



Zoning & Planning Committee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Monday, May 9, 2016

Present: Councilors Hess-Mahan (Chair), Danberg (Vice Chair), Leary, Yates, Albright, Sangiolo and Baker

Absent: Councilor Kalis

City Staff: Dori Zaleznik (Chief Administrative Officer), Jacob Cole (Senior Financial Analyst), James Freas (Acting Director, Planning Dept.), Barney Heath (Incoming Director of Planning), Rachel Blatt (Urban Designer), Lily Reynolds (Community Engagement Coordinator), Norine Silton (Administrative Assistant), Alice Ingerson (Community Preservation Manager), John Lojek (Commissioner, Inspectional Services), Karyn Dean (Committee Clerk)

#148-16 **Mayor's appointment of Gregory Groot to the Economic Development Commission**
GROOT GREGORY 296 Lake Avenue, Newton Highlands, appointed as a member of the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION for a term to expire May 1, 2018 (60 days 6/30/16) [04/13/16 @ 3:55 PM]

Action: **Approved 6-0 (Councilor Baker not voting)**

Note: Mr. Gregory joined the Committee. He explained that he is a member of the Newton Highlands Area Council and in that capacity has played the role of taking the voice of the local merchant. He would like to join the Economic Development Commission because he has worked in high-tech, start-up and public companies and has a good idea of what it takes to run a small business. The rents in Newton are as high as Newbury Street in Boston but without the foot traffic. He would like to take a more active role in looking at ways to make the City a more attractive and sustainable place for businesses to be.

It was asked if Mr. Gregory had any thoughts about what might be needed more in the City: residential development or commercial development. Mr. Gregory said there are areas in the City where denser populations are appropriate and desirable including village centers. Businesses cannot run without customers and there needs to be more residents. In the Newton Highlands there are two T stations and the utilization is relatively low throughout the year and there are 3,000 on-street parking spaces and 1,500 private spaces. Commuters are looking for places to leave to get into Boston and then get back. There are 37 separate parking regulations within the quarter mile between the two T stops which causes confusion for residents and businesses. Very few employees in the area can afford to live in the area so most are commuting. This past winter, when the T failed, the businesses did not have people to work in the businesses. The City needs to consider ways to develop more commercial space and more residential space in thoughtful ways.

A Committee member asked if he was familiar with the Newton Centre parking study. He said he has seen it and some of the conclusions that came from that were actually made by his group a few years ago and presented to the Transportation Advisory Group, without a consultant.

It was asked if the membership of the EDC included representation from various backgrounds to reflect the community. For instance senior citizen residents may have a unique perspective and should be represented. The Committee asked James Freas to supply a list which included represented sectors.

Councilor Yates asked that each of the appointees look at the Main Streets Program as it has had great success in other communities.

Councilor Danberg moved approval and the Committee voted in favor unanimously with thank to Mr. Gregory for his service.

#149-16 Mayor's appointment of Jeremy Freid to the Economic Development Commission
JEREMY FREID, 35 Cotton Street, Newton, appointed as a member of the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION for a term to expire May 1, 2018 (60 days 6/30/16)
[04/13/16 @ 3:55 PM]

Action: Approved 6-0 (Councilor Baker not voting)

Note: Mr. Freid joined the Committee. He explained that he has been working on the N2 Corridor Real Estate Task Force which has given him some exposure to some of the big picture planning and development for the City. Working with James Freas, Nancy Hyde and others on this encouraged him to be further involved and he would like to serve on the EDC. He works in commercial real estate, focusing on the Newton/Needham markets.

As a Newton resident he has been trying to create momentum for the N2 Corridor as he has seen Needham take much of the benefit from companies leaving Newton. There is a real opportunity for Newton to position itself as one of *the* innovative districts in eastern Massachusetts with good transit and school systems as well as desirable demographics. The average size business tenant in Newton is about 4,000 square feet so there is opportunity to develop larger scale tenants.

It was asked what sectors of businesses would be attractive for Newton. Mr. Freid said technology is certainly desirable. He was at a Cambridge innovative event and they were sitting next to a Seaport technology company and all the millennials were focusing on that group, and people over 50 were focusing on Newton. Targeting the older demographic in a start-up, or an entrepreneur who lives in the area but does not want to take their business into the seaport would be a good strategy. Life Science, Biotech and Lab are booming in the surrounding towns of Lexington, Needham and Waltham and that should be on the radar as well.

A Councilor asked what Mr. Freid felt the barriers to entry might be for Newton. He noted that a study was done by a consultant hired by the N2 corridor to analyze the area and get feedback of stakeholders in the area. They wanted to understand the perception of what it was like to do business in Newton and Needham. Initial feedback was the Needham tended to be more nimble,

and easier to get approvals done and that Newton was a bit clunkier with a larger legislative body and more difficult to get things done. It was asked if there were specific areas of concern such as permitting, tax base, etc. Mr. Freid said it was just an overall perception and he was not sure of any specifics beyond that. James Freas, Acting Director of Planning, explained that Newton and Needham contributed funds for the study but it was mostly paid for privately by companies in the corridor. They are aiming for a release date of the study in June to the Newton Needham Chamber of Commerce. Councilor Hess-Mahan noted that he has spoken to Greg Reibman about coming to present findings to Zoning & Planning.

A Councilor noted that he had attended a meeting of the N2 group and the participants did not seem to realize there were restaurants on the Newton side of the corridor. Mr. Freid said they should be briefed by now on the overall market. There is now a huge Newton presence at the meetings.

It was asked if Mr. Freid had any thoughts on the Wells Avenue area. He said it is becoming an alternative use park and he believes a second means of egress is essential. He has many other thoughts as well that he would be happy to discuss.

Councilor Albright moved approval and the Committee voted in favor unanimously with thanks to Mr. Freid for his service.

#150-16 **Mayor's appointment of Charles Tanowitz to the Economic Development Commission**
CHARLES TANOWITZ, 51 Harding Street, West Newton, appointed as a member of the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION for a term to expire May 1, 2018 (60 days 6/30/16) [04/13/16 @ 3:55 PM]

Action: **Approved 6-0 (Councilor Baker not voting)**

Note: Mr. Tanowitz addressed the Committee. He noted he has lived in Newton for 20 years and he helped create, launch and name the N2 Corridor project. He started a business in Newton and tried to expand it but ended moving it out of the City. He then brought it back and had recruitment and other issues so he intimately knows some of the business problems from the commercial side.

It was asked what sort of problems he ran into with his business in Newton. He explained that he had a business in Central Square in Cambridge which he sold to a company in Newton on Rumford Avenue. His team quickly learned that, at that time, the only walkable establishment from the new location was a convenience store. One employee quit a week later and another quit 3 months later. They were not willing to work in a location where they could not walk to get food, a cup of coffee or run an errand. Walkability is key and being in an office park was not attractive for those people who lived in Cambridge, Somerville and Jamaica Plain, for example. A 5-minute walk is considered "walkable". Also people did not want to buy a car to come out to Newton or to be able to get food or go to the bank while at work.

He explained that in any kind of innovation situation the way to get people to interact is to get them to go to a gathering place such as a bar or restaurant after work. That is what is going on in Kendall Square and downtown. The Chamber just had an event at TripAdvisor and they explained how they use their entire facility to create multiple gathering points within it. When he worked in Waltham, as soon as employees got in their cars, they were gone. The goal is to get them to easily reach a gathering point before they head home.

It was noted that Newton In Motion is looking at a transportation strategy for the City which would be key to some economic development models. Mr. Tanowitz said he has been involved in some of those exercises and has been thinking about this issue for a long time. Bike lanes would be helpful and perhaps bike share options as well as improving transit to main nodes and working with developers to upgrade what already exists.

It was noted that the village centers provide that important walkability factor. Mr. Tanowitz said his wife for example would love to move her business into a village center but it's a small business and the rents are not affordable. This pushes that business farther and farther out. This is a long-term problem that needs to be addressed. They also need to be looking at the make-up of the businesses that are in the more commercially focused areas and how to make those areas more walkable.

The Orr Building project will be bringing commercial and residential space. A committee member asked if office space would make sense in a project like that. Mr. Tanowitz replied that it would be great to have office space there but it would have to be determined if it made economic sense to the developer.

Councilor Leary moved approval and the Committee voted in favor unanimously with thanks to Mr. Tanowitz for his service.

#151-16 **Mayor's re- appointment of Jack Leader to the Economic Development Commission**
JACK LEADER, 613 California Street, Newtonville, re-appointed as a member of the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION for a term to expire May 1, 2019 (60 days 6/30/16) [04/13/16 @ 3:55 PM]

Action: **Approved 6-0 (Councilor Baker not voting)**

Note: Councilor Danberg moved approval and the Committee voted to approve Mr. Leader's re-appointment with no discussion.

#152-16 **Mayor's re- appointment of Robert Finkel to the Economic Development Commission**
ROBERT FINKEL, 6 Stearns Street, Newton Centre, re-appointed as a member of the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION for a term to expire May 1, 2019 (60 days 6/30/16) [04/13/16 @ 3:55 PM]

Action: **Approved 6-0 (Councilor Baker not voting)**

Note: Councilor Albright moved approval and the Committee voted to approve Mr. Finkel's re-appointment with no discussion.

Follow Up

The Committee asked that James Freas provide a list of the EDC members and include which sectors they represent.

The Committee had an opportunity to meet new members of the Planning Department staff: Rachel Blatt, Urban Designer; Lily Canan Reynolds, Community Engagement Manager; and Barney Heath, incoming Director of Planning & Development. Mr. Heath will be back before the Committee on May 23rd to review and confirm his appointment.

The Committee continued review and discussion of CPA, Inspectional Services and Planning and Development departmental budgets. Those discussions can be found in a separate budget report online on the Zoning & Planning Committee website.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ted Hess-Mahan, Chair