

# PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

January 7, 2019



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

Barney Heath  
Director  
Planning & Development

Rachel Powers  
CD and HOME  
Program Manager  
Planning & Development

Members

Peter Doeringer, Chair  
Barney Heath, *ex officio*  
Kelley Brown, Member  
Sudha Maheshwari, Member  
Jennifer Molinsky, Member  
Sonia Parisca, Chair  
Chris Steele, Member  
Kevin McCormick, Alternate  
James Robertson, Alternate

1000 Commonwealth Ave.  
Newton, MA 02459  
T 617/796-1120  
F 617/796-1142

## Full Members Present:

Peter Doeringer, Chair  
Sonia Parisca, Vice-Chair  
Kelley Brown, Member  
Jennifer Molinsky, Member  
Chris Steele, Member  
Sudha Maheshwari, Member  
Kevin McCormick, Acting Member for November Meeting  
Jim Robertson, Acting Member for November Meeting  
Barney Heath, *Ex Officio*

## Staff Present:

Rachel Powers, Community Development and HOME Program Manager  
Kathryn Ellis, Economic Development Director

1. **Minutes from the Planning and Development Board Meeting held on December 3, 2018**
2. **Board of Survey**
3. **Economic Development Strategy**
4. **Zoning Amendment Synopsis**
5. **FY20 Annual Action Plan Discussion**
6. **Northland Public Hearing – Zoning Change Presentation** (Continued from December 11th Land Use Hearing)

## 1. Action Item: Approval of Minutes of December 3, 2018 meeting

Chair Doeringer opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. The motion was made by Vice Chair Parisca and Mr. Steele and approved 6-0-1, with Chair Doeringer abstaining, to approve the minutes of December 3, 2018.

## 2. Board of Survey

**Roll Call (ALL MEMBERS):** Upon a motion by Mr. Steele and Ms. Molinsky, and passed 7-0-0, the Board of Survey was opened (7:03 pm)

Chair Doeringer introduced Clerk of the Board of Survey (BOS), Lou Taverna, to present changes to Approval Not Required (ANR) Plan rules and regulations. Mr. Taverna also invited City Land Surveyor Patrick Higgins to assist in discussing these changes which related to the ANR Plan content and submission rules and criteria. ANR Plans are part of a subdivision process by which authority is delegated to the Clerk of the Board of Survey on behalf Planning & Development Board. Currently, the submittal process is inefficient and inconsistent. Mr. Taverna and his team are recommending updates in order to streamline the process and reduce the time staff spend in critiquing and approving plans.

Mr. Higgins provided a brief history of his time with the City, a description of the problems his team are experiencing and an overview of the proposed enhancements. The Engineering Division encounter a number of projects and submitted materials often lack the necessary information, references and detail needed for the Division to sign off on plans and projects. As a result, the process is inefficient and time consuming. The existing guidelines are all over the place; Mr. Higgins is attempting to clarify requirements upfront to alleviate this confusion and assist developers and consultants to better address minimum criteria and reduce markups.

Mr. Higgins presented example site plan reviews where staff had to spend additional time assisting the contractor/consultant while the requirements should have been outlined in the guidelines. Issues have included plans lacking survey monuments, proper markings, easements, lot lines and dimensions. Subsequently, the Division must review multiple iterations of plans before they can be signed off by the BOS Clerk and recorded with the Registry of Deeds. Standards presenting required criteria would minimize these difficulties.

Chair Doeringer is concerned that these changes won't altogether simplify these processes and wondered if some of the ongoing inconsistencies are due to permits being approved by different Boards? Many of the projects are extremely complicated. Mr. Taverna described the differences in the types of review processes. For instance, the Planning and Development Board will see plans for subdivisions, while the BOS Clerk review the mergers on behalf of the Board. Ms. Molinsky believed the examples were reasonable but echoed that proposed changes may not resolve whether proponents do their due diligence. Engineering, however, hopes that this will put those proponents on notice. Information would be available electronically online, as well as in hard copy format.

Mr. Robertson asked how our processes compared in other Cities and Towns. Mr. Higgins indicated that requirements such as locus maps and particular text sizes are critical and standard in many communities. He's also seen communities that require much more, but he's trying to avoid anything superfluous.

Ms. Maheshwari inquired if survey monuments were available in GIS format. Mr. Higgins noted that hard copy plans were available in the City Engineering Office or through the archivist. Not all the monuments are located at this time, so the Division has slowly been trying to build capacity to re-set bounds. The division is working on digitizing everything, but all plans are currently physical. Its long, delicate process given the age of many plans.

Mr. Taverna entertained any wordsmithing or edits the Board recommended. Chair Doeringer pointed out editorial changes related to consistency and an issue with the Clerk Stamp. Mr. Brown would prefer to redline a word document. Ms. Molinsky asked if the Law Department has reviewed the proposed changes; Mr. Taverna indicated that will be the next step.

Chair Doeringer called for final comments and recommended voting, subject to editorial changes.

Upon a motion by Ms. Molinsky, seconded by Ms. Maheshwari, and passed 7-0-0 to approve proposed ANR submission changes as recommended by the Clerk of the Board of Survey incorporating editorial changes by the Planning and Development Board.

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Molinsky, the motion to adjourn the Board of Survey was approved 7-0-0.

### **3. Economic Development Strategy Plan**

Dir. Heath introduced Newton Economic Development Director, Kathryn Ellis, and provided a brief overview of the Economic Development Strategy Planning process conducted in conjunction with Camoines Associates. He indicated some recent edits had been integrated. The Planning and Development Department is now comfortable with both the form and substance of the Plan and would like to move towards adoption. Dir. Heath invited Ms. Ellis to present the Plan's highlights, as well as tackle any questions the Planning and Development Board may have. Once adopted, the Strategy will be incorporated into the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Ellis distributed Implementation Priorities, which are part of Appendix B in the Plan. These priorities provide extensive detail and Newton's key action points. The Economic Development Commission (EDC) has reviewed these priorities extensively and have essentially endorsed the overall strategy.

Ms. Ellis presented the following priorities and action points, which are outlined in the Economic Development Strategy:

1. Expanding the Newton Innovation Center, which has exceeded capacity, in conjunction with the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce and Cambridge Innovation Center. The City is seeking out new space; new companies have been turned away. Several tenant companies have been incredibly successful, now hiring between 20-30 employees since their inception. Learning from this experience, the City will begin cutting off organizations exceeding 20+ employees. Newly received grant funds will support an analysis to assist in guiding the relocation of the Center, best practices moving forward and the appropriate types of amenities to incorporate;
2. Ramping up the marketing of Economic Development in Newton. Information currently tends to get lost on the website. So, the City will be looking for tools to assist in this messaging, as well identify Newton's key strengths, including proximity to Boston, education systems, and opportunities. Two companies who can assist with these goals have been identified to date; similar technologies and methods have been utilized in Cambridge to great success.
3. Increasing lab space in Newton to attract more biotech. Newton has a great number of highly skilled residents and scientists, so more needs to be done to become appealing to these companies. Not many existing venues have this capacity in the City. (47:00)
4. Promoting an environment that supports small and local businesses. There are approximately 8,000 businesses in Newton; about 80% of these establishments are "Mom and Pop" businesses, with less than 10 employees. The consultant investigated how to support their retail strategies, "Main Street" and the village centers. Ms. Ellis referenced the Needham Street Visioning process and the emphasis around "Live, Work and Play".

5. Leveraging the EDC and the talent that compromises that Commission. The EDC has developed a steering committee centered specifically around biotech; they have been successful with bio safety implementation and the Wells Ave food truck ordinance. Continued partnership could help in expanding Newton's commercial value.
6. Expanding Newton's Visitation Program, which aims to investigate how to retain local businesses, understanding the challenges they face and identifying opportunities. The newly passed food truck ordinance was the result of such an initiative on Wells Avenue; efforts increased area amenities while relieving congestion. The idea would be to expand this strategy to all businesses within Newton, regardless of their relationship to a village center. Newton is also exploring TIF financing and various grants as potential incentives.
7. Creating positive conversations around the future of Newton and in turn, reinstate the value of being in Newton;
8. Monitoring development of critical developments such as Riverside, Northland and Washington Street and considering the right mix of residential versus commercial. How can we leverage good base practice and bring high valued jobs to the City.
9. Promoting multimodal transportation, such as bringing in bike share programming and leveraging access to rapid transit.
10. Reviewing all Land-Use Regulations to mitigate loss of commercial entities to residential development and improve the overall review process. The Zoning Redesign process informed the Economic Development Strategy.

Camoin Associates recommended a budget; however, financial resources are limited. Updates to the website are estimated at \$50,000. Improvements can also be addressed through staff capacity. (52:00)

Ms. Molinsky asked how this strategy will ultimately fit into the Comprehensive Plan and what the precedent for this has been. Dir. Heath indicated that the Department has been incrementally identifying and updating specific elements of the existing Comprehensive Plan versus overhauling the entire Plan. He noted the recent completion of the Housing and Transportation Strategies and anticipated the incorporation of the Climate Action Plan. This particular piece would replace the existing Economic Development component within the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Molinsky also inquired as to how the public processes would compare between redoing the Comprehensive Plan in its entirety versus utilizing this piecemeal approach. She wondered whether the City is getting broad enough input? Dir. Heath pointed to positives in this approach, but recognized it wasn't as comprehensive and/or inclusive as updating the entire plan as a whole. However, this approach has highlighted specific subject matters and ongoing processes have targeted appropriate and relevant audiences. The Comprehensive Plan is a massive undertaking and resources are currently not available that would support such an effort. The existing Plan represents a good base of work that contains broad, yet useful policy goals; recognizing this, Planning will continue to move forward with updates.

Chair Doeringer referred to previous discussions on the matter and noted that the appending modules don't reverse the existing plan but provide additional detail. He has been supportive of this approach. Ms. Molinsky sought further clarification as to whether elements were being replaced or augmented. Dir. Heath's interpretation is that new pieces and guidance would replace older items. Many communities are following suit, taking plans on element by element.

Mr. McCormick asked how the Comprehensive Plan and its Appendices would be displayed online and whether certain aspects of the old Plan would still be in effect. He is concerned it will be more confusing. The EDS is intended to be the new Plan, even if it won't replace the existing document. Ms. Parisca noted the generic, broad nature of the Comprehensive Plan and how the new EDS brings more specificity.

Mr. Steele recognized that while the existing Plan is broad, the new EDS takes a much more philosophical approach and directly tackles investment, attraction and retention. He further asked if the EDC would submit a letter of support on behalf of the strategy. He noted a recent discussion on the EDS at ZAP and wondered if indicators could be incorporated that measured positive impacts. If we could explain the directionality/outcome, the EDS might be more understandable. Mr. Steele also advised the City to be sure of its readiness to handle/field calls. Is the infrastructure (i.e. developable land) in place so that when marketing begins the City is prepared. Ms. Ellis noted an ongoing project utilizing GIS to assist with navigating these efforts. While she continues to prefer a customizable approach to the calls that come in, this tool will support the process.

Mr. Robertson, noting the executive summary and desirability of Newton over the last several decades, examined Newton's aspirations and mindsets when approaching the EDS. Ultimately, he would like to understand where we are going and what we're trying to achieve. He wondered why we wanted to add massive amounts of density in Newton's village centers. Dir. Heath noted a desire to increase the commercial tax base and ensure that village centers remain vibrant, which require sufficient foot traffic. Key findings of this and previous studies find that Newton often loses out as an attractive base for commercial entities, is the desire for its workforce to live in the community where they work. To compete, the City needs the necessary infrastructure to work towards this. There are limited opportunities to begin with, and so Newton needs to leverage opportunities where they are feasible. Ms. Ellis echoed this, along with the community concerns relative to traffic congestion as residents commute and the desire to offset educational costs.

Mr. Robertson further reinforced that Newton doesn't need any new banks or coffee shops. Ms. Molinsky concurred that banks and nail shops leave us with non-vibrant neighborhoods; she feels that the EDS reverses this, providing the potential to generate the desired foot traffic.

Chair Doeringer is a bit skeptical over the concept of "live, work and play"; his two takeaways from the EDS was the attempt to assist small business and the large number of existing low-wage businesses in Newton. He noted the challenges with assisting this particular commercial base and the need to be connected to much more pro-active technical assistance. He believes the document is thin on the necessary resources to assist this subset. His second takeaway was Newton's transportation situation and the immediate importance of reforms, which are currently listed with medium priority in Appendix

A. Chair Doeringer believes transportation is a much higher priority. Budget resources should be separated from importance in terms of priorities. He prefers that transportation activities be increased to a higher level of priority. Mr. Robertson agreed that transportation is the number one way to assist businesses.

Mr. Robertson further acknowledged the City's desire to support small businesses but wants to ensure small businesses aren't burdened by rules designed for big businesses. He also does not want to subsidize failing businesses. Ms. Ellis mentioned other ways small businesses are being supported and efforts to retain retail and certain amenities within a district. Dir. Heath noted the City's exploration of smaller spaces.

Ms. Parisca pointed out a particular Boston neighborhood containing small boutique "mom and pop" shops, its desirability and wondered how this may be achieved. Ms. Molinsky noted Central Square, whose overlay district limits chains and franchises, but has been successful. Mr. Brown added that we need to cultivate the desired commercial environment Newton wants, which may overlap in the support of Newton's small legacy businesses. Tools are available that can limit chain businesses and particular uses. Chair Doeringer encourages the use of an assortment of policy tools to avoid the creation of simple, cookie cutter retail shops; discounted rentals or rent control are options. The EDS should also reflect these goals. (1:33:00)

Chair Doeringer asked if the Board was prepared to vote. Mr. Brown would like to move forward and focus on actionable items. Chair Doeringer reinforced that he would like to amend EDS priorities, elevating transportation from a medium to a higher-level priority.

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele and seconded by Mr. Brown, the Economic Development Strategy was approved, incorporating an amendment increasing the priority of transportation from medium to high, and passed 6-0-1, with Dir. Heath abstaining.

#### **4. Zoning Amendment Synopsis**

Dir. Heath distributed a synopsis of zoning amendments, their status and required next action steps. Moving forward we will provide monthly updates to the Planning and Development Board.

It was noted that Inclusionary Zoning will be revisited and reworked to consider public comments. While the Board has previously voted on this item, this item is anticipated to come back before the Board with changes. Chair Doeringer inquired if the item will need to be re-advertised and reopened. This is being examined by the Legal Department. Ms. Molinsky inquired about the content of the Board's recommendation and how the transmission of this feedback can be helpful. Chair Doeringer pointed to how this can be impacted during the voting process. Mr. Robertson noted that the CPC always presented votes, noting the issues and challenges the Committee addressed. Dir. Heath suggested that a member could testify in person during a public hearing; Mr. Brown agreed this could be a meaningful approach. Chair Doeringer wasn't convinced of the impact of the Board's presence at such hearings and noted that the City Council received the full letter, along with the vote's reasoning. Ultimately, he would prefer to keep the vehicle for such feedback flexible.

Mr. McCormick requested that required joint meetings be distinguished from non-required meetings. Ms. Powers indicated that she would do this.

Mr. Brown encouraged all members to pay particular attention to Northland's Transportation reports. Dir. Heath noted a peer review developed by Beta Engineering will be distributed to members. The document will also be made available online.

Dir. Heath informed the Board that there would be an RFQ process for the Riverside Vision Plan; they've reached out to 5 firms and a selection committee will be put in place.

#### **5. FY20 Annual Action Plan Discussion-**

Ms. Powers announced that planning was underway for the City's FY20 Annual Action Plan. The Division is entering its fifth year of the 2015-2020 Consolidated Plan and anticipating funding levels similar to FY18 during FY20. Staff are expecting to present proposed goals, activities and allocations centered around affordable housing, architectural access, public services, ESG homelessness prevention and shelter services and the WestMetro HOME Consortium at the P & D Board's April 1<sup>st</sup> meeting.

Human Service and ESG RFPs are scheduled to be released on Monday, January 14<sup>th</sup> and will be due back Friday, February 1<sup>st</sup>. Like the previous year, Ms. Powers seeks P & D Board volunteers to participate in the RFP review process. The review will take place between February 8<sup>th</sup> and February 13<sup>th</sup> and all materials would be distributed electronically to participants no later than Tuesday, February 5<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Parisca and Mr. McCormick volunteered to assist in reviewing Human Service Program applications, while Vice Chair Doeringer volunteered to review ESG applications.

#### **6. Northland Public Hearing**

Upon a motion by Mr. Robertson, seconded by Mr. McCormick, the continuation of the Northland Redevelopment Rezoning public hearing was unanimously passed 7-0-0.

#### **7. Next Meetings-**

The next Northland joint LUC meeting is scheduled for January 15<sup>th</sup> and January 29<sup>th</sup>; the covered topics will be Transportation and Sustainability and Stormwater Management.

#### **8. Action Item: Adjournment**

Upon a motion by Chair Doeringer seconded by Mr. Steele and unanimously passed 7-0-0, the meeting was adjourned at 9:13 p.m.