



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
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MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, December 5, 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; Michael Wilcox; Tina Burgos; Anne Marie Dowd; and Devra Bailin.

Not Present: Matt Talcoff; Ted Owens; Peter Atallah; and Bill Day.

Also Present: Greg Reibman; Robert Smart; Paul Ferreira; Eric Vogel; Josy Pan; and David Gordon.

I. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of November 7, 2018 were unanimously approved.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates

Our next meeting is scheduled for January 2nd, 2019 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 sent out next year's calendar invites to members.

III. Discussion of Self-Storage Uses

Members were reminded that Belmont Landscaping at 540 Hillside Avenue recently sold to a self-storage business, which obtained a special permit from the Planning Board for the use in that industrial district as a specially permitted "any lawful purpose or special use not enumerated elsewhere in this By-Law". Robert Smart is the attorney representing Blue Hawk Investments which is seeking a zoning change to allow the use in the Mixed Use-128 area to allow another self-storage facility at 77 Charles Street. Robert Smart and Paul Ferreira were before the members leave to make a presentation about their proposal. Adam B. explained that the role of the Council is not in assessing individual applicants for particular uses; the CEA's role is to look at macro-economic elements as to uses and their potential economic impact on surrounding properties and potential to incent maximum development of

the area. In other words, the members are not here to discuss to the merits of a particular proposal or application—that belongs, in this case, to the Planning Board.

Bob Smart explained that they were before the CEA to enlist business support for their proposal to add self-storage to the listed special permit uses in Mixed Use-128. He noted that the members supported a citizen petition to amend the By-Law which allowed boarding of animals at an animal hotel in the district. He noted the use was not listed in the Zoning By-Law at all. It is also undefined. He pointed out that it behooves the Town to be clearer on uses in the use tables, as it makes it difficult for new businesses to open in Needham. (In response to a question by a member, Devra explained that some flexibility was inserted into the By-Law by the adoption of the Determination of Use By-Law, which permits the Planning Board to determine if a use is similar in kind and impact to a use allowed by right or special permit.) Bob Smart argued that the use is appropriate to the Mixed Use-128 district because it is low impact, replaces the structures with a new attractive building, including a landscaped buffer and public access community room, and increases tax revenues. The use in this zoning district requires a zoning amendment, which he said he has drafted. The CEA has not seen nor reviewed such amendment.

The structure proposed is a multilevel self-storage facility. Renderings were shared with the members. Paul stated that it represents the highest and best use for the property and a good use for the neighborhood. Although not determined yet, it is proposed to have retail, restaurant and/or community space in a portion of the first floor, especially on the frontage of Wexford/Charles. The proposal is not yet in front of the Planning Board. They have looked at the economic need to an additional self-storage facility and believe that the market can support this facility along with the Hillside Avenue and Needham Street facilities.

Moe noted that this is a matter for the Planning Board; that the CEA can offer advice to the Planning Board if asked to do so but to date we haven't been asked; and that we cannot make recommendations on particular applications pending before other boards for decision.

Adam M. commented that there is a growing need for self-storage and he feels it is needed, especially in the commercial market. Landlords have been converting basement storage into usable office space and/or amenity centers, forcing tenants to find alternative storage space. Paul explained that about 2/3 of the current use of self-storage is for residential customers; 1/3 for businesses. He doesn't think business would be distributing out of the building.

Rick asked about what was proposed for the street frontage, as that is important for assessing whether it meets the goals set out in the zoning. The Town wanted and passed the new zoning to activate certain uses, which hasn't happened yet. Members asked how this building/use will move toward those goals. Paul said no decision has been made for those non-self-storage areas.

Stu asked about the number of units being proposed. Paul said they are looking at an FAR of 2.0, which is the allowed density for low traffic uses. He noted that the Hillside Avenue facility is about 123,000 sq. ft., which was determined to have a 14 space parking requirement. Their facility would be 93,000 sq. ft. and the building would triple the real estate tax revenue. Moe noted that most commercial uses, like offices, bring with them tax revenue from personal property tax, which they should look into.

Rick and Bob noted that they did not believe the personal property tax would apply to stored items (unless taxable to their owners).

Devra noted that she had discussed this use with Bob Smart and expressed concern about the use not meeting the goals of an active interconnected urban environment. But she added that the uses proposed on the street frontages may be important to the evaluation of the building's contribution to those goals in the Planning Board's evaluation of the project. A zoning amendment would not have to require active streetscape uses, such as retail, restaurants, consumer services, etc.; but it might be more consistent with district goals to tie any special permit for self-storage to active streetscape uses open to the general public.

Bob commented that he is in favor of the approach of clarifying uses in the By-Law and defining terms. Glen agreed that we should expand uses allowed by right and commented that the uses in the By-Law are too restrictive. Way too much process is required for businesses to open in Needham.

It was noted that the issue of uses allowed by right and by special permit is a bigger issue to be discussed with the Planning Board at Chair/Vice Chair meetings.

IV. Discussion of Gordon Liquor License

David Gordon of Gordon Liquor's explained that they had sought an all alcohol retail license which the Select Board denied, along with Volante Farm's request for same. They are reapplying for just a beer and wine license. Adam B. reiterated his explanation, previously given on the self-storage issue, to David so that he understood the limitations of our role. Moe reiterated that, since Gordon's will be applying to the Select Board for its license, the CEA cannot make recommendations on a specific pending application. Adam B. explained that this advisory council is focused on broader economic impacts and benefits of certain types of businesses and land uses in specific commercial districts.

David explained that they are in a niche market and trying to build on it at a new location at 79 Wexford Street—it is experiential retail, focusing on high end consumers, as well as online purchasers. They offer essentially a personal shopping service for unique and/or more expensive product. Given the "white papers" prepared by the Wine Shop Subcommittee of the CEA in 2012 before retail sales of alcohol were allowed, Virginia suggested that we should try to understand the impact on the existing Needham market. David indicated that their concept has very minimal impact on other vendors in the Needham market; he doesn't see it as competition to existing vendors. Adam B. mentioned that the CEA does not have the capacity at this time to conduct an economic impact analysis of the retail alcohol market.

Adam M. indicated that he has known David for 35 years and is very familiar with Gordon Liquor's other sites. They are very high end. He views the use as one which could energize the area, which has seen very little turnover. David described his business concept as a low impact business use, having what he believes will be roughly two customers per hour, small outbound van deliveries, and small vehicle deliveries of inventory and other business supplies to the store.

One issue, which the CEA has been unable to study given the time frame of the request for input, is whether the Needham market is saturated or whether it can support another vendor. It was suggested

and agreed that Devra should start the process of contacting those individuals in the industry who provided information to the Wine Shop Subcommittee back in 2012 and update our information. Glen, Stu, and Rick agreed to serve on the group to restudy this.

Moe explained that the number of liquor licenses is limited by statute; the amount that Needham got approved through Home Rule was less than the statutory maximum. At the present time the Select Board has one all alcohol license left and two more wine and beer. (The Board has approved four all alcohol and one wine and beer.) Adam B. explained that the Select Board is not looking for a vote from us on this.

Stu felt that doing something in that area to spur on development is important. He thinks this kind of high end business would encourage that trend. Bob felt that this particular use would be less likely to impact competitors already in the market than another package store. Greg thought this use would enliven the area by bringing in something upscale and a new use. Tina commented on the need to support experiential retail—that is the way true retail can survive and prosper in our local economy. Other comments included: (1) whether this type of low impact use is really a plus to the area in that this low impact use will not create a vibrant street presence and (2) concern that incremental changes which are not consistent with an engaging streetscape presence may undercut future changes more likely to obtain the goals.

Adam B. indicated that we should report to the Select Board our conversation about this. Even though we have been unable to conduct any research, we should create an initial memorandum to the Select Board and offer our thoughts as discussed at this meeting.

V. Update from Downtown Subcommittee

Devra noted that the Needham Lights event on Saturday was highly successful. She reminded members that the Needham Winter Arts Festival will be in Town Hall on Saturday December 8th from 10-3. She hopes that members will support local artists as well as the downtown businesses for their holiday shopping.

Tina commented that the Needham Lights event did not assist her business in anyway. She will come to our meeting next time with suggestions about how to improve business, including her suggestion that the holiday stroll be separated from Needham Lights and held on Small Business Saturday instead.

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed further.

VI. Update on Industrial Zoning

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

VII. Update on Chestnut Street Zoning

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

VIII. Discussion of Needham Crossing Branding

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

IX. Discussion of CEA priorities/future goals

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

X. Update on Needham Crossing/N² Innovation District

As noted previously, 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 of Northern New England's representative, Shayne Durant, 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 reconnected and advises that Shayne would be willing to meet with the CEA. It is not clear what the impacts of the change of use will be on traffic (although trucks will likely be smaller).

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed further.

XI Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

XII. Other Business

Adam B. reminded members that he is looking to set up Chair/Vice Chair meetings with both the Select Board and the Planning Board. There is a real need to fill the Vice Chair position, whereupon Anne Marie volunteered.

XIII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:50 a.m.