

Minutes
Council of Economic Advisors
Wednesday, October 2, 2019, 7:30 a.m.
Public Services Administration Building - Charles River Room
500 Dedham Avenue
Needham, MA
Adopted December 4, 2019

Members Present: Stuart Agler, Adam Block, Tina Burgos, Anne Marie Dowd, Virginia Fleisher, Maurice Handel, Robert Hentshel, Adam Meisner, David Montgomery, Rick Putprush, Matthew Talcoff, Michael Wilcox.

Members Absent: Peter Atallah, Glen Cammarano, Bill Day, Ted Owens.

Others Present: Lee Newman, Director of Planning and Community Development; Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager; Daphne Collins, Zoning Administrative Specialist

Adam Block, Chair, opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of September 4, 2019 were unanimously approved.

2. Industrial Zoning (Highway Commercial 1)

Lee Newman, Director of Planning and Community Development, reported that the Planning Board (PB) held a public hearing on the proposed zoning change from industrial zoning to Highway Commercial 1. The video of the Public Hearing can be found on the Planning Board's website www.needhamma.gov/zoningFall2019. Natasha Spada, architect consultant, was hired to provide two build-out scenarios for the area illustrating an FAR at 1.0 and 1.75. Except for some minor language edits, the proposed zoning change in the Fall Warrant remains unchanged from what was presented at the Public Hearing.

Barrett Planning Group was hired to conduct a Fiscal Impact Analysis which will be brought before the Planning Board and presented to the Financial Committee on October 10, 2019. The Fiscal Analysis will be based on a conservative build-out analysis of a FAR 1.3.

There was a request to clarify the 25,000 square foot limit. Ms. Newman stated that maximum 25,000 square foot limit is associated to use for a singular tenant. This is similar to Mix-Use 128 and Highway 128 Districts.

Mr. Block encouraged members to informally canvass Town Meeting members about HC1 and to forward any comments or questions to Ms. Newman. Daphne Collins, Zoning Administrative Specialist, will provide members with a list of Town Meeting Members.

David Montgomery asked if there are other areas in the future for commercial rezoning opportunities. Mr. Block noted that the CEA identified three areas of focus for possible economic development opportunities – HC1, HC2 and HC3. HC2 would look at the elimination of zoning along 128; HR3 would look at the area between 128 to the railroad tracts. The Crawford area was also identified. HC1 was selected as the CEA’s top priority area because of the timing, location and size.

Mr. Block said that Anne Marie Dowd, the Vice-Chair, and he plan to meet with the leadership of the Select Board to discuss joint priorities areas of focus and collaboration. Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager, will follow-up to set up a date and time.

3. Economic Development Director Search

Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager, reported that the Town is undergoing a town wide classification review of each municipal position. The Economic Development position is being reviewed as well and will be posted as soon as the process is completed. She estimated posting the position in a couple of months and that the position would be filled by the first of the year. As is the custom for a Board staffing position, the CEA chair will be approached for input in the selection process.

4. TAP and Other Grants

Ms. Dowd reported that she and Devra Bailin, the former Director of Economic Development, met with MassDevelopment about grant opportunities. She informed MassDevelopment that Ms. Bailin is no longer employed by the Town, and Ms. Dowd will coordinate in the interim. Any updates from MassDevelopment she will forward to Ms. Newman.

Ms. Dowd reported that the Town may not qualify individually for a TAP grant to study an area for economic development but might if it strategically partnered with Newton for a joint area of study.

Ms. Collins informed that the application to Babson College’s Management Consulting Field Experience program (MCFE) was submitted by Ms. Bailin to develop a *Needham Economic Development Score Card*. The deadline for applications closed on October 1. Babson will be reviewing the applications and notifying applicants by November 1, 2019.

5. Update on Needham Crossing/N² Innovation District/Infrastructure Improvements

Mr. Montgomery reported on the MassDOT meeting held on September 28, 2019, geared to the business owners, and regarding the Highland Avenue/Needham Street Reconstruction project. The area of improvements extends along the corridor from Webster Street in Needham to Winchester Street in Newton. The corridor will include street and sidewalk reconstruction; bridge reconstruction and street realignment; utility reconstruction; curb cuts improvements; handicapped accessibility, as well as automobile, pedestrian and bicycle traffic flow improvements. The project has gone out to bid. A contractor will be selected by Spring 2020. The project has a five-year timeline from 2020-2015. MassDOT will maintain at a minimum one-lane of traffic open in each direction during reconstruction. A public hearing geared to the Needham/Newton residential community will be held

in Spring 2020. MassDOT will select a Community Liaison for the project to be the community/project contact to keep the community informed on the project.

Mr. Block asked that constituent businesses be updated on the project through electronic postings, as Ms. Bailin did. Ms. Fitzpatrick reported that there is a consultant that provides those updates to the Town which staff forwards to interested parties. Individuals can also opt in to receive these communiques. Ms. Newman will continue to provide the notifications.

Ms. Collins reported that the Traffic Management Advisory Committee (TMAC) received a petition for a light signal at Fourth Avenue and Kendrick Street. The petitioners provided data regarding the traffic problems in the area. This area will be further aggravated with the Highland Ave/Needham Street reconstruction project. A formal study is required for an eventual placement of a light. In anticipation of that study, the TMAC charged the Engineering staff to collect data on no-lefts from Kendrick Street onto Fourth Avenue; and a no-lefts from Fourth Avenue to Kendrick Street. The study will include accident data.

Mr. Block informed that there is community meeting regarding transportation issues in the N2 District, on October 3, 2019, 9:30 a.m.

6. Downtown Business Initiatives

Tina Burgos reported that there have been a lot of retail and restaurant additions to the downtown area.

On September 6, 2019, Chestnut Street retailers organized a successful sidewalk sale event quantified by foot traffic and sale receipts. Retailers are hoping to replicate this activity for the holidays with a Small Business Saturday either for the Saturday after Thanksgiving or another weekend that does not coincide with Needham Lights or Winter Arts Festival.

Though a positive community event, Ms. Burgos felt that Needham Light's family/child centric activity was not the most effective Shop Local tie-in for Downtown retailers because most participants attend the event with children and are not there to go shopping.

Ms. Fitzpatrick clarified that the indoor activities for both Needham Lights and the Winter Arts Festival will be managed by the Town through the Town Manager's Office with assistance from the Planning and Community Development staff during this transition period. The outdoor activities are managed by the Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Collins reported that Ms. Newman has charged staff to support the two holiday activities during the interim period. In lieu of the shop-local efforts during Needham Lights, Ms. Collins offered to assist in the Small Business Saturday. The Needham Lights activity is scheduled for December 2, 2019. The Winter Arts Festival is scheduled for December 14, 2019.

Save the Date flyers for these holiday activities and lawn signs announcing for the Winter Arts Festival are available for members for distribution and placement.

Applications enrollment from artists to participate in the Winter Arts Festival is open. There are slots for 34 participating artists; only six slots remain. The deadline is October 16, 2019. Elisa Litchman, the Planning and Community Development Department Administrator, is coordinating artist applications.

Stuart Angler asked about Pop-Up stores activities in vacant store space. Ms. Burgos noted that with the new businesses in town, vacancies are not available for Pop Up stores and the Pop-Up stores were for inventory liquidations. Ms. Dowd suggested local marketing efforts targeted at the Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital market and other local corporate neighbors.

There was a discussion about the lack of available parking in the downtown. Maurice Handle reported that for the past 25 years parking has been a key economic development issue. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that parking in the downtown is a real challenge for employees and an economic development issue for small businesses in the downtown. Ms. Newman informed that there was a Parking Survey conducted 8 years ago which indicated a surplus in available parking in the downtown. Mr. Handle argued that the parking problem is chronic and made difficult to manage since the spaces are owned and managed by different stakeholders outside the public domain. Mr. Handle believed there exists a public/private opportunity for a parking structure in the downtown as a business investment. Also offered as a possible solution was a parking shuttle transportation service to commuter nodes outside the downtown area. Mr. Handle said that the Select Board is opened to any parking solutions and ideas.

There was an inquiry about the CEA's Parking Wayfinding Signage program. Ms. Fitzpatrick will report back on the status of the Parking signage.

7. Planning and Community Development Business Permits Issued

Ms. Newman reported on the following Planning Board business Special Permits:

- new 60-seat Thai restaurant in the former UPS store location is about to be approved;
- Panchos Taqueria, 1450 Highland Avenue, will be opening soon. They expanded the parking for 12 additional spaces by demolishing a building in the rear;
- Climate Controlled, a 3-story, 123,000 sf self-storage business on Hillside Avenue is about to pull a building permit;
- NBC/Universal is about to be issued a Certificate of Occupancy.

Ms. Collins reported on the following Zoning Board of Appeals business Special Permits:

- Chef Mike, 73 Highland Avenue, is a 15-seat, catering and take-out Italian restaurant serving lunch and dinner;
- Hungry Coyote, 1185 Highland Avenue, is a new 54 seat, breakfast, lunch and dinner, Mexican sit-down and take-out restaurant;
- Home Kitchen, 324 Chestnut Street, is a new take-out and delivery for subscription prepared Indian meals;
- Baker's Best, 150 Gould Street, a corporate catering food services, expanded their space into the entire building. The additional space is to improve their current operations.
- Charles River Lofts, 300 Second Avenue, a large residential complex was granted a Comprehensive Permit Amendment, to add a dog exercise facility to be located on the top

floor of their parking garage. This amenity is to cater to their dog owner tenants and to market to new clients. A dog feature amenity is provided currently by their competition at The Kendrick, 285 Second Avenue.

Mr. Hentschel inquired about 1180 Great Plain Avenue, the proposed 16-unit residential complex Comprehensive Permit application. Ms. Collins reported that a Public Hearing was held in September which was continued to October to allow for a technical meeting between the applicant's consultants and the Town's technical staff to review the vehicular access options to the complex. Mr. Handle reported that the Select Board voted to recommend that the access to the property be one way.

8. Meeting Schedule

Mr. Block said that the Select Board may not see a need for the CEA to meet until January 2020 when a Director is hired. The November and December meetings will remain on the calendar until further notice. The CEA will be informed about the next meeting prior to Fall Town Meeting.

9. Other Business

N2 Signage – The signage package has been authorized by Normandy and is to ready to go before the Design Review Board. The package will be forwarded to Ms. Newman.

Downtown Snow Removal Pilot Program – Ms. Collins reported that the program approved at Spring 2019 Town Meeting authorizing funding for the purchase of a special snow removal equipment went out to bid. According to Rich Merson, the Director of Public Works, the equipment will be purchased and ready for this winter.

10. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:30 a.m.