turning the location into a distribution center only. Mike noted that he and Normandy had met with Coca Cola to talk about screening, truck queuing on Third Avenue, and noise (particularly impacting Residence Inn). Since the decision to change the purpose of the facility, Mike has tried to reconnect without success. He noted that Coca Cola was receptive to enhancing the property in terms of landscaping and screening, as well as better managing their operation onsite. It is not clear how the new function will impact truck idling on the street or traffic generally. Will there be more trucks coming with the new distribution center? Will more smaller trucks or vans be used in connection with the vending machine business? It was also noted that Needham water rates are expected to increase, as Coca Cola was subsidizing water costs.

There was a general discussion of the need to get more businesses into the area. The brokers reported that the residential market is softening, with cost per square foot declining and appreciation becoming less. Adam M. reported that in the commercial market it remains difficult to consolidate parcels because owner-occupied businesses (like the many in Mixed Use-128) tend not to sell. This is especially true because all along Route 128 areas have been up-zoned to get rid of existing uses.

Belmont Landscaping on Hillside recently sold to a self-storage business, which is permitting the use in that industrial district as a specially permitted “any lawful purpose or special use not enumerated elsewhere in this By-Law”. It was noted that the attorney for another self-storage group is seeking a zoning change to allow the use in the Mixed Use-128 area. Members observed that these uses are not traffic generators but they are usually sited in areas not yet ripe for development. It was suggested that we put this matter on the Agenda for next month for discussion.

X. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing

There was short discussion of the need for better and broader intercity transportation connection between Newton Highland T and Needham Crossing/Needham Heights/Needham Center, connection between Needham Heights commuter rail and Needham Crossing (part of NBCUniversal TIF), and desirability of making the Concept Plan for the MBTA unused rail bed parallel to Needham Street/Highland Avenue a reality.

Members were reminded that Monica Tibbits-Nutt, the Executive Director of the 128 Business Council, will be presenting a regional transportation update to the Select Board on Tuesday December 13th at 7:30 p.m. Members are invited to attend.

XI. Other Business

It was noted that the police/fire station override passed. Mike asked what the impacts were on commercial entities. Despite requests for details, Devra has been unable to obtain that information. Moe will try to get it. Mike noted that, unlike downtown leases which are usually triple net (placing the increased tax burden on the lessee businesses), most of the commercial sites in Needham Crossing are gross leases (placing the tax burden on the landlords to absorb).

XII. Adjourn

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