



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

Minutes
Council of Economic Advisors
District Focused Subcommittee Meeting
September 21, 2021 at 8 am

Members Present: Adam Block, Robert Hentschel, Adam Meixner, Rick Putprush

Others Present: Amy Haelsen, Economic Development Manager; Maureen Callahan of Rep. Denise Garlick's office

1. Review of Needham Center and Chestnut Street Business Zoning

Those in attendance discussed the existing zoning in these districts and shared the following commentary:

- The overlay districts in Needham Center that were intended to encourage more mixed-use developments have only resulted in one such project located at 50 Dedham Avenue. These types of projects come to fruition either through sales of commercial properties to new developers who will likely tear down the existing structures and build something new or through current property owners who renovate existing structures. Opinions about why this is the case included existing commercial property owners not wanting to take the risk of losing current tenants and income during 18 plus months of construction or that they are unmotivated to sell properties.
- Needham Center Overlay District A allows for a building height by special permit of up to 48 feet (3 stories/37 feet or 3+1 stories/48 feet) but Needham Center Overlay District B only allows for 2+1 stories/27 feet). What was the reasoning behind this?
- The suggestion was made to meet with the developer of 50 Dedham Ave. project to learn more about the challenges he faced throughout the permitting and construction process.
- Confirm if there is a bylaw that prohibits any building located within a certain distance of town hall be any taller than town hall
- Look into the parking requirements and whether it is an obstacle for certain types of prospective businesses to come to downtown

2. Walking tour of Needham Center - Observations:

- There are several banks in a dense area. Banks are desirable tenants for commercial property owners but don't generate a lot of foot traffic as the trend is for customers to conduct their banking business online.

- Several retail businesses have closed or relocated over the last 18 months. The hope is that the empty storefronts will be filled with new businesses that will help attract more foot traffic. Project Pop-Up helped to do this but how do we attract more permanent businesses of this type?
- There is a lack of trees and anything green along stretches of Great Plain Avenue. What can be done by the Town or a civic organization to increase beautification efforts in Needham Center?
- Some of the outdoor sidewalk displays detract from the aesthetics, specifically flower boxes that are void of flowers and in disrepair, overgrown landscaped area at Eaton Square that is owned by the Town.
- What can be done to activate the streetscape? Sandwich board signs can enhance the pedestrian experience if they're done well. The group discussed outdoor display of goods, the pros and cons of such, and whether they should be allowed.
- Signage directing visitors to public parking is inadequate and should be improved
- A parking deck to add a second level of parking to the Chapel Street public parking lot would go a long way to address parking needs in the downtown

Next Steps: The group did not have adequate time to traverse Chestnut Street and agreed that a subsequent meeting to focus on this area should be arranged.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 am.