



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

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

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, May 1, 2019 7:30 AM
Charles River Room
Public Services Administration Building
500 Dedham Avenue

Present: Adam Block, Chair; Virginia Fleisher; Rick Putprush; Moe Handel; Glen Cammarano; Michael Wilcox; Bob Hentschel; Adam Meixner; Ted Owens; Stuart Agler; David Montgomery and Devra Bailin.

Not Present: Anne Marie Dowd; Matt Talcoff; Bill Day; and Tina Burgos.

I. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of April 3, 2019, with an amendment of Rick's comments on page two revised to read "Rick was curious as to why the owner purchased the property when the use being proposed for it was not a use allowed by the zoning.", were unanimously approved.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates

Our next meeting is scheduled for June 5, 2019 in the Charles River Room. There was discussion of whether we should try starting at 8:00 instead. Several members expressed concern about going past 9:00. It was decided to try a later start date. Members expressed support in trying to keep the meetings to an hour or so. Items of critical importance will be put at the beginning of the Agenda to allow those who have to leave to participate as fully as possible. Future meetings will be scheduled for the first Wednesday of the month (unless a holiday) in the Charles River Room at PSAB.

III. Update on Citizens' Petition for Self-Storage Proposed Zoning Change in Mixed Use-128

The Citizens' Petition has been withdrawn due to lack of support from the Planning Board and other parties. Devra noted that the comments from the members were helpful to both the Select and Planning Boards. A key concern was the fact that a special permit could not be denied solely because of the use—there had to be a reason like traffic, access, parking, etc. to deny a permit where the use was allowed. This could have resulted in multiple storage facilities in the area.

IV. Discussion of CEA Priorities/Future Goals

Members were provided with copies of Adam B.'s and Anne Marie's draft CEA 2019 Priorities, 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. noted that our discussion of priorities and goals is bleeding too far into the year to formalize goals for 2019. He proposes we restart the process in September in order to finalize 2020 goals and priorities.

1. **Study, investigate and appraise town-wide economic conditions and trends.** Under new initiatives, we included creating a balanced scorecard of Needham's economic performance. It was reported that the Babson MCFE students did not choose our economic scorecard project application. Adam B. will reach out to see if the MBA students might be interested. Devra noted that it might be a reasonable project to give to the Babson club. There was considerable discussion about what questions we would be asking. Ted commented on the frequency (or lack thereof) with which available data changes. Devra agreed, noting that much available data is from the last census (2010) and is regional rather than Needham specific. An exception would be information provided by Mary Burke, a senior economist with the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, who provides more local data during her yearly presentations to the Chamber on the economy and commercial economic development overview.

Stu asked what information are we collecting that is valuable/useful in determining and directing policy? What exactly are the questions? Rick noted that the Economic Scorecard Devra circulated from Charleston is regional and isn't terribly helpful in figuring out questions specific to Needham. Aren't we back to questions like: how do we increase foot traffic and improve the vitality of the downtown? Moe asked how we quantify the economic health of our local businesses, which should be one focus. Devra noted that a more general question relates to the percentage of real estate tax revenues which come from the commercial base. Do we have a priority or goal to increase those revenues and to what percentage? Back to 20+%?

2. **Promote, assist and encourage the preservation, development, and location of new and existing businesses.** With respect to the downtown, we have received the Select Board's support in installing parking signage, a pilot program for snow removal in the downtown (if Town Meeting approves the purchase of a special vehicle), and possible solutions to improve traffic before the train signal on Great Plain. New initiatives are reflected in Goals document. Adam B., Anne Marie and Devra will work to get on site selection lists.

It was noted that one of the limitations on Needham is the very small floor plates in our downtown. Although we have destination restaurants, we have not been able to leverage that to increase the success of locally owned independent retailers and other businesses. Parking remains a critical problem, especially because of the loss of spaces occasioned by the construction of the Police/Fire station. The signage to designate parking areas from the main streets has been approved but not yet installed. Adam M. commented that Rockville Center NY is known for its restaurants—the stores around them are open and night life is active. How do we recreate that here? Outdoor seating? Stores open at night? Streetscape amenities?

In terms of getting the word out, NAIOP is providing a great opportunity to show off. N2/Needham Crossing will be featured on the Tour on June 5th. The tour will include N2 sites in Needham Crossing (e.g., SharkNinja) and Newton (e.g. Wells Office and Northland's proposed Needham Street development).

3. **Assist the town in attracting the preferred mix of goods, services, housing, recreation and entertainment in the appropriate districts.** A list of new initiatives is in the Goals document. Devra, Adam B. and Anne Marie will work with Mass Development to try to get a grant to study Chestnut Street and/or Wexford. Getting ideas on how to proceed in both areas will be very helpful.
4. **Make recommendations on improving permitting and licensing functions in the town.** Ted noted that the Planning Board consists of five individual members, and that it would be a mistake to think of the Planning Board as a monolithic entity. The demands on the Planning Board's time generally mean that more time is spent on permitting issues than actual planning. It is suggested that Devra, Rick, Bob and Ted work together to move beyond the items currently on the streamlining list. Devra noted that Town projects tend to get fast-tracked and that Town departments do not always make private projects a priority. There are certain structural issues in the public sector than impede progress. Mike noted that Wellesley just went to an online application process and suggests that perhaps we can learn something from it. To make changes, there needs to be direction from the Select Board and the Planning Board.
5. **Evaluate and advise the Town on ideas for zoning changes that will improve the economic vitality of the town.** As noted in the Goals, we were successful in promoting a private proposal to allow multifamily housing above commercial uses in the Neighborhood Business District along Central Avenue. We are still working to achieve the changes to Highway Commercial 1. We need to continue our work on Highway Commercial 2 and 3. Ted welcomes our assistance in studying the rest of Chestnut Street to remove zoning impediments to development. It is a sufficient challenge to deal with the multitude of small owners but without changes to the zoning there's no incentive to invest. We will look to see if Mass Development TAP grants could help us with either Wexford or Chestnut.
6. **Advise and make recommendations to appropriate officials, agencies, boards and town departments on issues of economic development.** See above. Devra noted that she and Anne Marie, at the request of Public Facilities, will be looking into the possibility of the Town purchasing the Army land on East Militia Road with the assistance of Mass Development.

V. Update on Industrial Zoning (HC1)

A workshop between the Select Board and the Planning Board is being arranged to discuss the zoning. Devra will also be present. It is anticipated that the workshop will be facilitated by the consultant hired by the Planning Department to provide three dimensional drawings. The plan is to get this zoning on the fall Town Meeting Warrant.

VI. Update on Chestnut Street Zoning

This matter is on the Warrant for Town Meeting.

VII. Update on Needham Crossing/N² Innovation District

The N2/Needham Crossing Corporation paid for Graffito to do a report on placemaking, signage, encouraging shared services (e.g. food trucks), access to natural amenities, and the like in Needham Crossing. Several members, including Mike, Bob, Virginia, and Adam M., attended the Needham Crossing Owners' Meeting on Monday, where Gustavo Quiroga of Graffito made a presentation. Members reported that the presentation was very exciting and created a lot of enthusiasm for the program. Coca Cola expressed a desire to make sure their improvements comport with the vision of the streetscape (including even brick and wrought iron fencing as they did in East Hartford). The Town expressed a willingness to do its share—we are trying to obtain streetscape design funds. If we cannot obtain any from MAPC, it is probable it will be a warrant item in the fall. Boston Properties, the owner of the PTC site, was present. Normandy was not in attendance but Devra will ask if she can get a copy of the Graffito report.

Devra and Mike are continuing their work on new N2 signage. Devra sent a request to Boston Properties to use their Kendrick lawn for a sign and is working with them to develop a gateway sign they can approve. The Town Manager is asking DCR for use of their property to put another gateway sign on the property on the right as you come over the bridge from Nahanton Street. We will also be refacing the existing five Needham Crossing signs with the new logo. Devra will begin the permitting soon.

VIII. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing

Devra noted that the intersection of Oak, Christina and Needham Street, Newton's MassWork's grant, has begun. There is still no word on the actual start date on the Corridor Project but the bid documents are not expected to go out until the fall (originally it was summer).

IX. Update from Downtown Subcommittee

Devra noted that she prepared and submitted to the local papers a shop local letter. Because spring is a time when retail purchases increase, one of the local businesses asked her to do so. Hometown Weekly will publish it as a letter to the editor and the Town will post it. No word from Needham Times. There were no other updates at this time.

X. Other Business

Due to time constraints, this item was not discussed.

XI. Adjourn

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