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

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Jeremy Freid
Jim Griglun
Debora Jackson
Zach Knowlton
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CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

DATE: September 13, 2022

TIME: 6:30 pm via Zoom

1. Attendance

Commissioners Attending: Phil Plottel (Chair), Sarah Rahman (Vice Chair), Chuck Tanowitz (Secretary), Jeremy Freid, Jim Griglun, Zach Knowlton, Jack Leader, Florent Mali, Marcella Merino, Joyce Plotkin, and Matt Segneri.

Commissioners Not Attending: Lisa Adams, Debora Jackson.

Staff Attending: Barney Heath, Director, Planning and Development; Zack LeMel, Long-Range Planning; and John Sisson, Director of Economic Development.

2. Approval of the minutes of August 9, 2022

After the motion to approve was made by Mr. Leader and seconded by Mr. Freid, the August 9 minutes were approved by all members present.

3. City updates

- a. Mr. Heath provided updates on current development projects: Riverside first phase focuses on MBTA garage design. Northland's Needham Street project has submitted building permit applications for the project's four larger, multifamily buildings. Staff review includes many special permit requirements, review of affordable units, and sustainability. Dunstan East on Washington Street appears to be on track with all demolition completed. Riverdale appears to be moving forward. Mr. Leader said the project should be very attractive from the Charles River, while the south side facing California Street may be less so. Mr. Tanowitz mentioned the bakery and sushi shop nearby, as well as the abutting Charles River trail. He asked if the project owners have made any commitments to snow and ice removal along the trail. Mr. Heath said he was not aware of any agreement. Mr. Heath said the area is slated for study with the consultant Utile, so additional engagement on this issue is possible. Mr. Leader asked about the geographic scope of the study. Lemel explained the study area is mostly north of California Street, which is zoned industrial. Mr. Heath also mentioned other proposals before the City Council: 50 residential apartments and a restaurant at 1314 Washington Street and a 175-unit assisted living and memory care facility on Crafts Street, both Mark Development projects. Sunrise is proposing an assisted living facility on Florence Street off Route 9. Northland's proposed 410-unit 40B project on Charlemont Street, as well as the West Newton Armory project, will come before the Zoning Board of Appeals soon. Mr. Heath said the firm Toll Brothers is proposing a 40B project on Route 9, and more information on that is to come.

Mr. Plottel asked about the displacement of Winston Flowers from the Florence Street site. Mr. Freid asked about the earlier proposal at 1314 Washington which included office space. Mr. Heath said the project has changed to residential. Mr. Freid asked how many total residential units the Northland sites will house. Mr. Heath said around 1,200—with 800 on the north side of Needham Street and 410 proposed on the south side of the street. Mr. Tanowitz asked about the brew pub proposal in West Newton and the Village Bank’s real estate portfolio which includes several village-center vacancies. Mr. Sisson said the bank is actively working to lease those spaces after having consolidated employees in a new office on Needham Street. Mr. Leader asked about the Oakley Spa mixed-use project on Washington Street and the suit filed by abutters on Walker Street. Ms. Plotkin asked about the status of marijuana businesses in the city. Mr. Heath said the industry appears to be going through a phase of contraction and consolidation, that several special permit agreements have been approved but facilities have not been opened. Mr. Plottel asked if Mr. Sisson could reach out to Winston Flowers and ask about the firm’s relocation plans and perhaps be prepared to discuss his goals and achievements at the next EDC meeting.

4. Working group updates

- a. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI): Ms. Merino said the group met the previous week to discuss ways to support the City’s DEI efforts, especially procurement and scheduling a meeting with the City’s purchasing director in September or October. She said the group is also interested in organizing a meeting with the regional chamber of commerce to identify challenges to minority businesses. Ms. Merino said the group also hopes to learn from the Wellesley DEI group and Boston’s initiative to identify demographics and diversity of real estate development teams. Mr. Sisson said he and Nick Read, the City’s Chief Procurement Officer, plan to attend the annual expo of the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts (BECMA).
- b. Sustainability: Ms. Rahman said the group did not meet, but members have been focused on the State electrification, in which Newton is one of 10 pilot communities. Mr. Sisson reported an update from Anne Berwick, Co-Director of Climate and Sustainability: the City is awaiting clarification from the Department of Energy Resources about how the State may interpret the legislation and Newton’s eligibility. Ms. Rahman said the group is also keeping tabs on discussions related to the City’s Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO). Mr. Heath said the City Council will hear a presentation about BERDO at its next meeting. Mr. Leader said a Maine court soon will be hearing a case about the electric transmission of Canadian power. He also said the City’s efforts on sustainable transportation are more focused on local mobility than commuting.
- c. Zoning: Mr. Tanowitz said the group focused on the village center zoning proposals, as presented by Mr. LeMel, and how the EDC can best support the changes from an economic development perspective. Mr. Griglun said he appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the zoning proposals and said he feels he has more to learn.

5. Village Center Zoning

Mr. LeMel said his presentation would be similar to the one he gave to the Commission in June. Mr. Plottel asked members to make notes about questions and concerns they may have, as the Commission will need to weigh in on the proposals. Mr. LeMel talked about the zoning goals, how earlier studies and community input has informed the proposals, and the need to make the economically viable changes. Mr. LeMel grouped the proposals into four areas: reducing parking requirements, scaling building design to village size, enabling flexibility and development of smaller lots, and changing the city’s review process to focus on larger projects. Mr. Plottel asked about the timeline and the process for mapping the new zoning. Mr. LeMel said the process is moving from current public engagement, to

drafting zoning language and maps in October. Mr. Plottel asked if the zoning changes would require a simple majority vote by the City Council, or a supermajority.

City Councilor Deb Crossley thanked Mr. LeMel for the presentation and said elements related to housing would require only a simple majority. She said it's unclear whether some of the proposed changes may need a supermajority. Ms. Crossley thanked Commission members for their interest in village center zoning and encouraged them to express their thoughts individually and as a group.

Mr. Plottel asked if other members had questions. Ms. Rahman asked how the public feedback will be used. Mr. LeMel said the input will help inform the mapping process, and the feedback will also be shared with the City Council. Mr. Leader said he was very supportive of the Planning Board's involvement in the development process. Mr. Tanowitz asked if the City has heard feedback from business owners. Mr. LeMel said retailers have participated in earlier phases, and that staff will work to reengage them. Mr. Tanowitz also asked about the reduction of parking in village centers and how that may affect mobility. Ms. Crossley said zoning regulations alone cannot effect all the changes to our village centers, that the City must do more management of parking, transportation, and wayfinding. Mr. Tanowitz, Mr. Plottel, and Councilor Crossley talked about conflicting priorities between different transportation modes and related safety issues.

Mr. Plottel said members should discuss next steps and said newer members may want to talk with Mr. LeMel to feel more comfortable in their understanding of the zoning proposals. Ms. Merino said she is supportive. Mr. Plottel said, in terms of next steps, members should first review the presentation slides or visit the library exhibit. Second, the Commission should discuss taking a formal position on village center zoning, which would be an advisory letter of support to the City Council. Third, individual members who are supportive of the zoning changes can speak to the City Councilors in their Wards. Mr. Plottel talked about the process for drafting the letter. Councilor Crossley said it would be helpful for her colleagues to hear from Commission members at different stages in the process and at future public hearings. Mr. Plottel said the Commission may try to draft a letter for review at the next meeting. Mr. Griglun said he'd like to see the draft letter before he'd feel comfortable commenting. Mr. Mali asked when members would be able to ask specific questions, such as about building height. Mr. Plottel said members can reach out to Mr. LeMel or Mr. Sisson with questions. Mr. Mali asked about the length of the support letter. Mr. Plottel said he would share some examples. Ms. Rahman asked about the process for drafting the letter and the level of detail. Mr. Heath pointed to some example village center zoning support letters have been posted on the City's website.

6. Date of Next Scheduled Meeting

Mr. Plottel said the next meeting will be on Tuesday, October 11, and the Commission may focus on the zoning letter. Other topics may include a presentation from Mr. Sisson and discussion of embedded carbon.

5. Adjournment: Upon a motion by Mr. Tanowitz, seconded by Ms. Rahman and approved by all members present, the meeting was adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
John Sisson, Director of Economic Development