



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
781-455-7550 x213

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, February 6, 2019 7:30 AM
Charles River Room
Public Services Administration Building
500 Dedham Avenue

Present: Adam Block, Chair; Adam Meixner; Rick Putrush; Moe Handel; Glen Cammarano; Stuart Agler; Tina Burgos; Anne Marie Dowd; Matt Talcoff; Bill Day; Bob Hentschel; and Devra Bailin.

Not Present: Virginia Fleisher; Ted Owens; and Michael Wilcox.

Also Present: David Montgomery; and Anne Weinstein, District Director for Rep. Denise Garlick

I. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of January 2, 2019 were unanimously approved.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates

Our next meeting is scheduled for March 6th, 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 CEA Priorities/Future Goals

Members were provided with copies, both by prior emails and at this meeting, of Adam B.'s and Anne Marie's draft CEA 2019 Priorities, Devra's Revised List of Proposed Zoning Changes January 1, 2018, Devra's How to effectuate streamlining changes (with numbers relating to Topics of Discussion) dated February 23, 2017, and Topics of Discussion with Lee Newman's comments dated November 2, 2016.

Adam B. began the discussion with the first goal identified on the draft (which he pointed out was not intended to be listed in any order of priority): "Study, investigate and appraise town-wide economic conditions and trends." He and Anne Marie propose as a new initiative that the CEA work on creating an economic score card to gage our progress economically. We need to come up with

quantifiable questions so that we have an effective tool to track our progress. Matt pointed out that his firm has an economist on staff who makes a middle market analysis and projections. Stu noted that he likes the concept but asked what exactly are we measuring. Devra noted the difficulty of obtaining up to date data. Adam B. suggested that a group of members put together questions and then work towards finding the information. Matt, Moe, Adam B and Adam M. will serve on the group studying this initiative. It was also suggested that we see if there are Babson students interested in assisting in the project. (Devra noted MCFE applications are due in March for next fall term.)

Adam B. explained that the second initiative under this goal is to study the impacts/benefits of tax exempt institutions in Needham to determine whether additional benefits can be gained for the Town. One is the BID-Needham. Devra was asked to find out about the BID-Needham tax exempt status. She reported that, in addition to services provided to the Town at no cost, the BID by voluntary PILOT agreement will pay \$73,000 during FY 2019, \$93,000 during FY 2020, and then increase annually by the change in CPI. The agreement can be adjusted if BID purchases more property. The suggestion is that the CEA evaluate the other contributions tax exempt nonprofits make to Needham. It was noted by the Town Assessor that even Partners Health Care data center facility at 128 First Avenue (worth \$8.5 million) is deemed by the DOR to be tax exempt even though it is simply an office/record keeping facility. Bob asked if the Select Board was ok with this type of inquiry; Moe, speaking for himself, thought it would be.

Matt asked about transportation initiatives to support Needham Crossing and Needham Heights. There was discussion of the Concept Plan for rapid bus over the unused MBTA rail running parallel to Needham Street/Highland Avenue, the fact that Northland Development is proposing robust shuttle connections as part of its project, including connection to Needham Heights commuter rail, and the fact that NBCUniversal's TIF includes requirements to study connections between Needham Crossing and Needham Heights and mass transit nodes in Newton. David, who serves on Needham's Transportation Committee and represented Needham on various State transportation boards, noted that it made sense to continue the dialogues with Newton, as both municipalities need to be on the same page in order for progress to be made, especially as it relates to State funding for projects. Stu noted that he felt transportation issues in Needham Crossing are already part of N2 initiatives, which has support from businesses and the Chamber. He suggests focusing on Heights and Downtown, which need more help. Devra commented that creating connections with Needham Crossing and Heights/Downtown is critical to supporting businesses.

The second identified goal is to: "Promote, assist and encourage the preservation, development, and location of new and existing industry, business and commerce." Completed initiatives include the canvassing of the downtown and requesting that the Select Board provide clear signage as to the location of our free public parking lots, snow removal in the downtown, and the signal before the RR tracks on Great Plain as vehicles move towards to Chapel/Chestnut intersection. Devra reported that the Town Manager advised that the Select Board approved of the sample signs provided by the CEA and is identifying locations to post them. As to the snow removal issue, the Town will, assuming approval at TM, initiate a pilot to test out new sidewalk equipment and snow removal in a portion of the downtown. The Select Board continues to work with the MBTA to mitigate the situation with the traffic signal—perhaps making sure vehicles go up to the stop line?

New initiatives could include liaising with the site selector teams of the Mass Development and Mass Econ. The former provides grants and advice; the latter serves as website for site selectors. Adam B. explained that, with Anne Marie's expertise, it is hoped that Needham can apply for and be granted State level grants to study certain economic areas—such as Wexford Street, Downtown or other areas. There may also be funding for marketing grants. This relates to developing and implementing a marketing message to attract businesses. Anne Marie mentioned that she has contacts who are consultants who chase grants and are paid out of grants obtained. Technical assistant grants, like the one we were unsuccessful with for streetscape design in Needham Crossing, are also available from the MAPC. Because we are not a gateway city, some grants may be more difficult to obtain.

It was noted that, as to the proposed new initiative to hold a marketing event to launch Needham Crossing, Adam M. has much of the information necessary to relaunch already. Stu raised the issue of whether, give all the work of the N2 innovation district group to market that area, our time might be better spent working on other areas of Needham. Devra did note that she is working with Mike to design, locate and permit the approved N2 Needham Crossing signs. Five are existing locations and two additional ones are proposed. There was consensus that, as to marketing and increasing the attractiveness of Needham, focus should probably be on the Center and the Heights areas. This should include a Shop Local campaign, which could be in cooperation with the Needham Business Alliance committee of the Chamber.

The third identified goal is: “Assist the town in attracting the preferred mix of goods, services, housing, recreation and entertainment in appropriate districts.” The first new initiative suggested is to engage CID, WeWork, and Greentown Lab incubator companies to promote Needham Crossing. There was some discussion as to whether this initiative is better left to the N2 groups. Adam M. noted that the CIC, the Chamber, and the City of Newton are trying to locate between 10,000-20,000 sq. ft. for a new location but they want the space pledged/donated. They have about \$200,000 for rehab but nothing for rent. (Current space belongs to the City of Newton.)

The fourth identified goal is: “Make recommendations on improving permitting and licensing functions in the Town.” Adam B. and Anne Marie listed some of the more recent initiatives upon which our work is complete. Ongoing initiatives include pressing for additional streamlining initiatives.

The fifth identified goal is: “Evaluate and advise the Town on ideas for zoning changes that will improve the economic vitality of the Town.” Adam B. and Anne Marie listed some of the more recent initiatives upon which our work is complete (recommending residential overlay for Central Avenue Neighborhood Business District and Highway Commercial 1). Ongoing initiatives include pressing for rezoning of Highway Commercial 2 and Highway Commercial 3, as well as additional streamlining initiatives. New initiatives could include to study Chestnut Street rezoning (this would be in conjunction with the Planning Board) and Wexford Street area (perhaps with the assistance of Mass Development grants).

The sixth identified goal is: “Advise and make recommendations to appropriate officials, agencies, boards, and town departments on issues of economic development.” Many of the recommendations here are identified in prior goals.

Stu thanked Adam B. and Anne Marie for preparing the list and asked what our priorities should be. Members were asked to send their individual list of priorities to Devra and Adam B., who will collect the members' views.

IV. Report on Chair/Vice Chair Meeting with Select Board and Planning Board (January 24, 2019)

Although Adam B. pointed out that he felt the joint meeting with the Chair/Vice Chair of the Select Board and with the Chair/Vice Chair of the Planning Board on January 24th, which he and Anne Marie (and Devra) attended, was helpful, there was not sufficient time to discuss it in any detail.

V. Report on Industrial Zoning (HC1) from Planning Board Hearing January 29, 2019

(Glen left the room for this discussion.) Due to time constraints, it was simply noted that there were five opponents who spoke at the Planning Board hearing. Devra made the zoning presentation to the Planning Board and answered questions from the audience; Adam B. made a presentation in favor as well. Devra noted that the Planning Department is engaging a consultant to provide new three dimensional drawings for as of right development and special permit development, which take into account the topography of the lot. It may be that additional height limitations and setbacks may be necessary from the Highland Avenue and Gould Street frontages (perhaps 40' like in the Elder Services District) and with height increasing farther in. Members stressed the need to provide precise information about the tax implications of the zoning changes. Devra noted that Adam M. has agreed to provide valuation and tax implications of possible development; Devra already has the existing tax information. Adam M. also noted that only Class A buildings will be constructed and that density/height will be focused on along Route 128.

VI. Report on Chestnut Street Zoning from Planning Board Hearing January 29, 2019

Due to time constraints, there was limited discussion of this topic. Anne Marie noted that in her opinion dense residential development could be problematic, especially as it impacts the schools. Moe noted that the Select Board received funds from Town Meeting to do a 2025 study of the Town infrastructure (water, sewer, traffic, etc.) and will include the impact of recent multifamily development on the schools and the adequacy of our existing structures to accommodate anticipated enrollment growth.

VII. Update from Downtown Subcommittee

See discussion above.

Other than this, this topic was not discussed due to time constraints.

VIII. Update on Needham Crossing/N² Innovation District

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

IX. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

X. Other Business

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

XI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:15 a.m.