



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: May 11, 2021

TIME: 5:30 pm via Zoom

1. Attendance

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

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

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

Commissioners Not Attending: Rob Finkel.

Staff Attending: Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development; Devra Bailin, Economic Development Director; and Zachery LeMel, Chief of Long Range Planning.

Also Attending: Councilor Pamela Wright; Rena Getz (Waban Area Council); Mark Donato; Sallee Lipshutz; Timothy Love (Utile); and Lisa Hollywood (Utile).

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

2. Approval of Minutes of April 13, 2021

After the motion to approve was made by Ms. Jackson and seconded by Ms. Nicklas, 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. Planning Staff Presentation and Discussion regarding Village Center Zoning

Because the meeting needed to be concluded by 7:00 so members of the Commission may attend the Land Use meeting tonight at 7:00 for the discussion of Riverside, this matter was first item on the Agenda. Mr. Plottel explained that the Planning Staff and their consultant are using the EDC for a trial run of its outreach for Village Center zoning.

Mr. Heath explained that the Planning Staff is very excited to get into zoning redesign and invited Mr. LeMel to begin the presentation. Mr. LeMel noted that economic focus is a piece of the village center rezoning and the Staff wants the assistance of the EDC to conduct outreach, which will target various groups. He introduced Timothy Love and Lisa Hollywood from Utile as the consultants leading the outreach efforts on the zoning.

Mr. Love explained that they are, with the outreach, taking a step back to ascertain what people want their centers to be. He displayed the village center

T 617/796-1120
F 617/796-1142

Twitter: @newtonecondev

map and explained that the areas are complex mixed-use places which vary considerably. The outreach will include vision kits and polls/surveys. There will be community engagement sessions with various groups and they are seeking the EDC's assistance in outreach to businesses, building owners and developers. He explained the timeline for that outreach.

Mr. Love explained that there were two categories of questions. The first topic was a healthy mix of uses. That included two questions: 1) have you seen changes in the makeup and mix of businesses in the village centers in the last 5-10 years? and 2) are the new life style centers like The Street in competition with or complimentary to the village centers?

Mr. Leader noted that many of the changes to village centers has been dictated by the zoning as to uses allowed by right and those by special permit. There are lots of banks and hair/nail salons because those uses were allowed by right. He added later that the need for parking waivers for uses like restaurants create unnecessary constraints. He did not think The Street was in competition.

Mr. Plottel commented that "mall" stores like Pier 1 used to be in a village center and was replaced with 4-5 businesses. He noted that there are many more restaurants in Newton Centre that 5-10 years ago. Ms. Marcela agreed that, in the sixteen years she has lived in Newton, there are more food and beverage stores in the village centers. She also felt that The Street was complimentary to village businesses.

Ms. Rahman commented that normally The Street is complimentary but, because of the significant amount of outdoor dining space for its restaurants, it may be competing for outdoor dining options. Ms. Plotkin noted that Newton Centre differs from the smaller village centers. Ms. Nicklas asked if they are looking at vibrant village centers for examples of how to create sense of place and diverse uses. Mr. Segneri noted the importance of creating outdoor community space. The Street has large anchors, including a movie theater, but villages are different and vary considerably. Creating vibrant village centers cannot be accomplished in a monolithic voice.

Ms. Lipshutz commented that the makeup of village centers has changed a lot since 1972. Both the Centre and the Highlands had grocery stores and felt there was a need to bring back unique stores. She added that historically many of the village center buildings had additional stories for apartments which were removed.

The second topic was diversity of village centers. What village centers are liveliest during lunch and why? Mr. Plottel noted that Newton Centre can be lively during lunch, especially when Newton South kids have a short day, a comment with which Mr. Tanowitz agreed. Newtonville is busy during lunch because of the proximity of Newton North. This has resulted in several quick food options. Mr. Tanowitz commented that Needham Street is also crowded at lunch time. Ms. Merino noted that many Boston College go to Newton Centre as well, especially places like Tango Mango. Mr. Plottel said that Uber Eats is very popular at the high schools as well.

Ms. Adams said that Newton Highlands does not seem to have very much lunchtime traffic. It was noted that some of the 5th graders go there for early release. There was discussion of which schools have open campuses and for which grades.

Mr. Love stated that there would be focus group meetings and Mr. Plottel asked if the Department had done outreach to the Newton Needham Regional Chamber, which has 900 members (per Ms. Plotkin). It was also suggested that the Department ensure the participation of landowners who have long been in Newton, like the Zussmans.

Ms. Merino and Mr. Tanowitz will survey their subgroup and determine which members are interested in working on this outreach. Mr. LeMel asked that Ms. Bailin send out the online survey and that Commissioners please fill it out. [It was distributed via email after the meeting.]

4. 1021 Boylston Street Project Presentation and Discussion

Prior to this meeting, this item, which was supposed to start at 6:35, was continued by agreement to the June 8th meeting as the first matter to be discussed. Due to time constraints, it was necessary to postpone this item and Commissioners were so informed but, because the decision was made after the Agenda was posted, Mr. Plottel announced at the beginning and throughout the meeting that it would be heard on June 8th. He also expressed his gratitude to the project team for agreeing prior to the meeting to continue the matter so that it can be properly discussed.

5. City Updates

Due to time constraints, Mr. Heath quickly explained three items: ZAP held a hearing on a gun shops with over 800 participants, which was continued for further community discussion. The Mayor is presenting the 2022 City Budget to the City Council on May 12th. The Commercial Heights zoning amendments will likely be heard in June by Land Use.

6. Discussion Items:

- a. Docket Item to Clarify Commercial Building Floor Heights and Vote thereon

The Planning Department docketed the item to ZAP and it was discussed at last night's ZAP meeting. The problem in the zoning ordinance was its embedding a 12' story height maximum when R&D requires 14'-16' story heights. The cap was changed from either the number of stories or the total height, whichever was less. There were other technical problems which also needed to be addressed, including unintentional deletions when the Ordinance was recodified. The article was well received by ZAP. Ms. Nicklas noted that Cat Kemmett and Mr. Plottel

did a great job on readying the article for presentation as well as the presentation itself. Mr. Tanowitz moved to support the recommended revisions to the Ordinance as detailed in the memorandum distributed to the EDC. The Motion was seconded by Ms. Rahman and unanimously approved.

b. Reports from Subgroups

1. Support Women and Minority-owned Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Adams reported that she will report at our next meeting; she needs the opportunity to meet with her subgroup after the presentation by Nick Read and Ms. Bailin regarding procurement options.

2. Report from Zoning Redesign Subgroup

Mr. Plottel reported that he intended to attend the Land Use Committee meeting at 7:00 and speak to the economic benefits of the Riverside project and to voice the EDC's support. He urged other members to join him. Public comments on economic impacts will be allowed for the first half hour and then the Committee will focus on transportation and parking.

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. Due to time constraints, no report was made.

7. Other Business

Mr. Plottel did ask whether anyone from the public wished to speak. Ms. Lipshultz was recognized, and she pointed out the Upper Falls has a village center at Pettee Square and made a recommendation of a real estate broker who may be of help with the village center zoning. Mr. Plottel commented that, because of repeated conflicts and ability to timely act with respect to ZAP and Land Use Committee meetings, he would like to discuss at our next meeting the possibility of changing our meeting dates going forward.

8. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—June 8, 2021

The date of the next regularly scheduled meeting for the EDC will be **June 8, 2021**.

9. Adjournment

Upon Motion by Ms. Bailey and seconded by Mr. Leader, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director