

CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS
Economic Development Commission

MEETING MINUTES

January 9, 2024

The regular meeting of the Commission was held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, January 9, 2023, in Room 204 of City Hall. Remote participation was available via Zoom.

Attendance: Sarah Rahman (Chair), Matt Segneri (Secretary), Jim Griglun, Debora Jackson, Florent Mali, Marcela Merino, Jane Obbagy, Chuck Tanowitz

Staff: Barney Heath, John Sisson, Josh Ostroff, Ned Codd

Approval of minutes: Minutes of the November 14 meeting were approved as corrected.

Guest Speaker: Planning & Development's Director of Transportation Planning Josh Ostroff announced his impending departure to join the Capital Program Planning team at the MBTA and Public Works Director of Transportation Ned Codd was introduced. Mr. Ostroff provided updates on the Bicycle/Pedestrian Network Plan, state and federal funding for the construction of accessible stations at the Newton's three commuter stops, MassDOT's improvements of Needham Street.

Mr. Codd explained his interest in joining Newton's transportation team and talked about the ties between housing, economic development, transportation, pedestrian safety, and public health. He expressed his excitement about improvements along Needham Street, Newton Highlands, Washington Street, and the commuter rail stations. Commissioners asked questions about future planning for public parking; the use of curbside space in commercial centers; and the availability of commuter rail ridership data from the MBTA.

City Updates

- Mr. Heath shared updates on the state's review process of the approved village center overlay zoning; the session's first meeting of the Zoning & Planning Committee and its interest in small business; three ongoing 40B housing development proposals, and the City's attainment of "safe harbor" under 40B.
- Mr. Sisson mentioned the California Street Industrial District Study and plans to review aspects of outdoor dining policy for 2025.

Year-end business

The Chair provided an overview of year' end business. Commissioners discussed the 2023 Annual Report; the EDC Self-Assessment online tool; the nomination of officers needed for 2024 and voting at February EDC meeting.

The Chair opened a conversation on EDC goals for 2024, focusing on village center economics, local businesses, strengthening the City's commercial tax base, and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Commissioners raised questions and contributed ideas on:

- the use of broad or specific language when defining the goals;
- different concepts of business (small, local, storefront, retail, restaurant, service, small professional offices, larger companies, and industry);
- the impacts of self-employment and work-from-home trends; and
- fiscal impact data by business size, sector, or employment.

EDC Project Subgroups:

The Chair reminded subgroup leaders to get group meetings scheduled and start discussing project scopes.

Next meeting: 7 p.m. on Tuesday, February 13, 2024.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Submitted by John Sisson, Economic Development Director