



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: January 18, 2022

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; Ali Erol; Jeremy Freid; Debora Jackson; Jack Leader; Marcela Merino; Joyce Plotkin; Matt Segneri; and Chuck Tanowitz.

Barney S. Heath
Director

Commissioners Not Attending: Rob Finkel.

Planning & Development
Devra G. Bailin
Director
Economic Development

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

Also Attending: Councilor Wright.

2. Approval of Minutes of December 14, 2021

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

Mr. Plottel noted that we were welcoming a new member, Ali Erol, and invited all of the Commissioners to introduce themselves and Mr. Erol to do the same.

3. City Updates

Ms. Bailin noted that Mr. Heath is unable to attend. She noted that Jumbo Capital has sold its three properties in Wells Office Park to Taurus Management for \$92 million. Also Finagle sold to Calare Properties 66 and 77 Rowe Street in Auburndale. The redevelopment of the West Newton Armory is moving forward with the hired consultant who will be showing their vision and plan on Wednesday January 26th at 6:00 p.m. Ms. Bailin explained that the City is moving forward with various initiatives to ensure continued outdoor dining after the April 1st deadline, including expansion of sidewalk seating, parking space dining, and private property dining (including patios and parking lots). She commented that considerable outreach has taken place with the restaurants, including revisiting Union Street outdoor dining.

4. Last Mile Delivery Services

Mr. Plottel introduced Mr. LeMel to explain the issue and why it is before the EDC at this time. Mr. LeMel had prepared a Memorandum to the EDC prior to the meeting which was circulated to the Commissioners by Ms. Bailin. Mr.

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

Lisa Adams
Ali Erol
Robert Finkel
Jeremy Freid
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Joyce Plotkin
Matt Segneri
Chuck Tanowitz

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

Twitter: @newtonecondev

LeMel explained that a group of Councilors is seeking to discuss the issue of whether and how last mile delivery services in village centers should be regulated and what amendments to the zoning code might be needed to address these issues. The issue relates to the fact that businesses seeking to stock groceries and other goods for delivery only frequently seek village center locations in order to deliver within 15-30 minutes and are often dark storefronts not open to the public. Inspectional Service Department (“ISD”) and Ms. Bailin recently received such an inquiry to locate within a village center. Based on the existing Use Regulations (Article 6), ISD determined this type of business to be Retail Sales use (Section 6.4.30), which is allowed by right in Newton’s business zones, including BU1 and BU2, the zoning for most village centers.

Mr. LeMel wanted to speak with the EDC to see what concerns, issues, thoughts, etc. that the Commissioners have on the issue of whether such uses should be prohibited in village centers, regulated in some way, or allowed in certain districts. He noted that prohibiting these uses doesn’t really get to why we have vacant storefronts and whether there are ways we can make it easier for businesses we do desire to open in village centers.

Mr. Plottel commented that he wanted to know the difference in impact between these last mile delivery services and a restaurant that does takeout only. How do we distinguish uses so as not to create unintended consequences? Mr. Tanowitz asked what is the real threat to village centers? Is there some level of worth in allowing provision of these services by bike delivery? Mr. Erol asked about the process. Mr. LeMel explained that it is presently just being discussed; zoning amendments will require new docket items and additional vote to refer back those amendments. Mr. Erol noted that he had read about the impact of last mile delivery services on small towns and would be happy to do some research on the topic. It may depend on who wants to open these facilities—local business or big business?

Ms. Adams is concerned about the environmental impact of such businesses and about allowing businesses in the village center which do not bring people into the centers. Ms. Merino agreed that we need to know who wants to bring these businesses into the village centers and the environmental impacts. Is there a way to establish a quota? We really need to think about what the future of our village centers is. Mr. LeMel commented that we need to determine how can we be flexible in allowing new and innovative businesses to our centers.

Mr. Tanowitz noted that convenience stores are offering delivery too and that the market is changing. How do these uses compare to banks which are largely unvisited? Mr. Plottel commented that people in Newton want the convenience of home delivery. Mr. Leader noted that the EDC is not just concerned about economic impacts or benefits, but on the quality of life. These uses don’t belong in the centers; they belong in the warehouse districts.

Mr. Plottel asked about next steps and how best the EDC can be of assistance. He suggested perhaps the Storefront working group might be best suited for the task. Mr. LeMel said he is looking for the EDC to provide insights into regulations and discuss other measures, such as parking requirements, which

might promote businesses we want to see in our centers. Ms. Merino and Mr. Tanowitz agreed to assist and coordinate with Mr. LeMel on this issue.

5. Discussion Items:

a. Reports from Subgroups

1. Support Women and Minority-owned Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Adams explained that she has nothing to report tonight.

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 there is nothing presently to report. He did want, however, to note that Alexandria's project at 275 Grove Street is moving forward and that UMass Amherst at Mount Ida has attracted a life science company to the campus.

4. Report from Support Newton's Storefront Businesses Subgroup

Ms. Merino reported that the Subgroup sent out a memorandum of its actions and goals going forward. The memo contains reflection points and questions for the Commissioners to consider. She also noted that day cares are suffering and perhaps these need to be a focus in 2022 as they were in 2020.

b. 2021 Assessment

At Ms. Rahman's request, Ms. Bailin distributed her findings/report on the self-assessments provided by the Commissioners. She explained the results are subjective but the results confirm that most Commissioners feel we are heading in the right direction and enjoy working groups. Comments focused on the advisory role of the EDC and on efforts to increase the tax base. There are a few individual outliers who don't feel connected to the work. The consensus is that the meetings are good and managed well. She will send the revised assessment out to everyone so they can be prepared to identify and prioritize goals for next year. At the top of the list from the self-assessment appears to be DEI initiatives and village center zoning redesign as goals. Mr. Segneri agreed to help Ms. Rahman in formulating goals from the Assessment in a format to facilitate EDC vote on priorities.

Ms. Jackson asked if the goals will be pulled from the Assessment and was told that is the plan. Mr. Plottel noted that the EDC needs to limit the goals, discuss them, prioritize them, and vote on it. Ms. Rahman noted that the EDC does best when the goal creates a

deliverable for the EDC to accomplish. Ms. Wood noted that at times the EDC takes on issues not listed in its goals because of City needs and concerns which arise during the year. Mr. Plottel noted that the EDC has over the past year been very successful in the areas it has chosen but agrees there is a very good reason to reevaluate the goals midyear so that they can be reevaluated. Mr. Leader agreed that the EDC has been able to influence decisions in the City.

c. 2021 Annual Report

Mr. Plottel asked if there were any volunteers to help with the Report. If not, the officers will take on the first draft.

d. Discussion of Goals for 2022

Mr. Plottel noted that the officers, with the assistance of Mr. Segneri, will take the assessment and seek to create a list of goals for the EDC to discuss, identify, prioritize and vote next time.

e. Nomination of Officers for 2022

This will be discussed next time. Mr. Plottel noted with great sadness that Ms. Wood will be leaving the EDC after our next meeting, as she is moving to Boston. He asked that anyone interesting in serving as an officer should feel free to contact any of the current officers or Ms. Bailin about what is entailed.

5. Other Business

Ms. Wood asked what happened with the electrification issue on which the EDC commented. Mr. Plottel stated that his hasn't seen anything come back yet and it appears that the City is now focusing on a BERDO requirement instead, which appears to be a better approach. He noted that our next meeting will focus primarily on internal matters.

6. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—February 8, 2022

The next meeting will be held virtually via Zoom on February 8, 2022 at 6:30 p.m.

7. Adjournment

Upon Motion by Mr. Leader and seconded by Mr. Tanowitz, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at approximately 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Devra G. Bailin, Economic Development Director