



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: July 14, 2020

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

1. Attendance

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

Commissioners Attending:

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

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

Commissioners Absent: Howard Barnstone; Steve Feller; Rob Finkel; Jeremy Freid; Jack Leader; and Matt Segneri.

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

Others Present: Councilor Crossley joined the meeting at 7:00

2. Approval of Minutes of June 9, 2020

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

Upon motion by Ms. Nicklas and seconded by Ms. Rahman, the Minutes were unanimously approved.

3. City Updates

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

Riverdale: Mr. Heath reported that the ZBA unanimously approved this Criterion Development Partners project with 243 units.

Riverside: Mr. Heath explained that the Riverside special permit is before the Land Use Committee tonight to make recommendations to the City Council for the Board order. It is expected to take another meeting to finalize the recommendations. Ms. Nicklas noted that the ZBA didn't like the innovation space proposed and instead community space was added.

Dunstan East: On a vote of 4 to 1 the ZBA approved this project with three buildings with 240 units and about 12,000 sq. ft. of commercial space.

Zoning Redesign: Mr. Heath explained that the residential zoning is moving forward with ZAP.

4. Discussion Item:

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a. Outreach

Mr. Plottel explained that the officers and Ms. Bailin held a meeting with the Mayor, Jonathan Yeo, and Mr. Heath. There was also a meeting with the officers and Ms. Bailin with President Albright and Vice President Lipof. Generally, the ideas of the EDC were well received. The officers, along with Ms. Bailin and Mr. Heath, also participated in a Newton Needham Regional Chamber webinar to explain the recommendations.

The officers also met with Brookline counterparts who asked about the mixed-use economic developments in Newton and their projected impacts on school enrollments, which Mr. Plottel will obtain and forward.

b. Implementation of Recommendations from Ideas Letter

i. Overall Status

When the items were reorganized by who was needed to implement the ideas, the Mayor was about a third and others required City Council involvement. There is support to move forward on several items. Ms. Bailin reported that she is working with Operational Services Division to put together a program about how to become a State vendor for goods and services. Several of the zoning initiatives were supported by Councilor Albright and Lipof. Ms. Wood noted that the Mayor asked that zoning initiatives be coordinated with the redesign efforts. Ms. Bailin was asked to go through the tracking sheet and update items.

There was discussion of the tracking sheet and the suggestion that we prioritize and coordinate our efforts to implement as we can. It was noted that some of the items are really matters which must come from the State. For example, the issue of whether restaurants can serve to-go cocktails is before the Legislature. The question of how much additional support is needed for Newton Al Fresco and how much has already been accomplished should be tracked. Mr. Plottel intends to go through the list of items and have members indicate those items they are passionate about and willing to work on.

This discussion was placed on hold to allow Councilor Crossley to address in items in 4.c.

ii. Private Funding Program (Item G in Letter to Mayor)

The Mayor was particularly supportive of EDC efforts to raise private funding to help small businesses with recovery.

iii. Zoning Language for

1. R&D and Modern Manufacturing (Item E.2.a)

Members were asked to state their interest in the various items on the tracking sheet in an effort to create a sense of priority. The results were placed by the Chair on the tracking list.

2. Home Business Ordinance (Item E.2.b)

Members were asked to state their interest in the various items on the tracking sheet in an effort to create a sense of priority. The results were placed by the Chair on the tracking list.

It was also noted that this discussion could be informed by Zach LeMel coming to update the EDC on the status of various commercial zoning changes in the zoning redesign process.

3. Drive-in Movie Theaters (Item A.3)

It was noted that this is already happening and may not require any involvement by the EDC.

iv. Working with NNRC on Mentoring, Marketing and other Matters (Items C.1 and C.4)

Members were asked to state their interest in the various items on the tracking sheet in an effort to create a sense of priority. The results were placed by the Chair on the tracking list.

v. Other Items

Mr. Tanowitz expressed concerns that the City's efforts with respect to outdoor seating were not extensive enough. He noted that there needed to be more placemaking efforts—to make even outdoor takeout more inviting. Isn't it possible to fit in more tables in the Centre for example?

Mr. Plottel noted that there were three main items for implementation: zoning initiatives, mentoring/marketing to be coordinated with the NNRC, and creation of a private fund to assist small businesses. Mr. Tanowitz indicated he would have time to do some research and writing on the private funding initiative.

c. City Council Requested Input

i. Retail Businesses in Residential Zones

It was again noted that this discussion would be enhanced if Zach LeMel could speak to the EDC about this issue in the context of the zoning redesign.

ii. Elimination of Single-Family Zoning

This item was taken out of order. Councilor Crossley joined the meeting at approximately 7:00 p.m. and Mr. Plottel agreed to take this item out of order so that she could address it. Ms. Crossley stated that the wording of this item alarmed her. Mr. Plottel apologized and said that it was not intended to do so and was sorry for the poor wording, which was the result of earlier conversations with other councilors. Ms. Crossley explained that there is no intention to do away with single-family zoning; the idea is to allow more types of housing opportunities, including multi-family, near transportation hubs throughout the City. The intention is to diversify the housing stock available near transportation nodes. Two-thirds of the Council is working on this to define the districts where this should occur and under what rules. To allow increased opportunities, what kind of requirements should be imposed; allowance by right or by special permit? And the Council is viewing these as transition zones from residential to commercial zones. This would create walkable neighborhoods near public transit with higher densities than traditional single-family zones. How far out from transit hubs to allow multi-family and whether it be by right or special permit are part of the discussion.

Mr. Plottel thanked Councilor Crossley for the clarification and apologized for the confusion fomented by the language used in the Agenda. Ms. Crossley noted she just wanted to offer clarification and welcomed feedback from the Commissioners. Ms. Jackson noted that, historically, multi-family housing is the means by which ethnic communities can afford home ownership. The City should reinstate ways for people of color to get into home ownership in Newton. Ms. Crossley noted that she agreed and pointed out that in 1923 Mayor Childs vetoed zoning which proposed all single-family zones for its exclusionary impacts. She also noted that 45% of Newton residents live in multi-family housing. She thanked the Commissioners for switching the agenda around so she could speak on this issue.

5. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

6. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—August 11, 2020

The date of the next regularly scheduled meeting for the EDC will be **August 11, 2020**. [Ms. Bailin was asked to find out if members are going to be able to attend and get back to the officers.]

7. Adjournment

Upon motion by Mr. Tanowitz and seconded by Ms. Nicklas, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director