



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: October 13, 2020

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

1. Attendance

Commissioners Attending:

Phil Plottel (Chair); Jean Wood (Vice Chair); Debora Jackson (Secretary); Jeremy Freid; Joyce Plotkin; Beth Nicklas Sarah Rahman; and Chuck Tanowitz.

Commissioners Absent: Howard Barnstone; Steve Feller; Rob Finkel; Jack Leader; Marcela Merino; and Matt Segneri;

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

Also Attending: Harry Sanders

2. Approval of Minutes of September 8, 2020

Upon motion by Mr. Tanowitz and seconded by Ms. Wood, the Minutes were unanimously approved with one abstention.

3. City Updates

Riverside: Mr. Heath explained that the biggest City update is that Land Use Committee voted 8 to 0 to approve the project. The Riverside special permit goes before the City Council for discussion and vote (unless continued) on October 19th. The Planning Department does anticipate some amendments and parliamentary maneuvers. Mr. Plottel asked if any EDC action is necessary at this time; Mr. Heath said no. Ms. Plotkin asked if the issue with the golf course had been resolved. Mr. Heath was not aware of any agreement. Ms. Rahman asked if Mr. Heath expected any significant changes and Mr. Heath replied that he thinks it unlikely.

Blue Bikes: Ms. Bailin noted that Blue Bike stations had been installed and a bike lane painted on Washington Street eastbound between Kempton Place and Lowell Avenue. She noted that businesses have been objecting to removal of parking on that side of the street. Mr. Tanowitz didn't see what the objection was since it is not safe to cross Washington Street to get to the businesses. He also asked about the Blue Bikes, which Mr. Heath explained were supported for two years by grants.

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
Marcela Merino
Beth Nicklas
Joyce Plotkin
Sarah Rahman
Matt Segneri
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Bram Way: Mr. Heath explained that Bram Way is temporarily closed where it is adjacent to the plaza until January when the closure will be revisited. The easement holders agreed to this temporary measure.

Zoning Redesign: Mr. Plottel asked if there is any update on the single-family zoning redesign. Mr. Heath explained that this is the subject of ZAP meetings in November/December. Mr. Freid asked about when they would get to the broader zoning redesign. Mr. Heath explained that commercial zoning will probably not come up until the fall of 2021 but that village zoning will be addressed soon. He expressed his desire for the EDC to be actively involved in that discussion, as well as with parking in those districts. This will be discussed in further detail later.

Needham Street: Mr. Heath explained that the approximately three-year project to reconstruct Needham Street will start in Needham and begin in Newton in the spring of 2021.

Restaurants: Mr. Tanowitz asked where the City is on the various requests from the restaurants. Ms. Bailin explained that the Licensing Commission voted to reduce alcohol fees by 50% and to allow restaurants to pay in two installments—one in November and one in June. There was discussion of street closures and the response of restaurants, particularly on Union Street.

4. Discussion Item:

a. Ideas Letter

1. Report from Private Funding Program Subgroup

Ms. Rahman reported back on behalf of the subgroup comprised of Mr. Tanowitz, Ms. Wood, Mr. Leader and her. They have been working to flush out a private fundraising model and the realistic parameters for a fund. The group placed several calls to banks and developers. The former felt that such a fund should be community government funded; the latter wanted more details before weighing in. Ms. Niklas asked whether the subgroup had identified how funds would be used. Ms. Rahman said they thought perhaps there could be a grant program like the City did with CDBG funds, but, until they were able to create excitement in creating a funding platform, specifics seemed premature. Ms. Niklas suggested the subgroup reach out to wealthy long-time residents for donations.

Ms. Plotkin asked about how the City distributed the grants and whether there were any additional funds. Ms. Bailin explained the process used and that the grants specified that half of the funds distributed had to go to pay rent. Mr. Heath explained that the City has received an additional \$600,000 in CDBG funds and

that the City would like to allocate some share to help small businesses but that there needs to be a more streamlined less staff-time intensive system to issue them.

2. Report from Zoning Language for R & D and Modern Manufacturing Subgroup

Mr. Plottel explained that he has been working with Ms. Bailin, Mr. Heath and City Planning Staff to create viable language within the current scope of the ordinance. He believes there is a plan and he hopes to bring the proposal to the EDC next month. Ms. Nicklas agreed to assist in the work.

3. Report from Subgroup meeting with NNRC on Mentoring, Marketing and other Matters

Ms. Jackson reported that she has had numerous discussions with the Greg Reibman at the NNRC. The Chamber's highest priority is the dining contest which she has shared with the Mayor's office, Ms. Bailin, Newton.org, and the various parent teacher organizations for distribution. The Mayor and the Economic Development Department distributed the details. Ms. Jackson also went to the Farmer's Market to advertise the contest. Ms. Rahman thanked Ms. Jackson for all her personal efforts on behalf of the EDC. She asked what the City has been doing to assist. Ms. Bailin explained that she looked again into closing Union Street for a short period of time this fall but most restaurants did not feel it would helpful at this time. The City also applied for a MassDOT shared streets grant to provide restaurants, who individually provided their requests, with portable heaters, outdoor lighting and tents. Unfortunately, the City was not successful in getting the grants.

Ms. Jackson noted that the diversity task force of the Chamber is presently working on the 50 Most Influential People of Color event. She hopes they will turn their attention to actively finding ways to assist women and people of color in developing and promoting their businesses.

b. Requests from the Planning Department

1. Request from Planning to Study Village Center Zoning

Mr. Heath explained that beginning soon, the Department will be discussing the village center zoning and needs the assistance of the EDC to discuss and promote ideas. In order to have the members familiarize themselves with the issues, Mr. Heath and Ms. Bailin will circulate zoning

maps of the areas at issue, current zoning, and draft proposed zoning.

2. Request from Planning to Study Parking Requirements

The desire for EDC input is also true of the parking requirements for village centers. As the members probably already know, there is proposal to eliminate parking requirements in village centers, which arguably create unnecessary barriers to redevelopment. Mr. Heath thought it might make sense for Zach LeMel to make a presentation to the EDC.

c. Discussion of other activities

There was no discussion of other activities.

5. Other Business

Harry Sanders, who owns property in Newtonville, asked about the newly installed parking meters. He understands that people do not need to feed the meters and that the meters are also not being enforced as to time limitations. This is creating confusion—the meters should be bagged. It is also problematic on his street that the residential spaces are now being enforced. It doesn't make sense. He asks that the City make clear on the ground—at the meters—what the rules are.

6. Thank You to Steve Feller and Howard Barnstone

Mr. Plottel thanked Mr. Feller and Mr. Barnstone for their valuable service and wished them well in their future interests. Mr. Heath was asked and noted that there are presently two members which the Mayor is seeking to appoint. If appointed, there will be one more vacancy to fill.

7. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—November 10, 2020

The date of the next regularly scheduled meeting for the EDC will be **November 10, 2020**.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director