

Town of Needham
Council of Economic Advisors
Meeting Minutes of March 13, 2024

Adam Block: Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:00am.

Roll Call Taken: Present - Adam Block, Kate Urquat, Bill Day, Rick Putprush, Mike Willcox, Lise Elcock, Jeremy Halpern, Adam Meisner, Dan Goodman, Matt Talcoff, Bruan Patel

Absent: Heidi Frail, Bob Hentschel

Also Present: J.P. Cacciaglia (EDM).

Adam Block Calls meeting to order at 8:00am and notifies the meeting is being conducted in a hybrid fashion, discusses the CEA HONE meeting where developers were invited to give feedback on the town's MBTA plans.

Discussion was held on a CEA letter of support for which plan that might want to support. Adam Block started discussion on height of units and explain the difference in economics in half stories, Rick Putprush brought up examples of why half stories are important as they allow projects to become viable and gave example of a developer (unnamed) that had spoken to him after the January meeting that a project under current zoning did not work with the number of units required to make the project viable. If a half story was added the development would have been possible.

Adam Block went through the map and discussed different zoning districts and that it will be important for the CEA to make recommendations on future projects. Rick Putprush made comments that it is important that the majority of people are not in zoning and visuals will need to be provided as well.

Bill Day spoke about a project about 10 years ago that increased the height of some buildings around the baseball field and stated the public support was very questionable. The renderings may have caused some issues as they were not as precise as they should have been and that plans might be better than an artist rendering.

Kate Urquat mentioned that it is also important to mention the downsides of not doing the zoning. Adam discussed the parking by-law changes that the planning board will take up as well to reduce parking as recommended by the parking study.

Dan Goodman spoke about how important foot traffic is to the business downtown and the heights and that more people that walk help businesses as it increases vibrancy of the project.

Matt Talcoff spoke about how it is important to be involved and make sure Needham remains a place where businesses want to locate and be friendly with the process to keep that advantage.

Lise Elcock commented that if we don't do it other towns will do it, new business will locate there as space will be available. There is constant competition in the marketplace and the mixture of what Needham offers keeps it as a very desirable community.

Kate Urquat spoke about what happens if we do lose what we have because Patel Bhuren spoke how when spaces are vacant that it makes it look not as inviting to live and start your own business there.

Dan Goodman spoke that if younger people don't move in the school will start fail as there will be no pipeline of students.

Adam Block spoke about the new development with Union Pharmacy, Common room opening in Needham Center.

Mike Wilcox spoke about the Highland Ave project will be wrapping up and if anything is moving with the former restaurant at the corner of 1st and Highland. Discussion was held on history of site and shortcomings, but that movement would be nice.

Adam Meixner mentioned that the market for under 5,000sq/ft of space has been very good but larger sizes over that are very slow to move. Adam asked if the spaces being leased are people relocating from the urban core or are places that local are looking to expand. Adam Meixner spoke that it is a flight to quality office space.

Mike Wilcox mentioned that a lot of users that have downsized with remote work are starting to sub-lease the space 140 Kendrick for instance has put over 100,000 on the market for sublease.

Matt Talcoff spoke on how mixed use is being highlighted and used downtown and there are some larger developments going on, but it isn't as robust as prior to the pandemic.

Discussion held on the Old Hill Crest to modify the zoning; Adam Block stated the planning board did not peruse a zoning amendment but wouldn't be just for that one site. Spoke that the Planning Board would like a zoning change to the area not as spot zoning.

Adam Block spoke about Muzi and the issues that have taken place in the commercial and lab market and that the planning board has extended the site plan approval.

Rick Putprush moves to adjourn second by Matt Talcoff. Meeting adjourned at 9:14am