

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE AGENDA

MONDAY, AUGUST 13, 2012

6:30 PM
Room 202

The Committee will be meeting jointly with the Economic Development Commission to hear a presentation on the EDSAT survey results. Full report and Executive Summary are available.

Respectfully submitted,

Alderman Stephen Linsky, Chair

The location of this meeting is handicap accessible, and reasonable accommodations will be provided to persons requiring assistance. If you have a special accommodation need, please contact the Newton ADA Coordinator Kathleen Cahill, 617-796-1125, via email at TGuditz@newtonma.gov or via TDD/TTY at (617) 796-1089 at least two days in advance of the meeting date.



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

A G E N D A

DATE: Monday, August 13, 2012

TIME: 6:30 – 7:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room 202

Setti D. Warren
Mayor

Candace Havens
Director
Planning & Development

Amanda Stout
Senior Economic
Development Planner

Commissioners

Christopher Steele, Chair
Ronald Lipof, Vice Chair
Jack Leader, Secretary

Barry Abramson
David Abromowitz
Daphne Collins
Charles Eisenberg
Robert Gifford
Jane Ives
Peter Kai Jung Lew
John R.A. Pears
Philip Plottel
Darryl Settles

Joint Meeting of the Long-Range Planning Committee of the Board of Aldermen and the Economic Development Commission

- 1. Welcome – Ald. Stephen Linsky, Chair, Long-Range Planning Committee, and Chris Steele, Chair, Economic Development Commission**
- 2. Brief Presentation of Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT) Final Report – Amanda Stout**
- 3. Comment and Context – Dr. Nancy Lee, Research Associate, The Dukakis Center for Urban Research and Policy, Northeastern University**
- 4. Discussion**
- 5. Next Steps**

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Preserving the Past  Planning for the Future



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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Setti D. Warren
Mayor

DATE: August 3, 2012

TO: Ald. Stephen M. Linsky, Chairman, Long-Range Planning Committee
Members of the Long-Range Planning Committee
Christopher Steele, Chair of Economic Development Commission
Members of the Economic Development Commission

FROM: Candace Havens, Director of Planning and Development
James Freas, Chief Planner for Long-Range Planning
Amanda Stout, Senior Economic Development Planner

RE: Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT) Final Results

CC: Board of Aldermen
Mayor Setti D. Warren

Background

The Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT) was developed through a partnership between The Dukakis Center for Urban Research and Policy at Northeastern University and the National League of Cities. The results are intended to provide cities and towns with an integrated view of how various departments and stakeholders affect economic development and their roles in creating a business-friendly environment. Over the past year, there has been considerable interest in and discussion of the EDSAT by the Long-Range Planning Committee, including a presentation delivered by Barry Bluestone of the Dukakis Center, and the Economic Development Commission.

The City of Newton completed the survey over the past year and received a report with the Final Results in June 2012.

At the EDC meeting on July 10th, Commissioners reviewed the EDSAT Final Results and began a discussion. The EDC was encouraged by some of the “strengths” identified in the report and suggested that the City promote these selling points while also making an effort to address some of the weaknesses and next steps.

The Joint Meeting of the Long-Range Planning Committee and the Economic Development Commission on Monday, August 13th will include a presentation of the Final Results of the Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT).

Methodology

The EDSAT is comprised of over 250 multiple choice questions. The quantitative questions were answered by Planning Department staff with data gathered from many City departments and research. Some of the qualitative questions were answered by a small working group comprised of members of the Long-Range Planning Committee (Ald. Stephen Linsky and Ald. Lisle Baker), the Economic Development Commission (former EDC Chair, Daphne Collins and current Chair, Chris Steele), the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce (Robert Halpin, former President), and the Planning and Development Department (Director Candace Havens and Sr. Economic Development Planner, Amanda Stout). Newton submitted a seven-page narrative response along with the multiple choice questionnaire responses.

As explained in the Final Results report, Newton's answers were rated on:

- Location Factor: level of importance to location experts (Very Important / Important / Not Important)
- Relative Strength: Newton's response versus the responses of the Comparison Group Municipalities (CGM) (Stronger than most / Average / Weaker than most)
- Interaction between Location Factor and Newton's Relative Strength yields telling results about "Deal Makers" and "Deal Breakers"

Summary of Results

Newton's Strengths

Newton receives high marks for **Quality of Life** factors that make the city an attractive location for businesses and residents. As written on page 22, these include: "a highly skilled and educated workforce," "a public transit network that includes light rail, commuter rail, and bus," and "an enviable set of quality of life factors, such as its proximity to Boston, the historic and village atmosphere, with the amenities and services of a modern city, and a highly rated public school system." Many of these factors, as well-maintained public spaces, a very low proportion of brownfields and vacant shopping centers, a very low crime rate, and strong local schools fall under the "important" location factors category.

The EDSAT report also identifies **Municipal Process** factors as areas in which Newton stands out from others who have completed the EDSAT. The report highlights "municipal permitting processes that are at the shorter end of the duration spectrum" and "the technical guidance that is offered to permit applicants" (page 22). Furthermore, while the City was unclear how our answers about some of the questions about community involvement in the permitting process would be perceived and analyzed, the report counts among our strengths that "elected officials in Newton are more involved in expediting development by facilitating dialogue with community groups than their counterparts in the CGM" (page 7).

Newton's Weaknesses

Several of the factors counted among Newton's potential deal breakers could be described as **Characteristics Associated with Location and High Quality of Life**. For example, when compared to other communities in the CGM, Newton has a very high cost of housing and high utility and property tax rates. Some factors, such as the presence of parking meters and the

fact that most retail sites in village centers do not have on-site parking, might only be considered weaknesses when compared to very suburban areas. High retail and office rents are also singled out as a weakness, which is consistent with anecdotal evidence, but also are consistent with the perceived desirability of the community as a place to do business.

Other weaknesses can be grouped under the concept that Newton needs to better **Understand, Promote, and Attract** business to the city. Most of these factors fall under the “important” location factors category and include the need to maintain better lists, hold formal debriefings with prospective firms, and hold a formal process of gauging the satisfaction of existing businesses. It also suggested better promotion of our strengths through marketing programs, more effectively engaging partners and local businesses as ambassadors, and identifying industries to target to create an economic development vision.

Next Steps Suggested in Report

Some of the next steps specifically highlighted in the Final Report include:

- Develop a business inventory;
- Survey businesses about satisfaction, what kinds of businesses they want to see, and outreach roles they can play;
- Identify missing and desired industry sectors,
- Create a development vision; and
- Proactive and direct marketing efforts aimed at identified business sectors.

Many of these steps are in progress or soon be started by the Planning Department and/or the Economic Development Commission.

There are several other strategies and tools that can be inferred from the EDSAT results that will be discussed at the August 13th meeting. They can be grouped under three categories:

- Understanding what we have;
- Promoting Newton’s businesses; and
- Identifying industries and attracting business.