

CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

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**Meeting Minutes**

DATE: July 11, 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, Zach Knowlton Jack Leader, Florent Mali, Marcela Merino, Phil Plottel.

**Commissioners Not Attending:** Jeremy Freid, Debora Jackson, Chuck Tanowitz.

**Elected Officials and Residents Attending:** City Councilors Lipof, Malakie, and Wright. Resident Rena Getz.

**Staff Attending:** Waneta Trabert, Sustainable Materials Management Director; Joseph Iadonisi, Planning Associate; John Sisson, Director of Economic Development.

**Approval of meeting minutes:** Ms. Adams moved to approve the May 9 meeting minutes, seconded by Mr. Leader. All members present voted in the affirmative.

Councilor Malakie raised her hand to ask if the meeting was being recorded. Ms. Rahman confirmed that it was.

**City Updates**

1. Guest Speaker: Sustainable Materials Management Director Waneta Trabert joined the meeting to discuss the City's recycling mandate and private hauler regulations. She oversees City recycling drop-off and collection and hazardous waste management. She also participates in the formation of Newton's Climate Action Plan. Every commercial property owner is responsible for ensuring that recyclable materials are being collected separately from other solid waste, she explained. Newton's mandate has two phases: cardboard

recycling enforcement starting in Sept. 2023 and other recyclable materials starting July 1, 2024. Ms. Rahman asked about the enforcement process. Ms. Trabert said City staff do not conduct proactive enforcement but respond to complaints. They then give the business time to come into compliance but are able to assess fines if needed. Ms. Trabert said the City has limited data on the percentage of businesses that are recycling. These regulations were discussed years ago but implementation was delayed by the pandemic, she said. The City is hosting several webinars on recycling programs, and a State agency called Recycling Works is providing technical assistance to individual businesses. Mr. Plottel asked if the City is working with the Chamber of Commerce on this effort. Ms. Trabert confirmed that, yes, the effort is being coordinated.

2. Brewery zoning. Planning Associate Joe Iadonisi was attending remotely to present an update on zoning amendments related to breweries, brewpubs, and the bottling of alcohol. However, he encountered audio issues, so Ms. Rahman suggested moving to another agenda item to allow Mr. Iadonisi time to troubleshoot.

## **Strengthen Village Centers**

### **1. Zoning & Planning Committee's Public Meeting**

- Ms. Adams reported to the EDC about the June 26 Zoning & Planning Committee's Public Meeting. She said more than 30 people attended in person, as well as hundreds online. Overall, she said, most of those speaking at the meeting had positive comments about the village center zoning overlays, while others did express concerns. Ms. Rahman explained that she, Ms. Adams, and Mr. Segneri spoke at the meeting not as representing the EDC but as individual residents, as the EDC is still formulating its letter on the zoning effort. Mr. Leader asked, of those who spoke out against the zoning overlays what were their concerns? Ms. Adams said most of the comments she heard were fairly general, but she did not stay for the whole meeting.
- Ms. Rahman reminded Commissioners that they should feel free to present remarks to the Committee as residents, as the EDC had not yet formalized its position.
- Mr. Leader asked Ms. Adams what specific concerns were raised by speakers. She said the comments addressed change of neighborhood character, loss of green space, and concerns about parking and density.
- Ms. Rahman said 56 people spoke before the hearing was closed. Thirty were supportive of the zoning changes, and the other speakers raised concerns.
- Some commented on the current state of MBTA operations and questioned whether the transportation options would be able to address increased customer demand.

- Mr. Leader said a 6-year-old report examining the history of development in the city showed 87% of buildings were constructed before 1957, and half of them could not be built today because the lots are too small.

*The discussion was interrupted as Councilor Lipof stopped in to ask if the Commission was going to discuss brewery zoning.*

#### Brewery zoning (continued).

- Mr. Lipof shared some information about a brewery company seeking to open in West Newton and voiced support for the zoning changes.
- Having addressed the audio issues, Mr. Iadonisi presented on the current regulatory hurdles to brewing operations in Newton: the prohibition of bottling alcoholic beverages and the lack of a zoning definition of a “craft beverage” business. He provided some possible options for the permitting process based on the building footprint.
- As this manufacturing use could involve natural gas, Mr. Plottel suggested some members of the Council may wish to have greater control. As part of Newton’s participation in the Ten Communities Program, Mr. Sisson added, the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) is asking the 10 municipalities to define how they will regulate process loads, which is the amount of energy that would be used in manufacturing processes such as brewing or distilling.
- Ms. Rahman asked about the timeline for amending this zoning. Mr. Iadonisi said a public hearing was scheduled for July 24. The proposal could be voted on after that zoning meeting and sent to the full Council. Mr. Lipof said this process takes time but that this has moved forward relatively quickly.
- While Mr. Sisson dealt with some technical issues to display the draft letter onscreen, Ms. Rahman provided an update on the Ten Communities Program and the goal of reducing the use of natural gas. Mr. Plottel shared some facts about the state’s uniform building code and defined the term process loads in greater detail. Hospitals, manufacturers, laundries, and commercial kitchens are uses with higher process loads. Mr. Plottel said the policy ultimately aspires to eliminate the use of fossil fuels. Mr. Mali asked if these new regulations might cause companies to move to locations with more energy options. Mr. Leader said larger manufacturing concerns have already moved that portion of their operations to regions with lower energy costs. Mr. Plottel said small-scale manufacturing would remain viable in Massachusetts.

## Strengthen Village Centers (continued)

### 2. Letter of Support for Village Center Overlay Zoning

- Ms. Rahman paged through the draft letter to solicit comments from Commissioners.
- Mr. Leader and Mr. Plottel commented on how the language addresses parking and parking requirements.
- Councilor Wright spoke up to say that a file directory, not the letter, was being displayed on Zoom. Mr. Sisson apologized and corrected the shared screen.
- Ms. Rahman asked about the percentage of different land area in Newton and its relationship to property tax generation.
- Councilor Malakie said she had a question about the sentence on the preservation of Newton's commercial tax base. She asked if the EDC had an opinion on the rezoning of industrial land on Border Street to residential. Mr. Sisson explained the proposal does not change the underlying zoning but enables an alternative method for landowners. Ms. Malakie said the proposed zoning sends a message to the existing businesses that they are not welcome and wanted the EDC and city staff to do outreach. With regards to the support letter, Mr. Plottel suggested the language should not address specific streets or areas.
- Mr. Leader said many of the long-term manufacturing businesses, which moved into the city's industrial areas decades ago, would not locate in Newton today because of the loss of commercial rail and high land costs. Mr. Plottel said the zoning should allow for multiple, competing uses for these parcels, and extend the amount of mixed-use priority street. Ms. Rahman added that the zoning proposed for some areas may be a result of the MBTA Communities requirements. Councilor Wright said mixed-use differs from the existing uses and that there's a lot of pressure on these businesses to sell.
- Ms. Rahman moved the discussion to the second section of the support letter and highlighted language advocating for public transportation improvements. Mr. Plottel suggested cutting two sentences on parking minimums.
- Ms. Rahman suggested tabling the discussion until the next meeting to ensure Commissioners have time to submit comments.

Given the few minutes left for discussion, Ms. Rahman suggested holding the remainder of the agenda for the August 8 meeting. She reminded Commissioners that the August meeting would be remote only via Zoom.

The Chair called on Ms. Getz who had a question about DHCD and the Town of Brookline having discussions about whether the first-floor commercial requirements would negate the

count of housing units in those developments. Ms. Rahman responded that the EDC has raise this concern with the Planning Department.

Mr. Plottel asked about the agenda item under DEI. Mr. Sisson said the City received a request for nominations of immigrant entrepreneurs but lacks a good business directory that would aid staff in connecting with those firms.

Ms. Rahman asked if anyone had and additional comments. Ms. Adams asked the Chair to remind Commissioners of the importance of having quorum at the August meeting, as it will be the EDC's last chance to vote on the village center zoning support letter and submit it ahead of the public hearing.

### **Next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Tuesday, August 8, 2023. The meeting will be convened virtually on Zoom, not in person.

### **Adjournment**

Mr. Leader moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Griglun. The motion was approved by all members present. The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Sisson  
Director of Economic Development