

CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: February 14, 2023

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

Commissioners Attending: Phil Plottel (outgoing 2022 Chair), Sarah Rahman (incoming 2023 Chair, outgoing 2022 Vice Chair), Chuck Tanowitz (outgoing 2022 Secretary), Lisa Adams (incoming 2023 Vice Chair), Jim Griglun, Debora Jackson, Zach Knowlton Jack Leader, Florent Mali, Marcela Merino, and Matt Segneri (incoming 2023 Secretary).

Commissioners Not Attending: Jeremy Freid

Staff Attending: Barney Heath, Director, Planning and Development; John Sisson, Director of Economic Development.

Approval of meeting minutes: Mr. Leader moved to approve the January minutes, seconded by Mr. Griglun. All members present voted in the affirmative.

City Staff Updates

- Mr. Heath said he would be sharing some revised village center zoning maps that present realistic depictions of the proposed zoning. He said some inaccurate renderings were being circulated by community groups. Mr. Sisson informed the Commissioners that some residents are leafleting small businesses with alarmist flyers. Mr. Plottel said most of the residents who spoke at a recent hearing were negative and that there's a good deal of fear in the community. Ms. Rahman said many speakers asserted that new development will cause displacement of small businesses and asked if the Charles River Regional Chamber might address this concern. Mr. Heath suggested small business owners may not want to involve themselves in this discussion. Mr. Tanowitz said the Chamber does support workforce housing and suggested the City have a better communications plan on this topic.
- California Street study. Mr. Sisson provided a brief update on the industrial-zoned land in the study area and preparations, with the consulting team, for a community meeting in April.

- Commercial data and trends. Mr. Sisson reminded Commissioners that he had shared documents about city revenues from property tax, hotel tax, cannabis sales, and labor market information—and invited Commissioners to discuss any of those data points that may be of interest to them.
- Outdoor dining 2023. Mr. Sisson explained that the City Council had been working to update and make permanent the outdoor dining program in both the Newton Ordinance and the Zoning Ordinance with a vote of the full Council expected on Monday, Feb. 20.
- Liquor license process. Mr. Sisson said he'd like to postpone the discussion of liquor licenses until a following meeting, as there are not updates to share at this time.

Election of Officers

Mr. Plottel opened the discussion about election of new officers for 2023.

- Sarah Rahman was nominated for Chair. Ms. Jackson moved to close the nominations, seconded by Mr. Leader.
- Lisa Adams was nominated for Vice Chair. Ms. Merino nominated Mr. Tanowitz, who respectfully declined. Mr. Leader moved to close the nominations, seconded by Mr. Tanowitz.
- Matt Segneri was nominated for Secretary. Mr. Tanowitz moved to close the nominations, seconded by Ms. Jackson.

All members present voted in the affirmative of the slate of candidates. With the election completed, Mr. Plottel handed off the meeting to Chair Rahman.

2023 Annual Report

Mr. Plottel displayed the draft annual report onscreen, and all commissioners reviewed the document page by page. Commissioners offered minor edits to a few sections of the document. Ms. Rahman opened a discussion of the 2023 goals and referenced the survey commissioners had completed, which were discussed at the January meeting. Ms. Merino said she recalled some concerns that the EDC goals be aligned with those of the City. Mr. Tanowitz concurred and added that the goals be formed with an understanding of the scope of work that this volunteer body can accomplish in 12 months. Ms. Adams also asked that Commissioners think about how the body can effectuate its goals and whether the current working groups are the best approach. Ms. Sisson said another consideration may be to include—in addition to the longer-term projects—some smaller, more immediate, projects that would provide some smaller wins in a

short span of time. Ms. Rahman talked about some of the limitations of the EDC's advisory role. Mr. Griglun talked about the important of having measurable goals. Mr. Knowlton agreed on the need for more specific, short-term wins to balance with the broad, long-term objectives. Mr. Mali suggested the EDC consider focusing on business attraction strategies. Mr. Knowlton pointed to discussions of electrification as an example of a pertinent but broad topic that was difficult for the EDC to gain traction on. Mr. Griglun asked how the pandemic affected how the EDC operates. Mr. Plottel said the pandemic prompted the EDC to take a more active role seeking ways to help local businesses. Mr. Leader added that Commissioners had more informal interactions with the business community prior to the pandemic. Mr. Tanowitz said the EDC has, in past years, served as an incubator of ideas. Mr. Sisson said the department may have some funding that could be used to hire consultants to help the EDC advance some discrete projects. Mr. Segneri said the EDC has been productive in aligning with City leaders and identified needs.

Next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 14, 2023, and will be held remotely on Zoom.

Adjournment

Mr. Plottel moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Tanowitz. The motion was approved by all members present. The meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Sisson

Director of Economic Development