

CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: May 9, 2023

TIME: 7:00 pm

LOCATION: City Hall Room 204 and virtually on Zoom

Commissioners Attending: Sarah Rahman (Chair), Lisa Adams (Vice-Chair), Matt Segneri (Secretary), Jim Griglun, Debora Jackson, Zach Knowlton, Jack Leader, Florent Mali, Phil Plottel, Chuck Tanowitz.

Commissioners Not Attending: Jeremy Freid, Marcela Merino.

Elected Officials Attending: City Councilors Alison Leary (Ward 1), Pamela Wright (Ward 3).

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

Approval of March and April meeting minutes: Mr. Plottel moved to approve the minutes with requested changes as approved by the officers, which was seconded by Mr. Leader. All Commissioners present voted to approve.

California Street study presentation by Utile

Consultants Tim Love and Loren Rapport shared a presentation on the California Street Manufacturing District Zoning Study, based on an earlier public meeting. They provided a project overview, goals, and information on the area's history, transportation challenges, community assets, current real estate market considerations, and potential development scenarios. Mr. Sisson shared information on the next presentation scheduled for June 8. Ms. Rahman opened the floor for Q&A.

Mr. Plottel said he liked the concept of a commercial-only zone but asked about the threat of additional 40B projects. He referenced political headwinds that delayed an R&D development proposal at Riverside and market changes that effectively halted that proposal. Mr. Love said the

zoning for this district should be crafted to allow the desired development by right. Mr. Plottel said it might be helpful to model a 40B development for comparison to educate the City Council.

Councilor Leary said the City is close to meeting its affordable housing requirements, so the threat of additional 40B projects could be eliminated soon.

Mr. Tanowitz asked about the adaptive reuse projects referenced in the presentation and whether the study area included buildings with that potential or whether new construction could accommodate the desired uses. Mr. Love said some of the existing buildings could be renovated. Alternatively, zoning language could be tailored to ensure desired first-floor uses that could be subsidized by higher-rent uses on upper floors.

Mr. Leader asked about the current transportation issues and whether the study will address them. Mr. Sisson explained that the study scope was focused on land uses, but the traffic conditions in the area are a known issue. Mr. Tanowitz said that zoning and transportation should be addressed at the same time, as they are interlinked. Ms. Rapport did offer that commercial and industrial uses would generate less traffic than residential development.

Mr. Griglun asked about the participation of existing landowners and their interest in the light industrial uses shown in the presentation. Ms. Rahman additionally asked whether those types of uses would require a single larger development or if individual developers could work collaboratively. Mr. Love said either could work, and the City might also be a partner to engender the desired land uses. Mr. Sisson said he has done outreach to the landowners and land use attorneys and will continue to do so.

Area resident Nyree Kibarian, who lives in a condominium at the corner of California and Los Angeles streets, seconded concerns about traffic. She said the MBTA bus service is good but limited.

Mr. Leader underscored the need to study the traffic conditions and pursue solutions. Mr. Tanowitz said the potential for more transportation modes in the area.

City updates and EDC discussion

Strengthening Village Centers

- **Village Center Rezoning:** Mr. Heath was not able to attend the meeting, as he was staffing another meeting. Councilor Leary shared information on the public hearing scheduled for June 26 and some changes made to VC1, creating a separate “mixed residential transit” overlay zone. Mr. Sisson mentioned that the village center updates are available on the project webpage.

Facilitate Owning & Operating of Businesses

- **Embodied carbon presentation:** Ms. Rahman referenced a Zoning & Planning presentation on embodied carbon which is an accounting of the carbon emissions generated during the lifecycle of materials used in a building. She explained Commissioners should learn more about the potential benefits and impacts.
- **Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO):** Mr. Plottel attended a meeting at Newton-based W.S. Development to discuss how this sustainability effort affects building owners. He explained that new buildings may be able to meet future emissions benchmarks. However, even buildings built in the last 10 years may not be able to comply. W.S. Development said the cost of fines imposed for noncompliance would be passed on to tenants, he said, which would raise the cost of doing business. For apartment buildings, the costs would be passed along to residents. Councilor Leary suggested the EDC engage with the Citizens Commission on Energy.
- **Water bottle ban and the mandate for commercial recycling:** Councilor Leary said City ordinances were updated to require private waste haulers to offer recycling to commercial customers in Newton. As of July 1, Newton businesses must comply with the State solid waste ban, which has required the separate collection of recycling for decades.

Review of the Economic Development Strategy

- **Location Opportunity Matrix:** Ms. Rahman provided an overview of the 2019 strategy document, which has become somewhat dated, as it was completed prior to the pandemic. The Planning Department may fund an update of the strategic plan in 2024.
 - Ms. Rahman asked Commissioners to comment on the matrix and mentioned the omission of the California Street manufacturing district.
 - Mr. Plottel said the EDC focused on R&D as a category intentionally, as it could mean life science or other uses. Opportunities for R&D may exist on Wells Avenue and in other areas, he said.
 - Mr. Leader talked about his meeting with officials at the UMass Mount Ida and the potential for commercial development on that campus. He said several State building authorities have oversight and are exempt from local zoning regulations.

- Mr. Plottel said the Newton-Wellesley Hospital campus and its environs should be included in the matrix.
- Mr. Leader said the West Newton MBTA parking lot has been studied in the past and should also be included.
- Mr. Plottel said small-scale medical facilities have proliferated in the years since the strategic plan was created.
- Mr. Tanowitz said the N2 Innovation District doesn't really exist in the same way it did years ago and should be split into separate study areas.
- Mr. Tanowitz also talked about home-based businesses potentially being included.

Next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Tuesday, June 13, 2023, in Room 204 at City Hall and virtually on Zoom.

Adjournment

Mr. Tanowitz moved to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Ms. Adams. 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