



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

Ruth Anne Fuller
Mayor

Barney S. Heath
Director
Planning & Development
Kathryn Ellis
Director Economic
Development

Commissioners
Joyce Plotkin, Chair
Robert Finkel, Vice Chair
Chuck Tanowitz, Secretary

Howard Barnstone
Stephen Feller
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Prepared for: Mayor Ruth Anne Fuller and Newton City Council

Prepared by: Newton Economic Development Commission

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I. Background

The Economic Development Commission (EDC) was established under General Laws Chapter 40, Section 8A to promote and develop business and industry within the City of Newton. The Commission is charged with strengthening the local economy leading to new job opportunities for residents and expansion of the City's tax base. City Ordinance Article V, Section 22-95 lays out the governing provisions as summarized below:

1. The Commission shall consist of 15 members appointed by the Mayor.
2. The Commission has the power and duty to:-
 - Study, investigate, and appraise economic conditions and trends;
 - Promote, assist, and encourage the preservation, development and location of new and existing Newton industry, business and commerce;
 - Investigate and assist in the establishment of commercial projects and identify appropriate commercial areas and zones for such establishment;
 - Prepare and distribute informational publications;
 - Cooperate with civic agencies/commissions/associations, state/federal agencies, municipal departments and officials, and business associations and organizations; and
 - Advise and make recommendations to appropriate officials, agencies, boards, department, and commissions of the City.

This report is prepared and submitted to the City Council in compliance with City Ordinance Article V, Section 22-95 (g) (10).

II. 2017 in Review

During 2017, the EDC undertook the following activities:

Organizational

- **EDC Officers** – The Commission elected Ms. Joyce Plotkin as EDC Chair, Mr. Robert Finkel as Vice Chair and Mr. Chuck Tanowitz as Secretary in February of 2017.
- **Hiring of New Economic Development Director** – The EDC Chair served on the selection committee and participated in interviews for the hiring of the new Economic Development Director. Ms. Kathryn Ellis was appointed after this three-month process and started her position in June of 2017.
- **Appointment of New Economic Development Commissioner Jean Wood** – The EDC interviewed a number of candidates this past year to fill the four open positions. Dr. Wood was appointed by the Mayor in November of 2017. She is an economist and a long-time Newton resident.

City Ordinances

- **Wells Avenue Food Trucks** – The EDC was the lead docketer of the ordinance to allow food trucks to serve the Wells Avenue business community. The EDC worked with the Planning Department in developing the ordinance and met with City Councilors to help to educate them on the ordinance. The ordinance was passed 23-0 by City Council. Property owners and employers on Wells Avenue are eager to bring this new amenity to the only office park in the City. Food trucks are expected to begin operation in the Spring of 2018.
- **rDNA** – The EDC was an early supporter of the rDNA ordinance and was an advocate for re-constituting the City's Biosafety Committee to review, evaluate, and make recommendations to the City regarding approval of potential rDNA sites. This ordinance, which eliminated the need for a special permit in certain

business districts, was passed by the City Council and will make it easier for life science entities to locate in Newton. It will also make Newton more competitive with many neighboring communities that have already adopted this type of ordinance.

Support for Public-Private Partnerships

- **N Squared Innovation District** – The EDC has supported this innovative partnership between the city of Newton and the Town of Needham. The District encompasses a 500-acre area including Wells Office Park in Newton, Founders Park in Needham, and the commercial corridor along Needham Street. N Squared is focused on branding and marketing, transportation and workforce housing options, advocacy for infrastructure improvements, establishing a food truck program on Wells Avenue, and community building through networking and programming.
- **Newton Innovation Center** – The EDC has continued to support the Newton Innovation Center (NIC) – a partnership of the City of Newton, Mass Challenge and the Cambridge Innovation Center. The NIC has doubled in size since it was established two years ago. Currently, the NIC serves 94 entrepreneurs and offers co-working space for some Newton residents. The NIC welcomed Debbie Kenny from Mass Challenge as the new Entrepreneur-in Residence. City employee and Economic Development Director Kathryn Ellis is located at the NIC and oversees the building at 124 Vernon Street in Newton Corner.

Other Business Efforts and Projects

- **Economic Development Strategy** – The EDC supported the Planning Department's request to the City Council for funding to undertake the development of a comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the City. EDC Chair and Commissioner Howard Barnstone served on the selection committee and participated in interviews for the hiring of a consulting company. Camoin Associates was selected as the vendor.

- **Austin Street - Newtonville** – The EDC was supportive of the various stages of the pre-construction phase of the Austin Street project. The construction will commence in January of 2018. The building will consist of 68 housing units, 23 of which are affordable and 4500 square feet of retail space.

On an ongoing basis, the EDC is involved in:

- **Wells Avenue** – The EDC is participating in an effort to update the City’s office park through a partnership of the City and property owners at Wells Avenue. Discussions focus on such topics as an improved entranceway, new signage, infrastructure improvements (roads, sidewalks, and landscaping), second means of access/egress, additional transportation options such as shuttles and bike share, and the introduction of food trucks.
- **Zoning Redesign** – The EDC is supporting the Planning Department’s efforts for Zoning Redesign particularly as it impacts economic development and the business community (i.e., revising parking regulations for businesses/restaurants).
- **Developer Proposals** – The EDC continues to review developers’ proposals from across the city to ensure the potential for increased commercial tax revenue and new business investment in Newton. In this regard, the EDC hosted Northland for a preliminary presentation on the site plan and EDC members participated in a tour of the Northland site on Needham Street.
- **Needham Street Visioning Project** –The EDC is providing representation on the Community Engagement Group for this new initiative.

- **EDC Membership 2017**

Joyce Plotkin (Chair)

Howard Barnstone (Vice Chair)

Chuck Tanowitz (Secretary)

Stephen Feller

Robert Finkel

Jeremy Freid

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