



Council of Economic Advisors
Town Hall
1471 Highland Avenue
Needham, MA 02492
(781)455-7500 x 255

Minutes
Council of Economic Advisors
Wednesday, February 10, 2020 9:00 a.m.
Zoom Meeting ID 840 2622 0888
Adopted June 2, 2021

Members Present: Stuart Agler, Adam Block, Tina Burgos, Glen Cammarano, Bill Day, Anne Marie Dowd, Lise Elcock, Virginia Fleisher, Maurice Handel, Robert Hentschel, Adam Meixner David Montgomery, Rick Putprush, Mathew Talcoff, Michael Wilcox
Members Absent: none

Others Present: Amy Haelsen, Economic Development Manager; Lee Newman, Director of Planning and Community Development, Representative Denise Garlick, Maureen Callahan of Rep. Garlick's office

1. **Introduction and Roll Call** - Adam Block, Chair, opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. He announced that this meeting of the Council of Economic Advisors was being held remotely, consistent with current state regulations, and was being recorded.
2. **Minutes of January 6, 2021** - Moe Handel moved to adopt the minutes of the January 6, 2021 meeting. Rick Putprush seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.
3. **COVID19 State of Emergency Update** - Amy Haelsen shared an update that was provided by Tim McDonald, the Director of Public Health for the Town of Needham. The town is currently in the yellow with the average daily case rate per 100,000 over the last two weeks is 37.4. The town's positive testing rate is 2.6%. Both numbers are trending down and have been for the past three weeks. The COVID Public Health campaign continues with over 2,000 free masks distributed to the public via grocery stores, to restaurant workers, and to town employees. There are new social media ads that are being aimed at teams which will run for at least four more weeks. As of Monday, the public health dept. has administered over 1,700 vaccinations that include 1,600 first doses. There has been much positive feedback from the community on how well these clinics have been run. Governor Baker announced updated business restrictions which were effective on February 8. The Commonwealth remains in Phase 3 Step 1 of Reopening (Order No. 58). They include lifting the 25% capacity restriction to allow up to 40%. The sector-specific industry standards dated in

December 2020 still apply to arcades and recreational businesses, driving and flight schools, gyms and health clubs, libraries, museums, retail, offices, places of worship, lodging (common areas), golf (indoor areas), movie theaters (no more than 50 people per theater). In addition, restaurants will now be limited to 40% of their seated capacity and, as under the 25% capacity rule, employees will not count toward the limit. Close Contact Personal Services will now be limited to 40% capacity and, as under the 25% capacity rule, employees will be not count toward the limit. A limit of 5 people per 1000 sq. feet applies for smaller businesses without an available fire occupancy capacity. There continues to be no capacity limits on manufacturing, construction, and laboratories—these sectors have never had capacity limits. The gatherings limit will stay at 10 people indoors, 25 people outdoors. Indoor performance venues and indoor recreation businesses like roller rinks and trampoline parks remain closed.

4. Subsectors update: office, industrial, retail, restaurant

Mike Wilcox shared that activity in the office sector continues to be reduced from pre-pandemic levels and he is not seeing large numbers of employees coming into the offices that his company manages. Some companies are relooking at the reutilization of their space and developing hybrid plans so that not all staff will be in the office at the same time post-pandemic. Mr. Wilcox added that as the lab sector and warehouse use continues to grow and demand space, there will be a shift in commercial real estate as office demand may be quiet for some time. On the tech side, some of his tenants are asking for short-term leases while they try to figure out longer term plans. As the timeframe for a return to the office keeps shifting, it can be challenging for them to determine when to start a new lease but most seem to be aiming for late summer or early fall. Adam Meixner added that his firm has not seen as many tenants looking to move out of downtown Boston to the suburbs as had been predicted. He added that he has received inquiries from lab groups that are getting pushed out of the Cambridge market which has become too expensive. Mr. Wilcox shared that the rent can be over \$100 a square foot on a triple net basis near MIT/Kendall Square. Lab space generally generates higher tax revenue for communities given the increased value of the space. Rick Putprush added that all sizes of warehouse distribution continue to demand space. Mr. Meixner said that the office activity in Needham and Newton has picked up a bit in recent months. He has found that renewals tend to be shorter term but the new leases average about five to seven years. Tina Burgos shared that this time of year is typically slower for retail but that things should start picking up again in the spring. She is concerned about the number of street-level retail vacancies in Needham Center. Most of the retailers had a strong holiday season which has helped carry them through the slower winter months but many are still struggling. Ms. Burgos stated that she has experienced some challenges with applying for the state's small business grant program which is being administered through the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation. Lise Elcock shared that the Newton Needham Chamber's Needham Business Alliance subcommittee is looking at ways to continue to generate support for the small businesses in town. Ms. Burgos commented that Great Plain Avenue lacks the qualities of an inviting and quaint downtown that other towns including Wellesley, Dedham, Concord, and Arlington have and she feels that the vacant storefronts

exacerbate the problem. Moe Handel inquired what type of technical assistance might be available for these struggling businesses to help them adapt and recover from this challenging situation. With the weather turning better and the restaurants more able to thrive with outdoor dining, the retailer will still have challenges. It was suggested that the Small Business Subcommittee take this up at one of their meetings to discuss tangible things the town can be doing to support the business community. Matt Talcoff added that small businesses should be taking advantage of the Employee Retention Credit that came out at the end of December. Lise Elcock mentioned that the Chamber has shared information on this during the weekly meeting of the Newton-Needham Dining Collaborative and in a webinar. Stu Agler added that the non-profit group SCORE also offers technical assistance to small businesses and should be used as a resource. Mr. Putprush shared that these are all great suggestions and important ways to support the retailers and small businesses but long-term we should be encouraging vertical development in Needham Center to bring in more of a residential population to be the built-in customer base. Representative Denise Garlick shared that supporting small businesses and developing our economy is a high priority for her and she'd like to join the CEA's meetings on a more consistent basis and do anything she can to help the business community move forward.

5. 2021 CEA Priorities – Chair Adam Block, Vice Chair Anne Marie Dowd and Economic Development Manager Amy Haelsen met last week with Select Board Chair Matt Borrelli and Vice Chair Moe Handel to review the following goals for the CEA that the committee has been discussing:

1. Small Business

- a. Continue outreach program to retail and restaurant businesses to understand their experiences and needs for recovery
- b. Develop and facilitate meaningful programming to support small businesses
- c. Advocate that Select Board and Planning Board extend permissions and other reasonable temporary regulatory relief for restaurants to continue use of outdoor space and controlled alcohol consumption through Thanksgiving 2021 and use of outdoor space to support retail
- d. Explore efforts to increase downtown mixed use/residential density

2. Redevelopment/New Business Opportunities

- a. District Focused Redevelopment
 - i. Chestnut Street Business District
 - ii. Center Business District
 - iii. Mixed Use 128 District – Boston College project
 - iv. Highland Commercial 128 District
 - v. Business District (Highland Ave/Bertucci's area)
- b. Brewery
- c. Marketing Strategy: Promote Needham
 - i. Needham as a great place to work, live and play
 - ii. Promote specific areas: TBD (site selection advocacy)
 - iii. Event for brokers and business media

3. Cluster Based Economic Development
 - a. Business Inventory
 - i. Update and complete current report
 - ii. Analyze trends and recommend sector priorities
 - b. Develop cluster-based economic development strategy
4. Reconstitution of the CEA
 - a. Sub-committee Formation and Action
 1. Small Business
 2. District Focused Redevelopment
 3. Cluster-based Economic Development
 - b. Develop performance metrics

Mr. Block stated that this is the year of recovery and he asked CEA members to think about how we can be most effective and deliver the greatest value to the Select Board and to businesses community. To do this, there will be monthly subcommittee meetings with the full CEA meeting once per quarter when the subcommittees will report in and any actions can be taken if needed.

6. **Highway Commercial 1 Update** – Lee Newman reported that there was a community meeting on February 3rd about the proposed zoning changes to the Muzi Ford property including a recap of proposed changes related to density, FAR, height standards, and introduction of a new residential use to what was the original proposal. At this meeting there was a presentation of the proposed zoning framework, a proposed design plan, a fiscal impact study and a review of the traffic study. Ms. Newman shared that 185 people attended the meeting via Zoom. The Planning Board will be putting together an FAQ on the project to post on the Town’s website. Ms. Newman will be presenting the new draft of the zoning changes to the Planning Board at their meeting next week. After review by the Select Board, the public hearing for the zoning changes will begin on March 16.
7. **Economic Development Manager Report**
 Amy Haelsen reported that she continues to be in contact regularly with the small business community, stopping by in-person to how they’re doing and communicating via email relevant and helpful info. on resources and funding, sharing links to free resources and webinars available from the Center for Women in Enterprise, the Small Business Administration, the International Downtown Group, Small Business Development Center, and the Newton Needham Chamber all of which provide technical assistance on various topics. Ms. Haelsen reported that a total of 47 Needham businesses have received grants from the Mass. Growth Capital Corp. totaling \$2.6 million. These grants can be used to help cover payroll, mortgages, debt, and other bills to help them through the difficult months ahead. The funds would come in the form of grants, which would not need to be repaid. Priority Categories for funding include restaurants, bars, caterers, and food trucks that collect and remit meals tax, indoor recreation or entertainment establishments, gyms/fitness centers,

personal services, independent pharmacies, event support companies, personal services, independent retailers (businesses with brick and mortar locations that collect and remit sales tax). Ms. Haelsen reported that she was approached by Devra Bailin, Economic Development Director for the City of Newton, to partner on a regional grant through the Mass. Office of Business Development to seek funding to reuse empty storefronts and make them into pop-up stores for local artists and the maker community. Needham and Newton submitted the grant request in late January and should be hearing if we were selected sometime in March. Ms. Haelsen provided an update on the visioning project being conducted by Boston College students on the Mixed Use 128 district. She participated in a recent introductory meeting with the group of six seniors and Professor Ed Chazen at which they outlined their plans and schedule, including the support and info. they needed from Needham to complete their work. Ms. Haelsen reported that she continues to attend bi-weekly Zoom meetings with about twenty economic development colleagues from several communities in the Greater Boston area to share best practices, discuss solutions and brainstorm on common challenges we're facing. She will be meeting with a small subset of the group to discuss how to work with small businesses to get them set up for e-commerce sales and other ideas such as a seasonal passport program in the spring. As for business updates, Ms. Haelsen reported that a new computer and phone repair shop opened on Great Plain Ave. in one of the spaces formerly occupied by The Closet Exchange. She added that she keeps an inventory of the vacant street level retail space throughout town and has spoken to many of the owners of these properties to inquire about interest level from prospective tenants and explore the possibility of displaying work from local artists in the windows to make the storefronts look more appealing and less empty.

8. **Planning and Development Department Business Permits Issued** – Ms. Newman shared that a permit was granted by the Planning Board to Boston Children's Hospital in early January to begin construction of their pediatric orthopedic facility in Needham Crossing. She shared that the Trip Advisor building is being used as a vaccination site as a result of the town being creative as that zoning use is not allowed under the zoning bylaws. The Board of Health declared a health emergency thereby enabling the building department to issue the permits to allow for such use. The permit for the reuse of the former Carters Mill building in Avery Square will move forward with a public hearing on April 6. This is for the 155 dwelling senior housing project which includes assisted living and memory care units. Ms. Newman closed her report by sharing that there are three separate potential mixed-use projects proposed for Needham Center although it is too early in the process to disclose details of the plans and identify the developers.

9. **Other Business** - none

10. **Adjournment Roll Call** – Mr. Handel made a motion to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Mr. Agler. The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 am.