



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
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MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, January 2, 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; Virginia Fleisher; Tina Burgos; Matt Talcoff; Ted Owens; Bill Day; and Devra Bailin.
Not Present: Bob Hentschel; Peter Atallah; Michael Wilcox; and Anne Marie Dowd.
Also Present: Anne Weinstein, District Director for Rep. Denise Garlick

I. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of December 5, 2018 were unanimously approved.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates

Our next meeting is scheduled for February 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 a copy of the report prepared by Adam B. when he and Jack Cogswell met with the Chair/Vice Chair of the Select Board on February 22, 2018. A list of priorities based on those discussions was created. (It modified the list the CEA brought to the meeting.) Adam B. explained that the CEA goal is to effect real change. Some issues are undertaken at the direction of the Select Board but others are suggested recommendations studied and proposed by the CEA.

Adam B. advised that streamlining certain regulatory and administrative processes in the Planning Department remains a CEA priority as the Town seeks to promote itself as a competitive location to site and conduct business. As suggested by the Planning Board, Devra provided a list of three non-zoning initiatives for the Planning Board to take up: (1) drafting and adopting regulations detailing the guidelines for requiring traffic and/or parking studies. [This is intended to formalize rules

already followed and avoid pre-filing meetings with the Planning Board to waive the filing of either or both studies.] (2) Insubstantial modifications post construction policy. [This will allow certain changes to be made administratively to a project post-construction as can be made during construction; the language for this revision has been drafted.] (3) Revising decisions to expressly allow de minimus and administrative changes without notice and hearing and to separate site plan review from special permit issues in the drafted decisions. As this should be discussed at the upcoming Chair/Vice Chair meeting, Devra will circulate the memorandum outlining all streamlining initiatives as well as the November 11, 2017 memo detailing the discussion between Devra, Ted and Marty regarding the initiatives. Devra was also asked to identify those issues concerning the ZBA (preexisting nonconforming parking lot modifications requiring special permits [--the suggestion is to replace the cumbersome special permit with a more limited site plan review standard] and imbedding into their special permit changes by less than full notice and hearing). Ted addressed these items but it does not appear that they have yet all been vetted and approved by the Planning Board.

The financial incentives referenced are not TIFs or tax abatements. 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 or other areas. There may also be funding for marketing grants. These are tied to the fourth priority regarding commercial eco development based on clusters of industry. What are the economic drivers in Needham and how to we foster them? How do we get businesses to work together to market and improve the economic environment for everyone? Can the CEA create tools to connect local businesses?

Chestnut Street (see discussion below) is proposed to be on the TM Annual Warrant only as it relates to the Hartney Greymont property. Highway Commercial re-zoning (see discussion below) is proposed to be on the TM Annual Warrant only as it relates to the Muzi/Channel 5 property. The downtown subcommittee visited other Towns and will put together its observations on other municipalities. (See discussion below regarding the Downtown Subcommittee.) Adam B. and Devra are trying to pull together information on our economic base. We will reach out to our commercial brokers to get their input. It was also suggested that there be greater outreach to landowners, perhaps including a representative on the CEA. Especially as to the downtown, landlords need to be part of the discussion and plan. Adam M. pointed out that office space not right along Route 128 has mostly demand for medical office. One of the difficulties with these uses is the parking demand associated with them. Most of the sites are simply too small to accommodate such uses due to the restricted parking available. Parcel consolidation takes a long time.

Matt asked about creating Needham Heights as a priority. Devra was asked to follow-up with Welltower again to see if they've changed their decision to reuse the property for some type of senior care.

Devra will send a copy of the February 22, 2018 memo regarding priorities to the members so they can provide their comments to her ahead of the January 24th meeting.

IV. Discussion of Chair/Vice Chair Meeting with Select Board and Planning Board

Adam B. noted that a joint meeting with the Chair/Vice Chair of the Select Board and with the Chair/Vice Chair of the Planning Board is scheduled for January 24th at 8:00 a.m. Anne Marie and

Adam B. will be attending. That is why it is important for members to review the list of priorities created last year and provide their comments to Adam and Devra. Devra will, as noted above, send out a copy of the document for comments.

V. Update from Downtown Subcommittee (Tina Burgos: local shopping incentive programs)

Stu asked whether we had received a response from our letter to the Town Manager/Select Board about Town parking signage, Town cleared snow removal for the retail sector, and the red signal before the RR tracks on Great Plain. Devra has received no answer and was asked to follow up with the Town Manager.

Tina has talked with owners of new businesses and restaurants and she reports a lot of optimism. She noted that there is a need to make sure that a sustained message of shopping local is made. Businesses need to help other businesses and use all social media platforms, including Instagram. She noted she was very disappointed in the huge fail by the Newton Needham Chamber regarding Small Business Saturday. Even providing a simple map with inviting graphics would be a good start. She noted that the South End is very spread out and yet the businesses there have been able to coordinate events and help all businesses. Devra noted the history of the Needham Merchants Association and the difficulty of getting businesses to participate. (NMA started out with over 25 active members and dwindled within a year to 5; even with free participation events she struggles to get a small portion of businesses to sign up.) It was agreed that there needed to be a broader shop local campaign but that is not a good fit for the CEA but is for the Chamber. Tina noted that the shop local website at the Chamber's website is pathetic as were the Chamber's efforts on Small Business Saturday. While the CEA can focus on broad economic initiatives (like zoning and streamlining), the Chamber is the right group to create a sustainable shop local campaign. Any suggestions we have will be relayed to the Needham Business Alliance. Devra noted that there is a need for a sustained campaign explaining to the public what the economic advantages of shopping local are and what our businesses have to offer.

VI. Update on Industrial Zoning

The Select Board will refer back the articles relating to Highway Commercial 1 to the Planning Board for hearing. If recommended by the Planning Board, the articles will be on the Annual TM Warrant in May. The Planning Board hearing is on January 29th. It is recommended that members of the CEA be present to voice their support for the articles and to articulate the reasons for the rezoning as it relates to the economic benefits. Members of the CEA should feel free to reach out to the community in the neighborhood which has already voiced its opposition to any changes.

Ted was unsure why the articles proposing the neutralization of Route 128 have not been advertised. The Planning Board did want to proceed with the article separately but Devra should ask Lee on the plan to move it forward.

VII. Update on Needham Crossing/N² Innovation District

Moe believes that the signage for N2/Needham Crossing was resolved by the Select Board. He will get confirmation from the Town Manager as to which is the correct alternative of the two presented.

Devra noted that, once approved, she will work with Mike Wilcox to get the signage approved by the DRB and get it posted at the five existing signs and perhaps at a new location on Kendrick which will not be disturbed by future construction of the corridor or Third Avenue signal. She has been assured that funding is available from the owners' private fund.

VIII. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing

Devra explained that Add-A-Lane project is essentially complete. The corridor project will commence in the fall of 2019 but we don't know where the contractor will start. Glen noted that he just received the new notice of taking but there's been no follow-up although it was indicated that someone would be calling to discuss it.

IX. Update on Chestnut Street Zoning

Ted explained that only the Hartney Greymont property is on for hearing before the Planning Board. The rest of Chestnut Street is not being pursued at this time. The hearing will be held in January or February.

X. Other Business

Devra relayed information to the members about the TripAdvisor stock being the number two performer in the S&P 500 in 2018; more shoppers got deals online on Black Friday than in stores (store traffic was down between 5-8%; online sales rose 23.5%.); two Needham companies were named to the Deloitte Technology Fast 500 list—Allego (#161 showing 646% growth) and Convergent Dental (#256 showing 348% growth); and TripAdvisor and PTC were both named great places to work.

XI. Adjourn

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