



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: November 16, 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; Rob Finkel; Jeremy Freid; Debora Jackson; Jack Leader; Marcela Merino; Joyce Plotkin; Matt Segneri; and Chuck Tanowitz.

Barney S. Heath
Director

Commissioners Not Attending: Eryn-Ashlei Bailey.

Planning & Development
Devra G. Bailin
Director
Economic Development

Staff Attending: Devra Bailin, Economic Development Director; Ann Berwick, Co-Director of Sustainability; and Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning.

Also Attending: Councilor Deb Crossley; Ali Erol; Simon French; and Greg Reibman. (An attendant who showed up as “Iphony” would not identify him/herself.)

2. Approval of Minutes of October 12, 2021

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

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

3. City Updates

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

Ms. Bailin noted that the Walgreens in the Centre is in fact closing. Ms. Bailin noted that the City continues to work on post-pandemic regulations for restaurants. Mr. Tanowitz noted that Chipotle was opening.

4. Discussion Items:

a. Reports from Subgroups

1. Support Women and Minority-owned Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Adams explained that the Subgroup has nothing to report but is scheduled to meet twice before our next meeting.

2. Report from Zoning Redesign Subgroup

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

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3. Report from R & D Attraction Subgroup

Mr. Plottel reported that Newton has obtained platinum certification from MassBio.

4. Report from Support Newton's Storefront Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Merino reported that there has been no meeting of the Subgroup since the ZAP presentation.

b. 2021 Assessment

Ms. Rahman explained that the Commissioners will be getting an email for the EDC 2021 assessment, which will take about 10 minutes to complete.

c. Advice to City Council and Mayor on the proposed Electrification Home Rule Petition and Ordinance

Mr. Plottel introduced Ms. Berwick and then proceeded to give a short summary of the background. The electrification home rule petition and proposed ordinance were passed by the Public Facilities Committee. Once they were aware of its provisions, strong concerns were expressed by Newton Wellesley Hospital, the Chamber and the EDC. Phil shared a draft comment letter. He hopes to have a discussion of the topic, incorporate feedback into the letter, redraft the letter and then vote on it. Ms. Berwick noted that there is much in the draft that the City agrees with and that discussion with the EDC and Mr. Plottel have always been respectful. Mr. Plottel reminded everyone that the EDC is advisory and not a decision-maker with respect to the issues. He asked if members think of specific comments after the meeting, they should communicate them to Ms. Bailin and him.

Mr. Plottel pointed out that the timeline can either be in the body of the letter or an appendix. He stated that his conclusion is that the proposal as it stands is not technically feasible; life science has very similar issues to the NWH's concerns. In his view, there should be an official exception for life science and noted that other communities have exempted them. It was also noted that the sufficiency of the grid to handle additional loads is questionable, where outages are already being experienced and Riverside is bringing power in from Waltham to solve its development issues.

Mr. Leader commented that he has many clients who have experienced power outages and brownouts. If there is not plan to update the grid, the proposal is simply not possible. There is simply not enough capacity in the current grid. Ms. Berwick commented that, because the proposal covers only new construction and substantial renovations, the increases in clean energy will provide

sufficient capacity for needs. Also because we are on the regional grid, our actions would be but a small part of the needs.

Ms. Adams said that she felt it would be very helpful to understand the true impacts of the proposal and to clarify the ability of the grid to accommodate growth. Ms. Wood asked what was causing the brownouts and outages now. Ms. Berwick said that in the past the NWH had frequent issues but that there is no big problem with reliability now. She pointed out that because of particular demands of the NWH and industries like life science/labs, the City is agreeable to a BERDO alternative as is being used in Boston.

Mr. Tanowitz noted that he too has questions regarding the capacity of the grid to handle growth and is concerned it will prove to impair both commercial development and delivery of increased housing stock. Councilor Crossley noted that, with respect to multi-family housing, Northland has proven that it can deliver full electrification through Passive House construction with significant savings in energy usage. She suggested that the EDC hear directly from Green Newton and Peter Barrer. She stated that electrification is the only way to green.

Mr. Plottel noted that the increased cost to electrify could have impacts on development in Newton. Northland testified that the costs increase 7-10% to electrify. These increased costs may prove prohibitive to small businesses trying to renovate commercial space, including the issue of one tenant triggering the necessity and expense of a full building upgrade. Ms. Berwick stated Green Newton found the increased cost to provide full electrification was only 1-3%.

Mr. Plottel commented on the potential impact on Newton's competitiveness in attracting new businesses to the City. Newton already has a reputation for taking longer and being more difficult than abutting communities. If those communities don't adopt similar provisions, Newton will be further disadvantaged. Ms. Adams asked if this was a real problem. Mr. Reibman commented that Alexandria said that overregulation by Newton will force it into other communities. He added that there is a need to fully explore the impacts of the proposal and that there is a lot of work to do. Councilor Crossley stated it is only applicable to new construction and substantial reconstruction (50%). She noted that NWH agreed to BERDO and then reneged. Ms. Rahman asked how the 50% was arrived at, since some communities used 75%; she added that it significantly more costly to retrofit to meet requirements than to comply with new construction.

Mr. Finkel suggested that the EDC take out any reference to the adversarial tone of discussions between the NWH and the City. Mr. Plottel said that one of the outstanding issues is the impact of banning use of natural gas to heat at houses rather than using gas to generate

electricity. The former is much more efficient and results in much less loss. He noted that 2/3 of the electricity in our region is produced by natural gas. Ms. Berwick noted that this doesn't take into account the relative efficiencies of heat pumps vs. natural gas furnaces. She commented that the grid receives half of the energy by renewable/clean sources and that this percentage will improve over time.

Mr. Plottel asked why the decision was made to exempt home gas stoves. This will continue to require upkeep of the infrastructure to support it but will result in far less in revenues to do so. With no other comments, Mr. Plottel asked if this issue will likely go back to the City Council this year. Councilor Crossley said she did not know.

It was suggested that a working group be established to draft a letter for discussion and vote at our next meeting. [Although no one volunteered to assist in the drafting, it was determined after the meeting that the officers will work on it.] Anyone with comments should send them along to Mr. Plottel and Ms. Bailin.

d. Update on Transportation Initiatives (Presentation by Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning)

Mr. Plottel apologized to Ms. Freedman for going so late and offered to postpone until a later date if she preferred. She agreed to present a short outline of transportation initiatives. 1. NewMo 2.0: the program has been expanded to allow anyone in Newton to go anywhere in Newton on this on-demand ride feature. (It will still go from and to the Needham Highlands commuter rail as well.) The City is aware of how difficult it is, especially for employees, to get from public transportation hubs to their places of employment. The program is intended to close the last mile gap. The shared ride component allows for efficiencies. 2. Blue Bike: there is very high usage of the bike share now. The City has also increased the number of stations from 6 to 15 with 4 more on the way. There are over 1000 rides per month. 3. Walkable Streets: The City is working on ways to improve both pedestrian and bike experience. There are vision plans in process and a consultant has been hired to provide a plan for Washington Street from West Newton to Lowell Avenue. The area has 4 travel lanes. 4. Carriage Way: The City is looking at the Carriage Way near the Marriot Newton on Commonwealth Avenue to make it safer and more pedestrian/bike friendly. They will be working to make it two way for bikes.

Ms. Merino noted that the shortage of workers is causing places like Starbucks to close or reduce hours. She asked if transportation issues are causing the shortage of workers. Ms. Freedman noted that it was more likely that the businesses are not paying living wages. Mr. Tanowitz asked about whether the Blue Bike stations will stay in place over the winter. Ms. Freedman explained that they will;

however, at Newton Highlands DPW has advised it cannot stay on the street. If another home cannot be found, it will be removed, stored and then replaced in the spring.

- e. 2022 EDC Meetings (Discussion on moving EDC meetings and changing the start time)

Due to shortage of time, this will be revisited in March.

5. Other Business

There was no other business discussed.

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

The last meeting of the year will be held virtually via Zoom on December 14, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.

7. Adjournment

Upon Motion by Ms. Jackson and seconded by Mr. Tanowitz, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at approximately 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director