



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

DATE: April 12, 2022

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

1. Attendance

Commissioners Attending: Phil Plottel (Chair); Sarah Rahman (Vice Chair); Chuck Tanowitz (Secretary); Jim Griglun; Debora Jackson; Jack Leader; Marcela Merino; and Matt Segneri.

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

Commissioners Not Attending: Lisa Adams; Ali Erol; Rob Finkel; Jeremy Freid; and Joyce Plotkin;

Barney S. Heath
Director
Planning & Development

Staff Attending: Barney Heath, Director of Planning & Development; and Devra Bailin, Economic Development Director.

Also Attending: Councilor Wright; Applicants for the Commission John DeVito, Zach Knowlton, and Florent Mali; and Brian Burke

Commissioners
Phil Plottel, Chair
Sarah Rahman, Vice Chair
Chuck Tanowitz, Secretary

2. Approval of Minutes of March 8, 2022

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

Lisa Adams
Robert Finkel
Jeremy Freid
Jim Griglun
Debora Jackson
Jack Leader
Marcela Merino
Joyce Plotkin
Matt Segneri

3. City Updates

- a. Electrification/BERDO Mr. Heath explained that the Home Rule Petition was approved by the City Council and is now before the Legislature. Mr. Plottel asked if Mr. Heath could provide the final language, as he never received a copy. Mr. Heath agreed [and provided the Home Rule Petition forwarded to the Legislature later]. Mr. Plottel noted that he had asked Ms. Bailin to share a letter from the Newton Climate Committee, which he happened to see, which addressed the EDC concerns but on which the EDC was not copied. The Sustainability Working Group may want to review it and respond as necessary. As to BERDO, Mr. Heath explained that it was brought before the City Council yesterday and so we are in the early stages of a challenging undertaking. The EDC will be critical to understanding what it means and its impacts of businesses. Ms. Rahman asked about the embedded carbon item. Mr. Heath said that it is a complicated subject which he needs to read up on. It is one of the climate initiatives that cities are looking at. Mr. Plottel noted that Liora Silkes, the City's Energy Coach, wants to come to address the Commission in future.
- b. Outdoor Dining Ms. Bailin explained that after rushing to put all the pieces in place to allow outdoor dining in the absence of emergency regulations (which expired on April 1), the Legislature finally passed an extension, which the Governor signed. Those restaurants which used our new

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enactments will have permanent alteration of premises that include their outdoor spaces. Those that didn't will be allowed to operate under renewed licenses. The only item remaining to be done on the City side is to make permanent the trial for using parking spaces.

- c. Housing Choice Mr. Heath explained that he is calling this MBTA Communities. The Planning Staff submitted its questions and comments to the State at the end of March. The State will be clarifying its guidance in the summer.
- d. Other Mr. Plottel reminded the Commission that Ms. Bailin is retiring so this will be her last meeting. He invited the members to the get together for her at Dunn and Gaherin's on May 12, 2022 from 5:30-7:00. Mr. Heath explained that the position will be posted this week and that he will be providing staff support in the interim.

5. Discussion Items:

- a. Discussion of Last Mile Delivery Services Mr. Tanowitz explained that after the last ZAP meeting, the options in regard to village centers were reduced to three, as indicated in Mr. LeMel's memorandum which was circulated. 1. Allowed subject to standards (Alternative 1) 2. Allowed by special permit (Alternative 1a) and 3. Not allowed at all (Alternative 2). The Planning Department is looking for the EDC to make a recommendation. Mr. Tanowitz noted that this is an emerging market and he recommends a look ahead in six months. Mr. Plottel noted that there is a fourth alternative—do nothing and the use will be allowed by right wherever retail is allowed. There was discussion of what happened with the transparency requirements and it was explained that, since ZAP did not want these in storefronts (even if below grade or on second floor), there was no need for them. There was discussion of the proposed parking requirements which are less than retail; it was noted that, since the uses are only allowed in the back and away from streets, the parking was may be less of an issue, especially with loading standards.

After these questions, members were asked for their views on the options. Some members expressed the view that these uses should not be allowed in village centers as they do not add to the vibrancy of the areas but will contribute to traffic, congestion and parking. Some members were torn; given the number of vacant spaces, wouldn't these fulfillment centers be a better option than vacancy? Mr. Plottel suggested a straw vote on the options before we decide on a recommendation.

The straw vote with Chair not weighing in were: 2 for Alternative 2; 0 were for Alternative 1a; 4 were for Alternative 1; and 1 was in favor of doing nothing. The Chair noted he preferred Alternative 1. Taking out, due to the lack of support, Alternative 2 and doing nothing, the Commissioners continued the discussion.

Ms. Merino commented that she was not sure traffic was a fair issue because, as noted previously, the microfulfillment center could be a block away from the center and still have the same impact and asked if there were any studies. Mr. Tanowitz noted that, although there do not appear to be traffic studies available, anecdotally, these uses tend to create back up due to the constant delivery vehicles in and out. He noted that the EDC doesn't have to write a letter and Mr. Plottel agreed that it might be best for officers to be present at the April 25th ZAP meeting to express the concerns and comments.

Mr. Plottel laid out the comments as follows: 1. Whichever option is chosen, this is an interim measure which should be reviewed when village center zoning is finalized. 2. These uses represent the challenges of a changing economy and transitions in retail uses. 3. The EDC wants to emphasize the desire for vitality in our village center storefront businesses. 4. There is consensus that doing nothing and implementation of special permits for these uses are not the way to go. The majority of the EDC Commissioners believe that the uses should be allowed in village centers with standards. Several members felt these were a reasonable statement of the EDC conversation. At this point and before a vote could be taken, one of the Commissioners dropped off so the matter was put on hold. At the end of the meeting, it was noted that the EDC still did not have a quorum to take a vote. For that reason, the officers will meet to decide how best to present the views expressed by the Commissioners during the discussion.

- b. Discussion of Goals and Creation and Assignments into Working Groups Ms. Bailin explained that she had not heard from everyone with respect to working group assignments.
1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commissioners who expressed interest prior to the meeting were: Ms. Plotkin, Mr. Segneri, Ms. Adams, and Mr. Plottel. At the meeting Ms. Merino and Ms. Jackson joined and agreed to co-chair. Mr. Plottel will speak with Ms. Adams to see if she would agree to focus on Sustainability for which she also volunteered.
 2. Zoning Commissioners who expressed interest prior to the meeting were: Mr. Freid and Mr. Tanowitz. At the meeting, Mr. Griglun agreed to join and Mr. Tanowitz volunteered to chair.
 3. Sustainability Commissioners who expressed interest prior to the meeting were: Ms. Adams and Ms. Rahman. At the meeting, Mr. Leader agreed to join and act as chair.
 4. TBD Mr. Plottel noted that this is open for any special matters that come to the EDC's attention.
- c. Discussion of Breweries in Newton Mr. Plottel noted that brew pubs and breweries were one of the recommendations made in its pandemic

recovery letter. He welcomed Brian Burke who is hoping to establish a Farmer's Brewery in the former Local space in West Newton, as we discussed last month. He noted he is securing the necessary permits to operate a second facility and/or move his facility from Hanover. Ms. Bailin explained that the Planning Department has suggested Mr. Burke engage a lawyer to assist in drafting zoning language necessary to accomplish his goals. She noted that there are at least two zoning impediments—Newton does not permit the bottling of alcohol and the zoning district in which the restaurant sits does not allow manufacture, although conceivably could be allowed as an accessory use. She felt the EDC could assist Mr. Burke in reaching his goals. It was noted that the EDC would require staff support to do so. Councilor Wright was also willing to assist and asked if we had language which could be used. Ms. Bailin noted that we do have the zoning language worked out by Needham after a year of investigation, which she was asked to share with the EDC. Newton would still need to change the prohibition against the bottling of alcohol. [Ms. Bailin forwarded the information from Needham to Mr. Plottel after the meeting.]

5. Other Business

6. Date of next regularly scheduled meeting—May 10, 2022

The next meeting will be held virtually via Zoom on May 10, 2022 at 6:30 p.m.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Barney Heath, Director of Planning