



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: January 12, 2021

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

1. Attendance

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

Commissioners Attending:

Phil Plottel (Chair); Jean Wood (Vice Chair); Debora Jackson (Secretary); Lisa Adams; Eryn-Ashlei Bailey; Jeremy Freid; Jack Leader; Marcela Merino; Beth Nicklas; Joyce Plotkin; Sarah Rahman; Matt Segneri; and Chuck Tanowitz.

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

Commissioners Absent: Rob Finkel.

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

Also Attending: Meryl Kessler

2. Approval of Minutes of December 8, 2020

Eryn and Lisa both asked that the minutes be amended to indicate that they had not yet taken their oaths so, upon motion and second, the Minutes were unanimously approved with modifications.

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

3. City Updates

Lisa Adams
Eryn-Ashlei Bailey
Robert Finkel
Jeremy Freid
Jack Leader
Marcela Merino
Beth Nicklas
Joyce Plotkin
Sarah Rahman
Matt Segneri
Chuck Tanowitz

Riverside: Mr. Heath explained that the developer is coming back to replace the hotel with R & D/lab. There will be a community meeting on January 21st. They are in communications with Alexandria (a developer which specializes in renting life science/lab space) which is also working on a lab space at Riverside Center. Both will be reviewing the proposed R & D zoning language.

Small Business Recovery Grants 2: Mr. Heath explained that the City is ready to launch a second round of small business recovery grants, which will be funded again at \$300,000 from additional CDBG funds. We are working with a software company Neighborly to reduce staff time. We will be targeting small storefront businesses throughout the City. The EDC will again be part of the selection process.

Zoning Redesign: The Redesign will focus on village centers during the coming months. Mr. Heath hoped that the EDC will help in those efforts.

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Pending Projects: The Newton Highlands 27-unit mixed use project on Walnut Street requires a rezone to MU4. In Newtonville, the owner of the former CVS space on Walnut street is also proposing a mixed-use project with 27 or so units. There is also another project of 20-24 units proposed for Oakley Food location on Washington Street.

4. Discussion Items:

a. Ideas Letter Follow-up

1. Report from Private Funding Program Subgroup

Ms. Rahman reported that the group is working to clarify and refine its memorandum. They are contacting Cambridge Foundation and community organizations to learn more about how their funds were initiated and how grants are made. Because there is a need for City and community support, Mr. Plottel will get a meeting with the Mayor to assess her support. Mr. Heath noted the success of the COVID-19 United Way Fund and will let the Mayor know of the EDC efforts.

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

Ms. Nicklas explained that she, Mr. Plottel, and Ms. Bailin worked with the Planning Staff on the language of proposed amendment and on the presentation for ZAP on January 11th. She reported that ZAP members were very receptive to the changes and that some minor changes were suggested. The item will be on the ZAP Agenda for hearing on February 8th. Planning is seeking comments from Mark Development, Alexandria and their attorneys. Ms. Nicklas explained that the sole focus is clarifying language and not on making broader changes to the zoning at this time.

Mr. Plottel asked that members consider attending the February 8th ZAP meeting and suggested that Mr. Freid might wish to testify about the need for these changes, especially as to Wells Office Park. Ms. Bailin noted that the Chair of ZAP invited the EDC to bring forward other ideas. Mr. Freid noted that cities and towns all over Massachusetts are trying to align their zoning to attract these uses so we need to make sure to get our ducks in a row. Mr. Plottel noted that we need to target Needham Street (near Starck) and Wells. Mr. Tanowitz commented that we need to make sure commercial brokers are aware that Newton is the place to be for biotech and high tech.

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

Ms. Jackson said she had no updates at this time.

b. 2020 Assessment

Ms. Jackson made a PowerPoint presentation of the results of the Assessment. She was pleased to report that in most categories the responses were strong. She noted some of the comments and issues that were raised. There is a need for better onboarding of new members. There was also a need expressed to provide materials ahead of time so the meetings could be more productive. Mr. Plottel was happy to see that members felt the work was important and valued; he thought it was a very helpful exercise and thanked Ms. Jackson for all her work on it. This was the first time such an assessment was done.

Ms. Wood suggested that we form an onboarding subgroup to create orientation materials and guidance.

c. 2021 Goals

Ms. Wood took the comments from the Assessment and grouped them into categories for discussion of 2021 goals. At the end, she placed the goals we outlined before COVID. Ms. Plotkin noted that, if there are no other organizations working on the issue of diversity, this might provide the EDC with a unique role. (In response to a question from Ms. Nicklas, Mr. Heath stated that Newton does not have an inclusion or diversity officer.) Ms. Nicklas asked if there is policy giving some priority to minority/women-owned businesses for City contracts. Ms. Merino suggested forming a subgroup to study, report, and come up with suggestions to promote diversity. When asked if the City has any lists of minority-owned businesses, Ms. Bailin explained that we did not. We are asking businesses applying for the SRB grants to self-identify but have been told by legal counsel we cannot create a list from the responses.

Ms. Rahman stated that, given what the Funding Subgroup has learned thus far, she is concerned about a goal to provide private funding to small businesses.

Mr. Plottel asked members to review the list and decide what activities they would want to work on in a subgroup. That selection should define our goals. Ms. Wood suggested that we touch base with the Mayor and Councilors to see if they have issues they want the EDC to pursue. Mr. Tanowitz commented that the EDC needs to be strategic in its goal choices. He thinks the focus on diversity is good.

The EDC officers will edit the draft goals based on the discussion and distribute them prior to the next EDC meeting. At that meeting, 2021 goals will be finalized and prioritized.

d. Annual Report

Mr. Plottel explained that the goal is to prepare a draft to present at our next meeting. The Officers and Ms. Bailin will work on a draft. Anyone interested in helping should contact Ms. Bailin.

e. Nominations for Officers of the EDC

Anyone interested in serving as an officer next year should let Mr. Plottel or Ms. Bailin know. Because of everything on our Agenda, we should plan to stay until 8:30.

f. Because we have a very full agenda for the next meeting, it will last until 8:30.

5. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

6. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—February 9, 2021

The date of the next regularly scheduled meeting for the EDC will be **February 9, 2021.**

8. Adjournment

On Motion by Mr. Leader and seconded by Ms. Nicklas, the meeting was adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director