



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
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MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, November 2, 2016 7:30 AM
Charles River Room PSAB

Present: Matt Talcoff, Chair; Glen Cammarano; Moe Handel; Michael Wilcox; Ted Owens, Virginia Fleisher; Rick Putprush; Bob Hentschel; Marty Jacobs; Bill Day; Peter Atallah; and Devra Bailin.

Not Present: Janet O'Connor; Brian Nadler; and Bruce Herman
Also Present: Anne Weinstein, Chris Thomas, and Stuart Agler

I. Approval of Minutes

The members approved the minutes for the meeting of September 7, 2016.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates

Our next meeting is scheduled for December 7th. Members also agreed to change the date of the first meeting next year to January 11th to accommodate Devra's planned vacation. Future meetings will be scheduled for the first Wednesday of the month (unless a holiday) in the Charles River Room at PSAB.

III. Plastic Bag Ban

Moe asked that he be allowed to bring Chris Thomas, a former Needham High School student, to discuss a possible plastic bag ban in Needham. Moe noted that the BOS has made a goal of evaluating this issue and may ask for the CEA's recommendations on the issue in future. Chris handed out a brochure and made a short presentation about the ban, which has already been adopted in Wellesley and Newton. He explained that the focus is single-use plastic bags given out by retailers and restaurants, which are an environmental hazard. The ban would prohibit the distribution of plastic bags less than 4 mils in thickness; give businesses a time period of between six months to a year to adjust to the ban; require that businesses use completely biodegradable bags made out of 100% recyclable materials; exempt thin-film plastic bags without handles such as newspaper, laundry/dry-cleaning, produce, meat and bulk food bags; and give the Health Department the authority to administer and enforce the ban with fines. Devra noted that she distributed the Chamber's comments on the Newton ban. Questions were

asked about the relative cost of paper vs. plastic, approach of simply charging for such bags (as has been done in Europe), and about other communities in Massachusetts which have instituted bans (31). Comments included the nuisance factor of plastic bags at the RTS, the lack of ability to recycle them at the RTS, the increased value of RTS waste if such bags are not included, the impact on restaurants, and the need to canvas the businesses for their views/concerns. No recommendations were made by the CEA members at this time.

VI. Update on Needham Crossing (Signage)

Devra met with Mark Rubin at 197 First Avenue to discuss a workable location for a “Needham Crossing: Gateway to N² Innovation District” sign visible from Route 128N. The proposed location was discussed, which also includes Town-owned land, and is acceptable in theory to Mark, who requires more detail. Devra obtained Steve Tanner’s help in reviewing the sign location, orientation, and design. Steve Tanner reviewed the location and determined that there were too many underground conduits in the area and proposed a different location on Maric’s land. Devra is waiting for the details from Steve before meeting again with Mark Rubin. Steve is working on it.

We are still awaiting the BOS’s response to Bill’s suggestion that we just rename Kendrick Street in some manner as “Needham Crossing”. Members discussed that changing the actual name would likely meet resistance from businesses located on Kendrick but they would not likely oppose if “Needham Crossing” became part of the name. Sixth Avenue in NYC is known as Avenue of the Americas. What if Kendrick Street were “Kendrick Street at Needham Crossing”? Or something like that. Then the actual exit could be so noted. Moe will forward the request to BOS.

V. Downtown Banner By-Law

Restaurateur Steve Waller from The Center Café spoke to the members about the fact that a lot of people don’t know about DiscoverNeedham.com, the downtown beautification process taking place, or about community events in the downtown. This sort of community information is important, especially to small businesses in the downtown. He would like the Town to institute a street banner program for civic events and information across the streets of the downtown.

Devra noted that this issue was brought to Town Meeting along with other sign by-law changes and the street banner amendments were edited out by Town Meeting. Devra will distribute a copy of the General By-Law amendment applicable to street banners along with the regulations which were created at the time when the draft Minutes are circulated. Bob noted that permanent posts for same were to be incorporated in the new streetscape designs but he does not believe that happened because of the Town Meeting vote. Moe noted that the business community will need to support this if it has any chance to succeed.

VI. Update from the Downtown Subcommittee: Detailed discussion and prioritization of streamlining initiatives

At our last meeting, the members began working through the list of streamlining initiatives using the September 23, 2014 “Topics of Discussion” document. It was agreed that Planning Board

members would take back the comments to the CEA and hold a discussion regarding them with the Planning Board. This was done and Marty presented the report from the Planning Board.

With respect to instituting a parking study moratorium for restaurants 100 seats or less, Marty indicated that Planning Board is now in agreement with it. They have agreed to undertake periodic parking studies themselves so that private applicants meeting the above requirements won't have to do it. He also noted that the Planning Board has not, as a matter of practice, been imposing limitations on lunch trade. There are some differences of opinion regarding restaurants over 100 seats and the Planning Board is concerned about impacts especially outside the downtown. After some discussion, Marty acknowledged regulations could be enacted to make the progress more predictable.

We turned to the next item on the list—standards for parking and traffic studies so that waivers of the requirements are transparent. Devra noted that every project triggering site plan review technically requires these expensive studies and that this issue involves both practice and Planning Board Rules and Regulations. Marty confirmed that the Planning Board was willing to spell out when these would be required. Marty cited some of the regulations used by other municipalities. Marty said the sense of the Planning Board is that it can make the regulations available in writing so that the process is more predictable.

The discussion turned to the request in 2(c) that even where parking and/or traffic studies are not waived and/or a landscaping plan is required, the filing should not be mandated until the site plan has been agreed upon by reviewing departments and the applicant. Marty noted that Lee was concerned about incomplete submittals. Devra noted that requiring the details upfront before the general layout is agreed upon is costly and wasteful. Members noted that some of the issues could be resolved by better interdepartmental communications in the prehearing stage. Rick suggested that the filing set should just show the area of landscaping not the detail—with the details to be provided once the various departments and DRB have had input. Such specificity of detail early on, Bob noted, can derail a project when an unforeseen issue arises in the field or a department raises something at the 11th hour. Marty thought if just detailed landscaping was delayed that might be something the Planning Board would consider and he will discuss it with the members.

Finally, there was a discussion of Special Permit transfers—particularly for restaurants. It was once again noted that the procedures were very different between the Planning Board and the ZBA. Since these uses are always special permit uses under the By-Law, they technically can only be changed by notice and hearing if they are personal to the applicant. The Planning Board handles these usually as de minimus changes (with caveat) and ZBA requires full notice and hearing. Devra suggested that perhaps we want to create a more limited process for these and other types of changes. A zoning change allowing a limited site plan review process might reduce the process associated with certain changes to special permit uses. Another solution is to expressly allow in the special permits that the applicant may substitute another operator who agrees to the terms and conditions of the permit. CEA Planning Board representatives will bring this issue for discussion by the Board but it also needs to be vetted by the ZBA and Town Counsel.

Due to the lack of time available for continued discussion of the feedback from the Planning Board, the discussion will be continued at our next meeting.

VII. Update on Industrial District Subcommittee

Devra simply noted that she is still waiting for Mark Gluesing, who was hired to make the elevation drawings for the CEA's meeting with the neighborhoods about zoning changes, to complete his work. Due to time constraints, no further discussions were held about this.

VIII. Update on N² Innovation District

Devra handed out the Banker and Tradesman article from October 2nd, the Boston-Crains.com article from September 16th, and the Needham Times article of September 29th. She noted publicity for Needham Crossing has been very favorable. Due to time constraints, no further discussions were held.

IX. Update on Downtown Events

Devra briefly mentioned that we have two Town events coming up—Needham Lights on Saturday December 3rd (including the Blue Tree lighting and activities in Powers Hall) and the Needham Winter Arts Festival on Saturday December 10th (with over 30 artists and artisans in Powers Hall).

X. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing, Downtown, and Elliot Street/Central Avenue Bridge.

Due to time limitations, this topic was not addressed in detail. Devra did note that the detours around Highland Avenue during the demolition of the old bridge at that interchange will take place over the weekend (November 4-6).

XI. Other Business

None.

XII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:10 a.m.