



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: July 27, 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; 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; and Devra Bailin, Economic Development Director.

Also Attending: Amy Sangiolo; Robert Fizek; Lauren Berman; David's iPhone (not identified).

2. Approval of Minutes of June 8, 2021

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

After the motion to approve was made by Ms. Rahman and seconded by Ms. Wood, the Minutes were unanimously approved.

3. City Updates (including Introduction of Hattie Kerwin Derrick and 1021 Boylston Street Project update)

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

Ms. Kerwin Derrick was unable to join the meeting tonight and will try to come in September.

Mr. Heath explained that the Land Use Committee did not give a welcome reception to the 1021 Boylston Street Starbucks project and consequently the petitioner withdrew their special permit application.

Mr. Plottel inquired of the Commissioners as to whether this type of land use project should come before the EDC. Ms. Wood commented that this is the sort of project which informs the EDC of what small businesses are interested in. Mr. Tanowitz noted that Starbucks is now doing drive-thru locations and it will come up again. If Newton doesn't permit them, they will go elsewhere. He noted that, although these types of facilities don't necessarily add to the vitality of the area, they are the trend. Ms. Rahman commented that it is helpful to hear business concerns; we need to ask, if a project is economically positive, what is the EDC role? Mr. Freid commented that drive-thru businesses are a polarizing issue in Newton.

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It was noted that the commercial height clarification amendment was approved by the City Council. Zoning Redesign continues with EDC member assistance—focus groups for landowners and business owners will be facilitated with member assistance on July 28th and 29th respectively. Mr. Heath explained that the Riverside project is now before the City Council again on August 10th regarding engineering issues; he anticipates a vote in September.

Mr. Heath noted that Garden Remedies is going before the Council to modify their application to delete the appointment only restriction. Other marijuana facilities are proposed for Newton Centre, Newton Four Corners, and Newton Upper Falls. There is also an application for delivery service out of Wells Office Park, where it is an allowed as of right use. He added that the delivery service is being offered by a social equity firm.

Ms. Bailin noted that three Newton popups are currently operating in Newton Centre, Newton Highlands, and on Washington Street near Cook. The fourth is opening soon on Needham Street in the old Qdoba site.

Mr. Heath explained that the Mayor visited Barrett Technology, a robotic company, which received a substantial grant from the NIH for its research and development. She also stopped by Rosenfeld Bagels in Newton Centre which had reported incidents of aggressive and abusive customers.

4. Discussion Items:

a. Reports from Subgroups

1. Support Women and Minority-owned Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Adams reported that the Subgroup needs additional time to further digest information and discuss. They will report at our next meeting.

2. Report from Zoning Redesign Subgroup

As previously noted, the commercial height ordinance amendments were approved by the City Council. With Ms. Nicklas leaving, Mr. Plottel asked for volunteers to join him in this subgroup and in the R & D attraction subgroup. Mr. Freid volunteered. It was noted that COVID-19 has accelerated R&D demand, especially in life sciences.

3. Report from R & D Attraction Subgroup

See above.

4. Report from Support Newton's Storefront Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Merino reported that most of the subgroup members have been working with the Planning Department to create focus groups for outreach on the Village Center Redesign project. As previously

mentioned, the EDC is assisting as facilitators and note takers in two focus groups this week: on July 28th the focus groups will be landowners and on July 29th business owners. Depending on the number of participants, there will be 2 or 3 breakout sessions and Ms. Bailin will share participate names in advance.

Mr. Freid commented that in places like Newton Centre, the construction of a structured parking garage would go a long way to activate development and reduce the concern about using on-street parking spaces for outdoor dining. Mr. Tanowitz commented on the equity concerns about how that space is presently allocated.

b. EDC Meetings

1. Discussion of moving EDC meetings to minimize conflicts with Land Use and ZAP Committee meetings.

There was a willingness to entertain revision to our monthly meeting time to alleviate conflicts with Land Use and ZAP. Ms. Bailin will explore the schedules of those committees and report back to the officers. Several members expressed that the first or third Tuesday would also work for them.

2. Discussion of virtual vs. in-person meetings post-State of Emergency

Commissioners discussed a preference for a hybrid model but wondered if that would require a quorum to be physically present. This is presently being discussed at the State level and will have to await State guidelines. Until April 1, 2022 virtual meetings are allowed.

5. Other Business

There are two vacancies on the EDC; interviews are underway for new members. Anyone with a suggestion for a small business owner should let Ms. Bailin know. It was noted that such an owner may live in Newton but not have a business here.

Mr. Plottel asked if anyone from the public wished to speak. Ms. Sangiolo asked whether the EDC was asked to weigh in on the use change from BU1 to residential to allow 12 units of housing. Mr. Plottel noted that it was not brought to the EDC's attention for comment. Robert Fizek also wanted to know about the EDC's position on rezoning to residential and noted that, in his opinion, doing so places Newton at a disadvantage by reducing the commercially zoned areas.

6. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—September 14, 2021

The date of the next regularly scheduled meeting for the EDC is September 14, 2021.

7. Adjournment

Upon Motion by Mr. Leader and seconded by Mr. Tanowitz, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at approximately 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director