



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: April 13, 2021

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

1. Attendance

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

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

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

Staff Attending: Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development; Devra Bailin, Economic Development Director; Zachery LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning; and Nevena Pilipovic-Wengler, Community Engagement Planner.

Also Attending: Councilor Pamela Wright; Elizabeth Mirabile; Rena Getz (Waban Area Council); Mitch Fischman (1021 Beacon Street Team); Attorney Jennifer Schultz (1021 Beacon Street Team); Ted Fire (1021 Beacon Street Team); Katie Enright (1021 Beacon Street Team); David Micley; N.E. Finn; and Simon French.

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

2. Approval of Minutes of March 9, 2021

After the motion to approve was made by Ms. Nicklas and seconded by Ms. Rahman, the Minutes 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 City issued 27 second round small business recovery grants, which will be funded again at \$305,000 from additional CDBG funds. He thanked Mr. Leader and Ms. Wood for their input into the top tier of applicants.

Local Rapid Recovery Planning Program: Mr. Heath explained that the City received a technical assistance grant of \$60,000 from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative and that work has begun under the grant. A survey is the first step and is underway. With these funds, the City will explore how to make improvements to our outdoor spaces on a more permanent basis.

Outdoor Dining: Mr. Heath explained that outdoor dining is in full swing. Newton Al Fresco is greatly improved this year by partnering with Newton Cultural Department and Newton Community Pride. Ms. Adams asked what happens after the COVID-19 emergency ends. Mr. Heath explained that the outdoor dining can continue to remain in place as is for 60 days after the State

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of Emergency is declared over. He noted the technical assistance grant (discussed above) is to help guide the City in long term solutions, using Union Street pilot as a potential model of outdoor dining. Ms. Bailey asked how the long-term solution will address parking issues. Ms. Bailin noted that that is one of the competing issues with on-street dining which needs to be addressed in any plan.

Another grant: Although he could not discuss it specifically, Newton will be partnering with Needham to revitalize village centers and take advantage of empty storefronts.

Community One Stop Grants: Pursuant to the State's new One Stop Grant program, Newton submitted five expressions of interest for review by the State.

Riverside Project: Mr. Heath explained that the project is on the Land Use Agenda tonight at about 8:00. The developer will start with a presentation first. It will next be on the Agenda of the Land Use Committee on April 27th, which will include the economic analysis of the project. There is a peer review of Mark Development's economic impact, but it is projected by the developer that the revised project will net in excess of \$800,000 per year.

4. Discussion Items:

a. Riverside Letter of Support

Mr. Plottel acknowledged receipt of the letter from Ms. Mirabile, which was distributed to members. Ms. Mirabile was recognized and noted that she had no need to comment further but if the Commissioners had any questions, she could respond. She added that the zoning amendment and terms of the special permit were specifically negotiated and should remain unchanged. Mr. Plottel noted that the EDC had concerns that those terms were negotiated by Ward Councilors and residents and not by the City. Ms. Mirabile acknowledged that but the developer should not be seeking more development. Mr. Plottel asked if there were any other public comments, which there were not.

The revised draft letter Ms. Nicklas prepared was also distributed. She explained that the letter was slightly revised. Mark Development's proposed amendment would bring an additional \$800,000 per year to the City and would support the City's economic goals of attracting robust R&D and life science to the City. The Commissioners went through the draft paragraph by paragraph and revised certain of the language.

There was some discussion of the language used regarding affordable housing. Although the percentage of units increased to 20%, the calculation is complicated by the fact that the makeup of the units has changed. Mr. Heath noted a loss of deeply affordable units. The consensus was to leave the language. There was also discussion on how

best to express the EDC's view that the maximum square footage should be increased (perhaps allowing an hotel in the future), while at the same time indicating the EDC's strong support of the changes. Language was revised to reflect a more positive note. After revision, Ms. Nicklas moved to adopt the revised draft with the ability of the Chair to make editorial changes, which was seconded by Mr. Finkel and unanimously adopted by the Commissioners (14 to 0).

b. Docketing Item to Clarify Commercial Building Floor Heights

Mr. Plottel explained that this item was not ready for discussion yet. Mr. Plottel and Ms. Nicklas are still working with Planning Staff to iron out all of the issues.

c. Reports from Subgroups

1. Support Women and Minority-owned Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Adams reported that the subgroup met and formulated a list of questions for the City. They are awaiting information regarding existing procurement and contracting practices, as well as an understanding of current barriers to minority contracts. They are seeking further information about best practices for supporting women and minority-owned businesses.

2. Report from Zoning Redesign Subgroup

Ms. Nicklas explained that she and Mr. Plottel are working with the Planning Staff, including Ms. Bailin, to finalize work on the commercial building height issue, which is complicated by the Zoning Ordinance's use of 12' stories with respect to FAR.

3. Report from R & D Attraction Subgroup

See above.

4. Report from Support Newton's Storefront Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Merino and Mr. Tanowitz jointly chair this Subgroup. Ms. Merino explained that the subgroup met and reformulated the goals to five. She asked about the Popup program grant. The five goals, as expressed on their written summary, are: Revitalize village centers (which include assessing how other communities are coping with the loss of restaurants, making recommendations to reduce storefront vacancies, liaising with various organizations to support placemaking, and supporting City efforts to rezone village centers); Follow up on pandemic suggestions related to store front businesses; Support COVID challenged local businesses, including retail, restaurants, personal services); Encourage opportunities for entrepreneurship; and

Improve conditions and/or provide services/tools for businesses to operate online and/or outside.

d. 1021 Boylston Street Project Presentation

Mr. Fischman introduced the team: Ted Fire (owner), Jennifer Schultz (Attorney from Sullivan and Worcester), and Katie Enright (HSH Engineering) for this proposed drive-thru Starbucks. Mr. Fischman noted that the site has been a pottery store for 15 years—it's located Westbound on Route 9 between Woodward and Dickerman Streets. Ms. Schultz explained that the property is in an MR2 district and is preexisting nonconforming. They intend to replace it with another preexisting nonconforming use—drive-thru coffee shop (Starbucks)—and will apply for a special permit to do so. The proposed site plan was presented which showed a 13-vehicle queue and 9 parking spaces. Commissioners asked some questions which will be answered at our next meeting due to the shortage of time. When asked about parking, Mr. Fischman explained that 89% of the customers will be from pass by traffic. There will be 30 new jobs brought to the site. The Commissioners will receive a copy of the presentation prior to the next meeting so that they may formulate any questions they have.

e. Planning Staff Presentation regarding Village Center Zoning

Zack LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning, and Nevena Pilipovic-Wengler, Community Engagement Planner, met with the EDC to discuss how best to collaborate on village center rezoning. They provided a presentation on the reasons for the rezoning efforts as well as its history. The Planning Staff is looking to the EDC to assist with outreach to businesses and landowners. The work requires both quantitative and qualitative data.

Ms. Nicklas asked about the elements of village center zoning and what research was being done to explore options for discussion. Mr. LeMel explained that, in addition to past outreach efforts, the Staff is looking at what other communities have done in their centers to better meet the needs of the community. Ms. Merino asked about how her subgroup can assist and what the schedule and nature of outreach to businesses and owners are. The pandemic has highlighted weaknesses in village centers, with Newton Highlands being an example with significant storefront vacancies. Mr. Tanowitz noted that zoning and transportation are intertwined. Mr. LeMel stated that the zoning efforts will be integrated with other efforts and specified goals of the City—e.g. transportation, sustainability and environmental goals.

There is a meeting scheduled with ZAP on April 26th; Staff will coordinate efforts of the EDC with ZAP. Mr. Freid wanted to make sure that outreach includes real estate developers as well as owners. He was assured that they would be included. Ms. Adams asked if there would

be consideration of environmental concerns in relation to the zoning work. Staff indicated those issues would be part of the considerations. Ms. Bailey wanted to make sure that there is a balance of small and large businesses.

It was agreed that the Storefront Group would take the lead on working with Staff. Ms. Merino, Mr. Tanowitz and Ms. Wood will meet with Staff to get a clearer view of EDC's role and the timeframe for engagement. Other EDC members may join the group. [After the meeting Ms. Adams volunteered to work with the subgroup.]

5. Other Business

No other business was discussed. Mr. Plottel did ask whether anyone from the public wished to speak. No one requested permission.

6. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—May 11, 2021

The date of the next regularly scheduled meeting for the EDC will be **May 11, 2021**.

8. Adjournment

Upon Motion by Ms. Jackson and seconded by Ms. Adams, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:31 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director