



TOWN of NEEDHAM  
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
**Economic Development**  
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**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS**  
**WEDNESDAY, March 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; Ted Owens; Anne Marie Dowd; Bob Hentschel; David Montgomery and Devra Bailin.

Not Present: Virginia Fleisher; Matt Talcoff; Bill Day; Tina Burgos; and Michael Wilcox.

**I. Approval of Minutes**

New member David Montgomery was introduced and welcomed to the CEA. The Minutes of February 6, 2019 were unanimously approved.

**II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates**

Our next meeting is scheduled for April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 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. pointed out that, with one exception, we have not had any feedback from the Select Board to the list of priorities. Devra explained that the Select Board has asked that we postpone any inquiry into nonprofits' impacts on Needham's economy, including PILOTs and other services provided, until it meets this summer. Adam B. explained that the Town identified six items in our charge, which

are shown on the draft Priorities. They include a mix of zoning, regulatory and other measures. Adam B. told the members that we have filed an application with Babson's MCFE program to get help in developing an economic scorecard.

Stu noted that he submitted his general comments, including letting Needham Crossing and transportation challenges, be handled by the N2 initiative. We should be focused on the heights, downtown, and industrial districts in terms of priorities.

Ted offered his opinion we should be asking has the Town done everything it can from a regulatory view to promote development. He believes that, as economic development director, and not solely as staff to CEA, Devra should be communicating directly with the Planning Board about, e.g., any changes to zoning she believes require Planning Board attention. Economic development is not simply regulatory and is not restricted to zoning initiatives. He believes we are about to see another economic downturn and feels that the Town is not prepared. The Town has been spending money and incurring debt which will prove problematic. People also seem to think that, because this is Needham, we can impose conditions on development and, despite their rendering development not economically viable, developers will develop anyway. It doesn't work that way. For example, the Town doesn't provide adequate parking in the downtown, forcing its provision on developers, which in turn hinders growth. Critical attention should be on the commercial tax base—people who resist change don't consider the common advantage gained by it. Ted noted that the Planning Board members have been accused of being in developers' pockets and their motivations question solely because they happen to believe in something different.

Devra wondered if we shouldn't place as our number one priority increasing the commercial base and then list ways in which we intend to focus on that. Adam B. felt that the CEA should be directly involved in marketing the Town and in trying to attract businesses to Needham. We need to be on the State site selector lists and refocus on the CIC and other co-working facilities. (Adam M. noted that the CIC is seeking 20,000 sq. ft. free of charge and are willing to put only \$200,000 towards renovating it. Basically, this is not something landlords are willing to do.) It was discussed that, although increasing the commercial base is implied in what we do, it should be made an express priority.

There was a discussion of Chestnut Street beyond the existing site before the Planning Board. Ted indicated that the Planning Board would welcome our input.

Rick indicated that he thought that there was not enough outreach to the public. He noted that the presentation on HC1 (Glen left the room for this discussion) at the public hearing was missing appropriate graphics and information on the tax implications of development. Bob noted that no amount of outreach or graphics will put an end to NIMBY responses. Ted noted that this is an ongoing weakness at public hearings—need an organized campaign; more supporters from CEA, speaking for themselves, should speak in favor of these zoning changes. They need to provide a counterbalance to those opposed. The public interest in such projects needs to be clear.

(Glen returned.) Adam B. noted that we also need to prioritize streamlining initiatives, which impede development and/or redevelopment especially by small businesses. The lack of progress over a long period of time is problematic.

There was discussion of the need, as in Dedham Center, for more multifamily residential housing in the Center and Heights. It was noted that the impact of multifamily is the subject of the Town's 2025 study. Moe, speaking for himself, feels that evidence may well show that such housing has minimal impact on, for example, schools. But at this point, we don't have the evidence to show the impact of existing multifamily units. And it is unlikely the Select Board would welcome our input on this at this time.

Stu suggested that there be more educational components to residents and Town Meeting about the commercial tax base and commercial tax rates on Town funds. It was suggested that there be a standard "hit list" for all projects and zoning initiatives: impact on tax revenues, impact on traffic, impact on municipal services, impact on infrastructure, and the like.

Ted suggested that the CEA should really not just be an advisor to the Select Board but also to Town Meeting. Moe will bring this up with the Select Board. Devra noted that the CEA does submit letters in support of initiatives before Town Meeting but only with the Select Board's express consent. David suggested exploring the possibility that the CEA as a committee routinely assist the Select Board—in the weeks prior to Town Meetings—by drafting language the Select Board could use at Town Meeting when introducing articles pertaining to matters of economic import to Needham. Moe acknowledged that most of what we have done is in the domain of the Planning Board and we should move forward with having meetings with the Chair/Vice Chair of that Board.

Adam B. asked the members again to please send their thoughts on priorities to Devra and him. Devra will send out to members both list of 2018 and 2019 priorities.

#### **IV. Report on Industrial Zoning (HC1) from Planning Board Hearing**

(Glen left the room for this discussion.) Devra attended the Planning Board meeting on March 5<sup>th</sup> at which time the consultant showed three dimensional drawings of the proposed zoning (which she had told the Board and the public at the January 29<sup>th</sup> public hearing would be forthcoming). Ted advised that the Planning Board received the dimensional representations and the consensus was that the heights along Gould and Highland were too high (which the CEA discussed last time) and the allowed increase in height at 50' in from those streets was too close to the streets. Devra noted that the consultant recommended 42'-46' and a distance back of approximately 150' from the street edges. The 20' landscaped buffer was discussed, as was the building setback. (One member expressed the desire to have the building setbacks increased from the streets.) The consultant recommended leaving the 20' landscaped buffer and not increasing the distance from the street to the buildings. Ted noted that not everyone will be satisfied with the changes. He also has a solution to the issue raised by one member about where Highland Avenue begins. Devra expressed concern about the way the discussion went.

#### **V. Report on Chestnut Street Zoning from Planning Board Hearing January 29, 2019**

(Glen returned.) Ted noted that there was a letter submitted which impugned the integrity and motives of the Planning Board, which was deeply disturbing. He did the public presentation on January 29<sup>th</sup> and he did not hide the fact that there was a development of the property proposed which was dependent on the zoning change. It is highly likely that the six story profile will be rejected by the Planning Board. Some members expressed support for 4 stories; some 4-5; but all members seem to

support this project as TODD. A question was raised whether the CEA should be advocating for greater residential density in the downtown and along Chestnut. Moe pointed out that the Select Board would not support such advocacy until after the 2025 study. He also noted that there are differences of opinion on the height and use of this particular project.

#### **VI. Update on Needham Crossing/N<sup>2</sup> Innovation District**

Devra and Mike are continuing their work on new N2 signage. We have drafts and Devra has spoken with Mark Gluesing about the proposed signs and locations.

#### **VII. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing**

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

#### **VIII. Update from Downtown Subcommittee**

Due to time constraints, this topic was not discussed.

#### **IX. Other Business**

Devra noted that there is a new co-working space at 1320 Highland Avenue called “Burbspace”. Verastem empty lab space at 117 Kendrick has been leased to Advantagene now Kendal (?) Therapeutics. UMass Amherst at Mount Ida is working to establish its connections to Needham, Newton, N2, and local businesses. This type of large educational institution, which includes the Isenberg School of Management, is precisely the institutional educational element our innovation district was missing. Advance Auto Parts has a grand opening soon for its facility at 11 Second Avenue.

#### **X. Adjourn**

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