



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: April 7, 2020

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

1. Attendance

Commissioners Attending:

Phil Plottel (Chair); Jean Wood (Vice Chair); Debora Jackson (Secretary); Howard Barnstone; Rob Finkel; Jeremy Freid; Jack Leader; Marcela Merino; Beth Nicklas; Joyce Plotkin; Sarah Rahman; Matt Segneri; and Chuck Tanowitz.

Commissioners Absent: Steve Feller; and Peter Lew (deceased).

Staff Attending: Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development; and Devra Bailin, Economic Development Director.

Also Present: Josephine McNeil

Prior to official business, Mr. Plottel announced to the members that Peter Lew had passed away on Sunday. There was a brief discussion of Mr. Lew's service on the EDC since 2002 and thoughts of remembrance. A moment of silence was held and Mr. Plottel stated that he will try to find out where the EDC's condolences may be sent.

Mr. Plottel asked how all members were faring and there was a brief discussion of same.

2. Approval of Minutes of March 10, 2020

On a motion made by Beth Nicklas and seconded by Marcela Merino, the Minutes of the March 10, 2020 meeting were unanimously approved.

3. City Updates

Coronavirus Updates: Mr. Heath explained that the Mayor, Deb Youngblood and Bruce Proia have been steering the City's efforts regarding COVID-19. They have been working tirelessly to get out accurate information quickly. Ms. Bailin has been doing the same with respect to information for businesses. He noted that the Planning Department has been managing remotely and getting used to operating meetings via zoom. Projects continue to move along. He also noted that the City is anticipating over a million extra CDBG funding under the CARES Act and expects to utilize some of it for economic programs.

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

Barney S. Heath
Director
Planning & Development
Devra G. Bailin
Director
Economic Development

Commissioners
Phil Plottel, Chair
Jean Wood, Vice Chair
Debora Jackson, Secretary

Howard Barnstone
Stephen Feller
Robert Finkel
Jeremy Freid
Jack Leader
Peter Kai Jung Lew
Marcela Merino
Beth Nicklas
Joyce Plotkin
Sarah Rahman
Matt Segneri
Chuck Tanowitz

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Riverside: Mr. Heath advised that the Land Use Committee is taking up the project at its meeting tonight. Mr. Plottel noted that the EDC's letter was received by the Committee, as confirmed in his conversation with Councilor Lipof. Mr. Plottel commented that Mark Development seems to be leaning towards life science at the project. Although we do not know if Mark Development has done any outreach to any particular life science partners, they seem to understand the value of that use. Ms. Bailin noted that the number of residential units has been decreased to 582.

40 B Projects: Mr. Heath explained that hearings regarding Dunstan East project will continue (on April 22nd). [This project includes 243 units of rental housing (25% affordable/80% of area mean) and 12, 521 sq. ft. of ground floor retail.] The ZBA is also continuing hearings on The Residences on the Charles (15 Riverdale Avenue). [This proposal includes 204 units of rental housing, 7000 sq. ft. of retail, and community and amenity space—the 17,782 sq. ft. for office/innovation space has been removed.]

Mayor's Business Check Ins: Mr. Heath and Ms. Bailin explained that the Mayor will be holding a business check in later this month regarding streetscape work in Newtonville which has begun, the possibility of NewCal expansion at the existing Senior Center location, COVID-19 impacts, and any other matters the businesses wish to discuss.

4. Discussion Items

a. COVID-19 Recovery

- i. How does the EDC support business recovery and attraction of new business that can be successful in Newton?
- ii. 60-day report with recommendations to the City.

Mr. Plottel referenced the Mayor's letter to the EDC, asking for a report on recovery recommendations to assist businesses to get back on their feet. There was a brief discussion of the possibility of CDBG grants going directly to small businesses. Mr. Leader noted that there had been such a CDBG economic program for microloans to small businesses under Mayors Cohen and Warren. He served on the advisory committee. The available funds varied year to year.

Ms. Merino suggested that we should be targeting mom and pop stores. She added that we need to get together an accurate up-to-date list of business and property owners.

Mr. Plottel directed the members' attention to the COVID-19 recovery plan discussion outline which had been provided. Realistically, what businesses will survive and what can the EDC to help make them ready to reopen. What steps does the EDC recommend the City take and how do we best organize ourselves to be able to make recommendations in 60 days? What ideas can we come up with tonight to inform the process?

There was a brief discussion of the status of federal response and a reminder that there are both constant contact and website news updates from Economic Development. Ms. Bailin noted that she is also fielding calls and emails from those businesses in need of assistance. The Chamber is also providing updates and webinars to assist. Ms. Bailin pointed out that Secretary Kennealy and his team have weekly updates on Friday and that the Massachusetts Office of Business Development (“MOBD”) provides summaries and additional information applicable to businesses.

Mr. Plottel set out a COVID-19 recovery plan for Newton businesses discussion outline for steps the EDC can take to help businesses that survived be ready to reopen and to help attract new businesses to open in Newton. Mr. Barnstone noted one easy element should be free parking in the village centers. We need to focus on those measures the City can take to make reopening easier. Mr. Tanowitz commented that a key component will be to get folks out; create foot traffic with appropriate social distancing—perhaps, close the streets on weekends and make them available for pedestrians. What are we looking at in terms of long-term closures, which will force some businesses to fold? And how many Newton residents will be unemployed and for how long? What will be the impacts of new social distancing, especially on the restaurants?

Ms. Plotkin asked what problems are we being asked to solve or lessen: operating expenses, attracting customers, marketing, problems businesses will face in reopening, etc.? Is our focus existing businesses or possible new emerging businesses?

There was a discussion of the survey created by a group of economic development directors working together. Ms. Bailin shared it with the EDC officers but felt it was too long and intrusive. Ms. Jackson agreed it was too detailed but might be helpful in assessing needs if streamlined. She noted that there was not going to be enough money to assist all the businesses so our focus needs to be steps the City can implement. Mr. Barnstone added he agrees with Mr. Tanowitz that the key is to drive consumer traffic back to the stores, get employees back to work and figure out the logistical/immediate needs to do so.

Mr. Plottel noted that the City is tight on funds and that tax revenues will be down. What the City can do is to make it easier for a business to be successful by removing impediments. Mr. Leader noted that a lot of tradesmen—contractors, plumbers, electricians—suffer from the inefficiencies of the Inspectional Services Department. The City should hire more inspectors and/or issue inspection times via cell phone appointments. Too much time is wasted waiting for inspectors during the assigned windows. Major problem for businesses will be the lack of cash flow.

Mr. Tanowitz commented that a possible solution for restaurants would be outdoor seating, allowing greater distancing. Other ideas to bring business back? Ms. Bailin commented that Nift is a program that was successfully used after the gas explosions in North Andover and Lawrence to assist businesses to get back onto their feet by using funds provided by the gas company to purchase gift cards

that delivered cash directly to stores/restaurants and then brought customers to them. There was discussion of a shop/dine/bank local campaign for independently locally owned businesses. Ms. Bailin noted that Needham's Discover Needham Shop Local temporarily worked but it was not a sustained effort. Work with the Chamber to bring it back? Mr. Finkel commented that a shop local campaign is a no brainer. Ms. Bailin noted that Paula Gannon has expertise in setting up cultural events and these could be paired with such a campaign which would target village centers.

Ms. Nicklas asked how much money do we have and how can it be dispensed? She noted that Mass Life Sciences is creating a fund to assist life science companies threatened with closure; it will issue grants and low interest loans.

Mr. Plottel noted that there will be impediments to businesses to reopen that are directly related to permitting and/or inspection. Ms. Plotkin noted that expediting city services should be one of the focusses of any recovery plan.

Ms. Merino commented that we should try to identify those businesses which need the most help and target community outreach to help. Should we prepare them for new modes of doing businesses—online presence, delivery models, retraining, etc? Mr. Barnstone agreed that there will be changes to how successful businesses will operate in the future and businesses will need to adapt and change. Mr. Plottel agreed that there will be new modes of delivery required. Ms. Bailin suggested that we may be able to create a tool kit for such new methods. Mr. Tanowitz noted the need for restaurants to have online order systems. Mr. Barnstone noted that we could create connections between vendors and those providing certain business tools.

Ms. Bailin noted that, with the help of large companies, both Boston and Cambridge were able to set up funds to assist small businesses. Mr. Barnstone thought creating a 'big brother' program for businesses could be helpful for small businesses. Ms. Jackson commented that businesses need more than tech support; many people are struggling with meeting just basic needs. In that environment, perhaps some sort of guidance or mentoring program is called for. Mr. Freid noted that deals have been abandoned and the situation is causing businesses to reel in their demands/expectations. He and other brokers are providing free advice and guidance. He agrees that providing intellectual capital is something within our reach. Newton certainly has the residents who can advise businesses. Mr. Finkel also agreed that providing mentoring and matching businesses to those who can advise them would be very helpful.

Mr. Plottel noted that the suggestions fall within categories and that if the EDC members break into groups, we could discuss ideas from each subgroup at our meeting in May and vote our plan in June, thereby meeting the Mayor's timeline.

4-7-2020 Subgroups (bold is lead)

1. Survey – **Jean**, Beth, Devra, Joyce [Joyce subsequently decided to focus on Marketing subgroup)
 - Simple set of questions

- fast
- 2. City Services – **Jack**, Jean, Phil, Debora
 - Staffing
 - timeline
- 3. Marketing - **Marcela/Chuck**, Joyce, Sarah
 - shop local,
 - outreach,
 - open streets
- 4. Mentoring – **Rob**, Jeremy, Howard, Matt
 - advisory
 - support
 - business capacity
 - new delivery service models
 - Linkage to other groups foundation funding
 - Enterise
 - Entrepreneurship for all
 - Score /SBA

Ms. Bailin will ascertain the amount of proposed CDBG available for economic development, a summary of how it may be spent, and the EDC will weigh in at that time.

b. Additional topics

- i. Task Forces
There was insufficient time to discuss this topic.
- ii. Riverside Project
See above Updates
- iii. Laboratory Research Update
Mr. Plottel noted that he prepared some preliminary research on this issue but discussion will have to wait until a later date due to time constraints.
- iv. Restaurant Liquor Licenses Update
It was noted that the memo from Maura O’Keefe in the Law Department was distributed. Ms. Nicklas noted that she still had some issues on which she need clarity.
- v. Elected official outreach
Mr. Plottel noted that many have already started outreach measures with City Councilors and encouraged folks to keep that up.
- vi. Additional Meetings
Mr. Plottel commented that there may be a need for additional meetings but for now the plan is for the various subcommittees work towards reporting at the May meeting.

5. Other Business

There was no other business discussed.

6. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—May 12, 2020

The date of the next meetings for the EDC will be **May 12**, 2020. At this meeting, the subgroups will report survey results, draft report sections and draft initial recommendations. At the June 9th meeting, there will be a final vote on recommendations.

7. Adjournment

Upon motion the meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director