



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: March 9, 2021

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

1. Attendance

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

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

Barney S. Heath
Director

Commissioners not Attending: Eryn-Ashlei Bailey; and Rob Finkel.

Planning & Development
Devra G. Bailin
Director
Economic Development

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

Also Attending: Robert Korff; Elizabeth Mirabile; Councilor Pamela Wright; and Mark Donato

2. Approval of Minutes of February 9, 2021

Commissioners
Phil Plottel, Chair
Jean Wood, Vice Chair
Sarah Rahman, Secretary

After the motion to approve was made by Ms. Nicklas and seconded by Mr. Leader, Mr. Plottel asked that the motion be amended to correct the draft Minutes by adding that after the meeting Mr. Segneri joined Subgroup A. The amendment was accepted and Minutes, as corrected, were unanimously approved.

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

3. City Updates

Small Business Recovery Grants 2: Mr. Heath explained that the staff is in the middle of tier two review of 30 or so applications for the second round of small business recovery grants, which will be funded again at \$300,000 from additional CDBG funds. He thanked Mr. Leader and Ms. Wood their input into the top tier of applicants who will now present documentation to support their responses. Mr. Heath pointed out the City may be getting additional State and/or Federal Cares funds which will allow assisting more of the small businesses that applied.

Outdoor Dining: Mr. Heath explained that the City is moving forward with a more expansive Al Fresco. Restaurants will be allowed throughout the City to expand outdoor dining in parking spaces beyond their frontage with the consent of their abutters. The rollout date is April 1st and will continue through 60 days past the end of the State of Emergency. The City is also piloting an expansion of outdoor dining along Union Street with outdoor takeout dining areas. With

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the financial and volunteer assistance of Newton Community Pride, several outdoor dining areas for takeout will be made more aesthetically appealing, including Union Street, Langley Lot, Centre Green, Elm Street parking lot and Newton Highlands. The Cultural Department is working with Newton Community Pride to bring public art to these spaces as well. With Rapid Recovery Technical Assistance funds of \$60,000, the City will explore how to make improvements to our outdoor spaces on a more permanent basis. There are issues which were obviated by the State of Emergency; those instituted under those guidelines will expire 60 days after the termination of the State of Emergency. How do we instill that flexibility after COVID? It was noted that, not only are parking waivers implicated, but also building and plumbing codes. Mr. Tanowitz argued that we should be giving restaurants more outdoor space, including street closures. Mr. Heath pointed out that, when we proposed that for Union Street, there was considerable opposition from retail, service and office owners. The technical assistance grant may provide us ideas on how to make outdoor experience permanent. Ms. Merino thought this is clearly something the Subgroup to support storefront businesses should involved in.

Curbside Pickup: Ms. Bailin added that the Curbside Pickup/Takeout spaces has proved popular to both restaurants and certain service and retail storefronts.

Sheltered Market: Mr. Heath noted that the City is exploring the sheltered market statute to assist minority and women-owned businesses. He explained that Ms. Bailin is seeking information from other municipalities to see what they are doing. Ms. Bailin noted that to take advantage of the statute, the City needs to do a disparity study. Ms. Wood asked about whether we had a minority data base. Mr. Heath explained that we did not. Subgroup A would like to be kept informed.

4. Discussion Items:

a. Reports from Subgroups

1. Final Report from Private Funding Program Subgroup

Ms. Rahman noted that the Subgroup has submitted its final report. Members will individually follow-up with people and organizations which will be helpful in establishing a community foundation. The memorandum will be provided to the Mayor and the EDC will target the fall to do a check-in on the issue so that the good work the Subgroup has done isn't lost. The consensus was for the Officers to stay on top of it with Mr. Tanowitz's help. Mr. Segneri noted that the EDC's executive officers are only one pillar of this and Ms. Rahman agreed that community support is critical. The key is to make sure that the foundation doesn't cannibalize funding from other organizations but it brings them together for collaborative efforts.

2. Support Women and Minority-owned Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Adams noted that the committee had met but was not aware of the City's efforts into sheltered markets. The Subgroup is working to narrow their focus. They think it will take two years to broaden the reach of City contracts to minority vendors. The Subgroup would like to understand how many contracts are let to women and minority-owned businesses, so they can have a baseline from which to judge success. They want to know what steps the City has taken to advance diversity. They intend to research case studies from other cities and towns and to contact key groups like the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts. Ms. Bailin commented that, as noted in the executive summary from Boston's Disparity study, that City has not been successful in awarding contracts to women and minority business owners. Ms. Bailin added that she has made inquiry to various cities and towns about undertaking a disparity study, which is required before the sheltered market program can go forward. She will share the executive summary with the Commissioners after the meeting.

3. Report from Zoning Redesign and R & D Subgroup

a. Docketing Commercial Height Correction

Ms. Nicklas explained that, together with Planning Staff, the Subgroup had come up with language to deal with the problem created by the Ordinance's tying height to a 12' story. However, the issue is not ready for the EDC to vote, as an additional issue has arisen in that FAR (floor area ratio) is tied to the 12' story. If that is not corrected, a taller building with two 14-15' stories would have the same FAR as building with two 12' stories. At the very least acknowledged, the issue has to be acknowledged and a proposal to correct it if it becomes an issue. The members of the Subgroup are working with the Planning Staff to draft a correction.

b. Councilors' Temporary Parking Waiver Item

Because of the State of Emergency, it is not necessary for this to go forward at this time to allow outdoor dining for restaurants. This will become an issue 60 days after the State of Emergency ends. Planning staff, together with Law, HHS, and Inspectional Services, are looking at the issues arising from increased capacity for restaurants outside.

c. Regulatory Permits and Licenses

Mr. Plottel and Ms. Nicklas were asked by the Planning Staff to provide guidance on the rules, permits, regulations, etc. required for lab spaces. They have provided a Department of Environmental Protection FAQ, as well as OSHA guidance document for labs. The point is to understand how well regulated these uses are, thus somewhat obviating the need for local control.

4. Report from Support Newton's Storefront Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Merino and Mr. Tanowitz jointly chair this Subgroup. Ms. Merino noted that some of the update was already discussed. The main focus of the Subgroup is to try to prioritize the 11-12 ideas on the goals' list. How to support the City to make sure storefronts are occupied? One idea was popups. Ms. Bailin noted that they are still waiting to hear about the MOBD grant for a sustainable popup program, which would include rent for one popup in Needham and 1 or 2 in Newton. Another related issue is how to bring more life to the village centers. The Subgroup is also considering doing another business survey in a year or two to see what has changed.

Ms. Rahman asked whether the Planning Department has a map of commercial areas with a list of businesses which occupy them. Ms. Bailin said that they probably have commercial areas mapped but not individual businesses or vacancies. Ms. Rahman noted that, without this information, how will the EDC know where to focus? A desire was also expressed to look into food trucks by Ms. Merino; Mr. Tanowitz noted that they are very restricted to underserved areas like Wells Office Park. Mr. Tanowitz noted that some food trucks take orders and then deliver which is a loophole.

b. Riverside Letter of Support

Ms. Nicklas prepared a draft letter based on comments made at last month's meeting. Mark Development's proposed amendment would essentially replace the hotel with a lab building and the existing office building would also be R & D. In terms of finalizing the letter, Mr. Korff was asked and explained that the amendment would be before Land Use on April 14th [corrected after the meeting to the 13th] or 28th [27th]. Mr. Plottel noted that the EDC has supported projects at Riverside for over 15 years.

The letter was discussed. During the discussion of the trail network and proposed work relating to the RR bridge, Mr. Korff was asked and explained that there were no changes to that part of the project. The members decided to remove references.

During the discussion, Ms. Jackson asked about the reduction in affordable housing units. Mr. Korff explained that the reduction reflects the reduction of the total number of units being proposed. Mr. Korff was asked and agreed to provide the Commissioners clarification of the issue. [Additional information was received and distributed to Commissioners after the meeting.] Mr. Plottel and Ms. Nicklas expressed the view that the EDC need not weigh in that issue. Others, including Ms. Rahman, disagreed. Given the need for further clarifying

information on the subject, the EDC agreed to put over finalizing the letter until our next meeting and vote at the next meeting.

Mr. Plottel asked if anyone in the audience wanted to comment and no one did.

c. Annual Report

It was noted that the Annual Report was filed and distributed.

5. Other Business

Mr. Plottel noted that at our next meeting there will be a presentation from a business proposing a drive-thru Starbucks on Boylston Street. Ms. Bailin noted there was a Planning DRT (Development Review Team) last week on a drive-thru Dunkin on Route 9. The comment was made that the drive-thru was denied for the McDonalds on Needham Street. We are also hoping that the Planning Staff can come to talk about village zoning at our next meeting.

6. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—April 13, 2021

The date of the next regularly scheduled meeting for the EDC will be **April 13, 2021.**

8. Adjournment

Upon Motion by Mr. Leader seconded by Ms. Nicklas, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director