



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
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MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, April 3, 2019 7:30 AM
Charles River Room
Public Services Administration Building
500 Dedham Avenue

Present: Adam Block, Chair; Virginia Fleisher; Rick Putprush; Moe Handel; Glen Cammarano; Michael Wilcox; Anne Marie Dowd; Bob Hentschel; David Montgomery and Devra Bailin.
Not Present: Adam Meixner; Matt Talcoff; Bill Day; Tina Burgos; Ted Owens; and Stuart Agler.

I. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of March 6, 2019, with a recent revision by David on page three paragraph 3, were unanimously approved.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates

Our next meeting is scheduled for May 1st, 2019 in the Charles River Room. Future meetings will be scheduled for the first Wednesday of the month (unless a holiday) in the Charles River Room at PSAB. Devra sent out next year's calendar invites to members.

III. Comments on Economic Impact of Self-Storage Proposed Zoning Change in Mixed Use-128

Devra received an email from Kate, advising that “[t]he Select Board has asked for any comments from the CEA relative to the economic development impact of the proposed zoning to allow self-storage facilities in the Mixed Use 128 District.” Devra provided copies of the proposed Citizens Petition, which proposes the use by special permit, and that portion of our December 5, 2018 Minutes regarding the CEA’s previous discussion of self-storage uses. It was noted by the members that the CEA has not had sufficient time to do any study, conduct any research or obtain any testimony regarding the economic impact of such uses. That being said, Moe noted that the Select Board is looking to the members for any information they have which will assist the Board in making its recommendation to Town Meeting.

Adam B. noted that the existing zoning for this area was intentionally designed to remove storage as an allowed use. (Devra noted that when she and Moe were on the Planning Board in 2001, the referenced storage was mostly to commercial storage; self-storage did not exist as it does now.) Adam B. attended the Planning Board hearing on this last night. He commented that, although we are not dealing with a particular project, the proponent of the zoning intends to activate retail uses on the first floor. Devra noted that there is no requirement for such retail use in the draft zoning. Adam B. noted Adam M.'s comment from our December meeting that such storage is now necessitated as commercial building are using former storage space for amenities. Is this a use which should now be allowed?

Rick commented that there is very little positive impact on economic development because this use does not produce many jobs, is not an active use spawning other uses, and, although it would obviously create a more valuable building than exists there now, the use is simply not consistent with what we envisioned for the area. In the long run it would detract from the area—negatively impacting decisions by others to invest in ways more consistent with the urban vision, which includes our multifamily residential overlay. Certainly the housing overlay will not be advanced by this use. We have to ask what we are sacrificing if we approve the zoning change.

A question was asked what was originally envisioned with the Mixed Use-128 district. Devra noted that both with zoning in 2001 and revisions to uses in 2011, we were seeking a true mix of commercial, office, retail, consumer services, restaurants to create an urban village—walkable and vibrant. This requires active uses. With the multifamily residential overlay adopted later, we sought to incent that development, which was difficult due to the multitude of small owners. David commented that he believed the more recently adopted multifamily overlay changed the vision for the district as then embraced and put forward by the CEA and any proposed uses should be considered in the context of that changed vision.

It was noted that there has been a lot of turnover in the retail which is part of the Needham Street and Christina self-storage facility. Mike noted that the storage area is expanding at that facility. It was suggested that, if self-storage is a use in demand, we need to ask if it should be allowed in this district. Virginia noted that in most multifamily developments, storage options are part of the revenue stream, available to tenants at a cost.

Bob, noting his free market approach, suggests that there is a demand for these uses and we should let the market decide what is desirable. He doesn't believe the use detracts from other uses and, although he would not put retail at this location, the owner is willing to take that risk. He also noted that the area is not presently attractive and the new building would be.

Rick said we need to look at a couple of things. Self-storage, in his experience, requires three criteria: demographics, access, and visibility. He's not sure why this location was chosen. Also, we should be looking at the utility of the building if the business of self-storage fails. Unlike an office building, it isn't readily reusable for another use. He doesn't see this as fitting the vision we had, nor the highest and best use of property. Rick was curious as to why the owner purchased the property when the use being proposed for it was not a use allowed by the zoning.

It was noted that this zoning change doesn't just authorize one storage facility; it authorizes the use, albeit by special permit. Adam B. noted that one Planning Board member noted that the provision of a special permit is not sufficient protection against multiple self-storage uses. She expressed concern that this was a slippery slope of a use that will lead to more units being proposed. Adam B. noted that the attorney for the proponent argued that the Planning Board can deny future special permits. Devra and Anne Marie agreed with the Planning Board member; the Planning Board cannot deny a special permit for arbitrary and capricious reasons. The fact that a facility already exists is not adequate grounds for denial.

Moe indicated that this thoughtful discussion was very helpful. It was agreed that Devra will forward these Minutes (once reviewed by the members to make sure all comments are included and accurately reflected), as well as the discussion which took place on December 5th. Moe noted that the Select Board is meeting Tuesday. Devra will get the Minutes out by Thursday; members are asked to make any changes by Monday so she can forward them to the Town Manager by Tuesday.

IV. Discussion of CEA Priorities/Future Goals

Members were provided with copies of Adam B.'s and Anne Marie's draft CEA 2019 Priorities, Devra's How to effectuate streamlining changes (with numbers relating to Topics of Discussion) dated February 23, 2017, and Topics of Discussion with Lee Newman's comments dated November 2, 2016. Comments have been received from Stu, Virginia, David and Matt.

Matt sent an email asking the CEA to focus on Wexford/Charles Street, as well as Needham Heights business. There was discussion of what the CEA might do to foster experiential retail and the current move by online giants to create small brick and mortar storefronts to highlight their offerings. How do we increase foot traffic in the retail areas? How can we make it easier to permit outdoor seating and other amenities along the streetscape to encourage foot traffic? If we widen sidewalks but don't allow for street furnishings, displays and seating, what have we accomplished? Use of parklets was envisioned but not encouraged.

Due to time constraints, there was no time for further discussion today.

V. Report on Industrial Zoning (HC1) from Planning Board Hearing

The zoning has been put over until the fall Town Meeting in late October. The Planning Department engaged an expert, after the Planning Board closed the public hearing, to prepare three dimensional drawings of the zoning. Although the height along and distance from Gould and Highland where increased height is allowed has been discussed (and highlighted), the Planning Department and Planning Board did not change it. When she met with the consultant prior to her engagement, Devra noted that the height, based on comments obtained during CEA meetings, should probably be 40ish feet along Gould and Highland and the allowance of increased height about 150' from those streets. After her modeling, the consultant essentially agreed with those solutions. While Devra was on vacation, it was determined that the site plan Mark Gluesing provided on the zoning underestimated the size of the parking structure necessary for the as of right construction. The Planning Department concluded, and

the Planning Board agreed, that this problem required the zoning to be put off, as they could not resolve. Devra has subsequently proposed a solution, which is now being explored.

VI. Report on Chestnut Street Zoning from Planning Board Hearing January 29, 2019

Devra provided the members with a copy of the zoning proposal. The height has been reduced to five stories or 60'. Moe noted that advocating for more multifamily housing at this time creates a disagreement between the Planning Board and the majority of the Select Board. Anne Marie noted that the Chestnut Street crosswalk near Roche Bros. is very dangerous and adding increased traffic problematic. It was noted that visibility in that area is poor. Bob noted that allowing vehicles in the Junction commuter rail parking lot to exit directly onto Chestnut Street should probably not be allowed.

VII. Update on Needham Crossing/N² Innovation District

Devra and Mike are continuing their work on new N2 signage.

VIII. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing

Devra noted that the intersection of Oak, Christina and Needham Street, Newton's MassWork's grant, was supposed to begin this week. (Needham's share of the MassWork grant, the signal at First Avenue, was completed some time ago.) There is still no word on the actual start date on the Corridor Project. Glen noted that the State has not finalized its takings as to his property. We also have no indication of where the project will start.

IX. Update from Downtown Subcommittee

There were no updates at this time.

X. Other Business

Devra briefly noted the following items: (1) The State's Economic Assistance Coordinating Council has approved a proposal to grant tax breaks on businesses that move into vacant storefronts, provided the municipality agrees to give its own award. Final guidelines are pending. (2) The DPW storage building at the Transfer Station has been named the Jack Cogswell Building. (3) We received a response back from TMAC regarding our concerns about pedestrian safety on Garden Street due to vehicles taking abrupt lefts to avoid the train signal. TMAC has recommended that police enforcement be increased and that the stop bar be repainted. (4) Candel Therapeutics has moved into 117 Kendrick lab space—it is a life science company. (5) Acorns has closed. Devra understood it was a choice on the part of the owners. (6) Coworking spaces are looking to the suburbs including Industrious and WeWork.

Mike noted that the N2/Needham Crossing Corporation paid for Graffito to do a report on placemaking, signage, encouraging shared services (e.g. food trucks), access to natural amenities, and the like in Needham Crossing. He wants to make a presentation to the Town and other business owners; he's working with Devra to arrange with the Town Manager's Office. The target date is late April for the meeting and Devra will let members know so that they can attend.

XI. Adjourn

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