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# CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## Economic Development Commission

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### Meeting Minutes

DATE: October 12, 2021

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

#### 1. Attendance

Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

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

Barney S. Heath  
Director

**Commissioners Not Attending:** Jean Wood (Vice Chair); and Rob Finkel.

Planning & Development  
Devra G. Bailin  
Director  
Economic Development

**Staff Attending:** Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development; Hattie Kerwin Derrick, Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion; and Devra Bailin, Economic Development Director.

**Also Attending:** Peter Standish (Northland); Kent Gonzales (Northland); Mike Medeiros (Northland); Greg Reibman (Charles River Regional Chamber); and Ali Erol.

#### 2. Approval of Minutes of September 13, 2021

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

After the motion to approve was made by Mr. Leader and seconded by Ms. Rahman, the Minutes were approved (with one abstention by Mr. Tanowitz).

#### 3. City Updates

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

Mr. Heath noted that the Land Use Committee has a full agenda now until the end of the year. He explained that the Alexandria proposal at 275 Grove Street (known as Riverside Office Center) to convert additional space has resulted in concern regarding shadows, noise and traffic. The project requires that new HVAC equipment be installed on the roof, increasing the height. The shadow concerns were raised by neighbors behind the building. Mr. Heath was asked to send notice of the hearing to EDC Commissioners.

Ms. Bailin stated that outdoor dining regulations for next year are being finalized. Mr. Heath noted that Ms. Bailin and Ms. Freedman are working with the restaurant community, DPW and other departments to make sure we have a plan in place when we shift from emergency regulations (ending April 1) to normal ones. He commented that the City is monitoring what other municipalities are doing. There are ordinance changes that will be required. Mr. Plottel asked if the City needs any assistance from the EDC. Mr. Heath told him that there will be some need for ordinance changes, including parking requirements. The proposal is to have outside dining to be from April 1 to

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December 1, the latter can be extended if DPW, based on weather forecasts, extends the time.

Mr. Tanowitz asked about whether there are any City regulations which prevent restaurants from installing windows which open to the street. Mr. Heath commented that he could not see why these would be prohibited. Mr. Plottel wondered whether these might be precluded under energy codes, although he has seen them in Cambridge. Ms. Bailey asked about the use of tents and heaters and whether these could be clarified in the final restaurant guide. Ms. Bailin commented that she would add it to the list and send the final policy around when complete.

#### **4. Discussion Items:**

##### **a. Reports from Subgroups**

##### **1. Support Women and Minority-owned Businesses Subgroup**

Ms. Adams explained that the Subgroup met after she was able to meet with Ms. Kerwin Derrick and Ms. Bailin. Based on those conversation, the Subgroup will focus on three areas: procurement, vendor directories, and public relations effort to reach underrepresented groups. She will coordinate with the City team.

##### **2. Report from Zoning Redesign Subgroup**

Mr. Plottel noted that there is nothing presently to report.

##### **3. Report from R & D Attraction Subgroup**

Mr. Plottel reported that he and Ms. Bailin have a meeting scheduled with MassBio to obtain Newton's platinum certification.

##### **4. Report from Support Newton's Storefront Businesses Subgroup**

Ms. Merino reported that, after its work with the Zoning Redesign efforts in the village centers, the Subgroup has been quiet.

Mr. Heath noted that the consultant is making a report to ZAP on October 25<sup>th</sup> regarding the results of the outreach efforts. He was asked to send out the meeting information. Ms. Bailin noted that consultant met with ZAP last month to explain some of their factual findings. The presentation is available online.

Mr. Plottel explained that he received a letter from Councilor Albright about the interest of the EDC in participating in organizing holiday strolls/fairs in village centers. He sent it along to the Subgroup. Gloria Garvis of Newton Community Pride and Paula Gannon, the City's Cultural Department, have expressed interest. Ms. Rahman asked what the time commitment is; Ms. Merino asked who would be leading the efforts. Mr. Tanowitz thought it was a

great idea but it is important to know who is leading the effort; it cannot be EDC Commissioners. Mr. Plottel noted that it is rather late in the year to do this for this year.

b. Recommendations from Support Women and Minority-Owned Business Subgroup

Ms. Adams, as previously noted, had none to report at this time.

c. Outdoor Dining Discussion

This matter was discussed above in City Updates.

d. Update on Northland Project (Presentation by Kent Gonzales and Mike Medeiros on Passive House and electrification efforts)

Mr. Plottel introduced Kent Gonzales from Northland who agreed to speak to the EDC about their project, especially as it relates the electrification issue. Mr. Gonzales introduced Peter Standish, Senior VP of Development, and Mike Medeiros, Associate VP of Construction, to talk about their 100% electric design using Passive House. He noted that, while it is possible to attain these standards on new construction, it is much more difficult with existing buildings. The key starts with significantly reducing energy consumption which requires tight buildings. The biggest challenge Northland faced was providing hot water using electricity. Heat pumps were not a solution; although gas hot water heaters are much more efficient, they were able to attain efficiencies using electricity by using new technology. The units at Northland will be very efficient; so much so that all HVAC will be included in the rent. He noted that he could not comment on the impact of electrification on commercial development but understands from others that this could pose a challenge to both new construction and redevelopment. Mr. Medeiros added that electrification is difficult if the building is not part of a new build. It only works if the building being serviced is highly efficient; if not, it will consume greater energy to heat hot water systems or provide cooling than using gas directly.

It was noted that Passive House goes well beyond stretch energy code requirements. For new construction, the construction cost to comply with the stretch energy code is about 2.5% increase; to provide market rate Passive House buildings like Northland is bringing to Newton, it's about 7-10% increase. It was explained that normally Passive House has thick walls and small windows, which would not result in a market rate product. Mr. Gonzales noted that they are getting close to submitting for building permits.

Mr. Leader asked if Eversource was able to supply sufficient capacity for the Northland project. Mr. Gonzales explained that Eversource

used normal calculations to determine the electricity needs for the project, which it said it could provide, but the project, because of the Passive House construction, is using far less energy. Ms. Jackson asked about increasing electricity demands by mandating electrification; is there adequate supply or will rates rise, resulting in yet higher costs for consumers? Mr. Gonzales pointed out that their units are so tight that they will use between 30-50% less electricity. Mr. Medeiros noted that sources of electricity are being pushed out of state; plants are no longer right in the communities using them. This increases costs and inefficiencies.

Mr. Plottel asked about development across the street. Mr. Gonzales responded that they have existing tenants: Marshalls and H.C. Starck. They will likely use 160 Charlemont for a construction staging site. There are no plans for now. Mr. Plottel noted that this area is zoned ready for R & D and, with the old manufacturing buildings, could easily be converted to lab space. There being no further comments or questions, Mr. Plottel thanked the Northland representatives for meeting with us.

e. Electrification Home Rule Petition and Ordinance

Mr. Plottel explained that the City Councilors will be meeting with Newton Wellesley Hospital representatives on October 20<sup>th</sup>. We don't think the matter will be brought back to Public Facilities before our next meeting. Mr. Leader commented that he's still concerned about capacity. He noted that Riverside is bringing power from Waltham. He believes the proposal is well-meaning but not feasible. We need to rebuild the infrastructure; Newton already has brownouts. Mr. Plottel added that, under existing conditions, we will be using more gas energy to produce electricity than if we used gas directly to heat at the end user. Mr. Tanowitz noted that the vast majority of housing stock in Newton is old (something like 80%) and cannot create efficiencies necessary to make this work. The stock would need to be rebuilt. He doesn't think this is the way to go. Mr. Plottel added that the goal should not be electrification; it should be reduction in energy consumption with the implementation of performance standards.

Mr. Plottel asked what the EDC should do on this issue. Mr. Leader said that we need to weigh in. The goal is laudable but it simply isn't feasible. Ms. Adams believes that the EDC should weigh in, agrees proposal doesn't appear realistic to implement and suggests we look to what other municipalities are proposing. Mr. Plottel commented that a better approach would be to adopt emission standards and promote efforts to reduce consumption. Ms. Rahman asked what does weighing in mean; a stated position and concerns? What is the time frame? Ms. Plotkin had no comments. Mr. Segneri suggested that, even if the goal is laudable, we need to better understand the limitations—exemptions, as were discussed last meeting, are

necessary. We should frame those in our response. Mr. Freid stated that, given the complexities, we should identify our concerns and suggest changes to the draft. Ms. Jackson commented that she felt she really couldn't add value to the discussion. Mr. Plottel asked if the pending Home Rule and ordinance proposal adds uncertainty which won't exist in other communities without the proposal; Ms. Jackson said that it will certainly make it riskier to come to Newton. Mr. Plottel will speak with the officers and they may propose something for our next meeting.

f. 2022 EDC Meetings (Discussion on moving EDC meetings and changing start time)

With the Commissioners approval, the officers will discuss this and come up with a plan for next year.

**5. Other Business**

Mr. Plottel called upon Mr. Tanowitz who wished to raise an issue with the EDC. Mr. Tanowitz wants to bring transportation issues to the attention of the EDC, including bike lanes on the Carriage Way in Auburndale. The EDC may wish to weigh in on these issues, which also have impact on our DEI endeavors. The City's employers can't recruit underrepresented employees if they can't get here. Transportation can be a considerable barrier. Mr. Heath suggested that the EDC invite Nicole Freedman, our Director Transportation Planning, to our next meeting if she is available. She can speak to Blue Bikes, bike paths, NewMo, transit initiatives, etc. Ms. Adams stated that her subgroup discussed this and thinks it's important to get educated. Ms. Bailin will invite Ms. Freedman to our next meeting.

Mr. Plottel noted that Ms. Rahman will continue Ms. Jackson's tradition of creating a yearend self-assessment so we can identify our goals for next year.

**6. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—November 16, 2021**

Due to the week of November 9<sup>th</sup> being a short week, Mr. Plottel asked if anyone had any objection to changing the meeting to the following Tuesday—November 16<sup>th</sup>. There being no objection, the date of the next regularly scheduled meeting for the EDC is November 16, 2021. The last meeting of the year is scheduled for December 14, 2021.

**7. Adjournment**

Upon Motion by Mr. Tanowitz and seconded by Ms. Adams, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at approximately 8:11 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director