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Mayor

Barney S. Heath  
Director  
Planning & Development

John Sisson  
Director  
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Commissioners  
Phil Plottel, Chair  
Sarah Rahman, Vice Chair  
Chuck Tanowitz, Secretary

Lisa Adams  
Jeremy Freid  
Jim Griglun  
Debora Jackson  
Zach Knowlton  
Jack Leader  
Florent Mali  
Marcela Merino  
Joyce Plotkin  
Matt Segneri

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# CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## Economic Development Commission

### Meeting Minutes

DATE: August 9, 2022

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

### 1. Attendance

**Commissioners Attending:** Phil Plottel (Chair); Sarah Rahman (Vice Chair); Chuck Tanowitz (Secretary); Lisa Adams; Jeremy Freid; Jim Griglun; Debora Jackson; Zach Knowlton; Jack Leader; Florent Mali, Marcella Merino; Matt Segneri.

**Commissioners Not Attending:** Joyce Plotkin

**Staff Attending:** John Sisson, Director of Economic Development

### 2. Approval of Minutes of June 14, 2022

After the motion to approve was made by Rev. Dr. Jackson and seconded by Ms. Rahman, the June 14<sup>th</sup> minutes were unanimously approved.

### 3. Introduction of members and staff

- a. Chair Philip Plottel explained using part of the meeting to introduce new staff and members. Plottel, a real estate consultant, has served on the EDC for 15 years and chaired the body for three terms.
- b. John Sisson, a Newton resident who had worked as economic development director for the Town of Dedham for the past seven years, described his professional background and interests in village center economics.
- c. Debora Jackson, dean of the business school at Worcester Polytechnical Institute, has served on the EDC for four years. The 23-year resident said she wants to see an increase in minority populations in economic development.
- d. Chuck Tanowitz, who has served on the EDC since 2016 and lived in Newton since 1996, works in communications and is very interested in transportation as an economic driver.
- e. Jack Leader, the EDC's longest serving member, works in financial services. He talked about several the achievements of the EDC during his tenure.
- f. Lisa Adams, who has a background in labor and employment law, became interested the EDC's work and wanted to give back to the community.
- g. Sarah Rahman works professionally in economic development policy at the federal and state level and has served on the EDC for four years.
- h. Jeremy Freid, who works in corporate real estate focused on the Route 128 market, has served on the EDC more than six years and enjoys being able to bring his professional expertise to public sector discussions.

- i. Marcela Merino, who is from Honduras originally, has lived in Newton Highlands for 20 years. Ms. Merino has served on the EDC for four years and works professionally in business, economics, and international development. She is interested in regional competitiveness and economic inclusion.
- j. Matt Segneri has served on the EDC for four years and works as the executive director of the Harvard Innovation Labs. His background includes strategic planning for cities.
- k. Florent Mali, a 16-year resident, was appointed to the EDC earlier this year. He has engineering degrees in earth sciences and computer engineering. Originally from Albania, Mr. Mali works for a computer software company.
- l. Zach Knowlton studied economics and finance and works for an investment firm in Boston. Mr. Knowlton served on the EDC in Medway for five years before moving to Newtonville and wanted to get involved in Newton.
- m. Jim Griglun, who moved to Newton nine years ago, is a certified financial planner who has also studied economic development policy.
- n. Mr. Plottel followed up on Mr. Leader's introduction on the accomplishments of the EDC over time, including studies of Newton Center and Riverside, the Austin Street project in Newtonville, upgrading the City's attractiveness to life sciences firms, technical analysis of Newton zoning, and helping shape the City's response to COVID-19. He asked for other examples.
- o. Mr. Leader added the EDC's involvement in the redevelopment of Chestnut Hill Square.
- p. Mr. Plottel discussed the development process and current housing developments being advanced under the State's 40B statute.
- q. Mr. Tanowitz mentioned another accomplishment: the economic development report the EDC worked on with Camoin Associates, which was published in 2019.
- r. Mr. Plottel also mentioned the EDC's work to mitigate the burden of parking requirements and the special permit process for restaurants.
- s. Mr. Sisson mentioned the accomplishments of the City's zoning redesign work

#### **4. Working group updates**

- a. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI): Ms. Merino shared information on the subgroup's latest discussion of how to promote more economic inclusion, including initiatives on procurement practices, internships for diverse students from Babson college, and making the City more welcoming to minority-owned businesses. Ms. Adams added that the City is in the process of hiring a DEI consultant. Mr. Sisson mentioned trying to manage the volume of economic development contacts and needing a CRM tool to categorize businesses by type, industry, and tagging them for DEI. Mr. Plottel said EDC members could provide guidance on the CRM.
- b. Sustainability: Ms. Adams said the group is observing federal, state, and local policy discussions, including two bills on Beacon Hill. The members met with State Rep. Kay Khan to discuss the electrification bills that will be discussed in the next legislative session. Mr. Leader spoke about the limitations of the existing electrical grid capacity across the city and the challenges that may present. He said the group has also spoken about transit challenges. Ms. Rahman spoke about the Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO) being discussed in Newton and questions being raised about long-term costs, how they are distributed, and the implementation timeline. Ms. Rahman also spoke briefly about "embedded carbon," the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) or greenhouse gas emissions associated with construction materials, and that topic is being discussed by some members of the City Council. Mr. Plottel reminded members that the EDC did issue a letter on electrification which supports the goals but expresses concerns about feasibility and regional competitiveness.

- c. Zoning: Mr. Tanowitz spoke about the City’s ongoing Village Center Zoning efforts and zoning to regulate “dark stores.” Mr. Plottel said the EDC did express support for the conceptual framework being discussed for advancing the public conversation about zoning. Mr. Sisson described the plans for community engagement. Mr. Freid said the zoning update is a major challenge but could be transformative and beneficial. He followed up to express disappointment in a portion of the Northland project having a larger amount of residential and less commercial space than was originally planned, as the EDC had supported more commercial activity on the south side of the project site.

#### **4. Next meeting**

Mr. Plottel said the next meeting will be on Sept. 13 and that potential agenda topics include:

- Mark Development’s proposal at 1314 Washington Street in West Newton.
- Village Center Zoning discussion with Zach LeMel.
- Embodied carbon discussion.

Ms. Adams asked about whether the meeting will be remote or in-person. Mr. Plottel said the meetings will remain remote for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Mali asked to join the zoning group. Mr. Knowlton asked to join the sustainability group.

Mr. Plottel said he will provide an update to Mayor Fuller.

**5. Adjournment:** Upon a motion by Mr. Leader, seconded by Ms. Adams and unanimously approved the meeting was adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
John Sisson, Director of Economic Development