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# CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## Economic Development Commission

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### Meeting Minutes

DATE: June 9, 2020

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

#### 1. Attendance

Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

##### *Commissioners Attending:*

Phil Plottel (Chair); Jean Wood (Vice Chair); Debora Jackson (Secretary); Howard Barnstone; Rob Finkel; Jack Leader; Marcela Merino; Beth Nicklas; Joyce Plotkin; Sarah Rahman; and Chuck Tanowitz. (Some members arrived after the meeting began.)

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

*Commissioners Absent:* Steve Feller; Jeremy Freid; and Matt Segneri.

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

*Also Present:* Mayor Ruthanne Fuller; Harry Sanders; and David Donahue.

#### 2. Approval of Minutes of May 12, 2020 and May 26, 2020

- a. Introductory Comments from Mayor Fuller: Mayor Fuller thanked the Commissioners for their important work in normal times and to express her gratitude for their wisdom and energy in these difficult times. She noted that the health crisis has created an economic crisis in the City and every industry sector has been injured significantly. Reopening is equally difficult as the closings in March. She has seen the draft report and knows that the EDC has done extremely important work over the last two months. She thanked the Commissioners for their thoughtful advocacy for all sectors of the City's economy. She stated that, although unable to stay for the rest of the meeting, she looks forward to the final recommendations and working with the EDC to restore Newton's vibrancy.
- b. Approval of the Minutes of May 12, 2020 and May 26, 2020  
On the motion by Mr. Leader, seconded by Ms. Wood, and unanimously approved, the Minutes of May 12, 2020 and May 26, 2020 were approved.

#### 3. City Updates

Riverside: Mr. Heath explained that there is another Riverside meeting at which engineering, post-construction monitoring, and sustainability will be discussed. It is expected that this will be the last substantive discussion

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before the conditions of the Board order will be finalized, which, after a few meetings, should be in the end of July.

Dunstan East: This matter is still pending before the ZBA. Mr. Heath explained that Mark Development reduced the height of one building and added it to the second in response to neighborhood opposition to the height. The hearings will continue on June 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Riverdale: Mr. Heath reported that the ZBA is meeting on this petition next week. Conditions for the approval have been provided to the ZBA for consideration. The neighborhood has been fairly quiet.

Armory: Mr. Heath was asked about the Armory. He noted that a consultant has been hired to explore the feasibility of using the building for 100% affordable housing. Ms. Plotkin commented that that isn't sustainable. Mr. Heath explained that DCAM won't agree to sell it to the City if there are any non-affordable units. If the City doesn't take it, DCAM will sell to the highest bidder. Mr. Heath also noted that the City of Lynn did put a plan together for all affordable Veteran housing and the City will be looking at that model with its consultant.

Streetscape Projects: Mr. Heath was asked about various streetscape projects and he reported that, because of the lack of traffic and parking, both the Newtonville and West Newton project were proceeding ahead of schedule. Mr. Leader noted that a Newton Facebook group was complaining about parking issues in Newtonville and there seemed to be a lack of awareness of what the project is. Mr. Heath noted that the Department will be issuing a flyer regarding the project within the next day or two. Mr. Finkel asked that the flyer be forward to the EDC.

#### **4. Discussion Item: Ideas Letter to Mayor**

At this point, Mr. Plottel shared the screen and the Commissioners were invited to comment on the draft letter. Mr. Finkel stated that any non-substantive changes should be delegated to the Chair to make. Ms. Nicklas thanked the subcommittee who worked on the draft.

In going through the survey section, Ms. Wood noted that the number of survey interviews stood at 51 but she needed Mr. Leader's number to add to the count. Comments were made by the members as they went through each section, with Mr. Plottel making the changes as agreed. The Chair noted that, although some of the outdoor seating ideas have already been implemented by "Newton Al Fresco", he felt they should be left in. Mr. Tanowitz asked about making a recommendation that there be designated parking spaces for pickup. Ms. Bailin noted that the City was moving to phase two of outdoor dining option, including street closures and parklets. These will need to be individually examined and pickup for both retail and restaurants determined. Questions were raised by Ms. Plotkin regarding outdoor concerts and use of certain terms, which were resolved.

With regard to the City Section, Mr. Barnstone noted that some of the ideas are

tactical and immediate and some are long-term efforts. After discussion, language was added to the beginning of the section to clarify the nature of the changes being recommended. Mr. Plottel noted that the purpose of all of them was to recommend strategic changes that would make the Newton economy vibrant.

There was a lengthy discussion of the after-school programs. Ms. Wood indicated the need to be clear on the ask and not water it down. If programs cannot be provided, it will be difficult for families to get back to work. Language changes were made.

There was a brief discussion of the small business recovery grant program after Mr. Leader mentioned the CBDG grants. Ms. Bailin explained there were over 100 applications and, because of HUD oversight, the staff were completing reviews in accordance with strict requirements, including seeking additional information from applicants. They will then be working with Ms. Wood and Mr. Leader to evaluate and determine finalists.

After review of the letter was completed, there were a few questions regarding the Appendices. Ms. Plotkin noted that the grant program referenced in Appendix B should say a minimum of 30% not 50%. The change was agreed to.

Ms. Plotkin also questioned whether certain portions of Appendix C ought to be changed to reflect changes made to the letter. It was decided that subgroup work will remain as submitted.

Mr. Leader stated that he had five interviews with survey respondents, raising the number of total follow-up interviews to 56.

Upon motion by Mr. Leader to approve the letter with changes discussed and delegation to the Chair to make any editorial corrections and seconded by Mr. Tanowitz, the motion carried unanimously (11 to 0).

The letter will go out tomorrow morning with a copy to the EDC. Mr. Plottel commented that this project has been the most intense and important work he has done while working on the EDC.

## **5. Other Business**

No other business was discussed.

## **6. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—July 14, 2020**

The date of the next regularly scheduled meeting for the EDC will be **July 14, 2020**.

## **7. Adjournment**

Upon motion by Ms. Jackson and seconded by Ms. Nicklas, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote at 8:43 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director