

Minutes
Council of Economic Advisors
Wednesday, December 4, 2019, 7:30 a.m.
Public Services Administration Building - Charles River Room
500 Dedham Avenue
Needham, MA

Members Present: Stuart Agler, Adam Block, Tina Burgos, Glen Cammarano, Anne Marie Dowd, Virginia Fleisher, Maurice Handel, Adam Meixner, David Montgomery, Rick Putprush, Michael Wilcox.

Members Absent: Bill Day, Ted Owens, Robert Hentschel, Matthew Talcoff.

Others Present: Lee Newman, Director of Planning and Community Development; Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager; Daphne Collins, Zoning Administrative Specialist

Adam Block, Chair, opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m.

1. Minutes of October 2, 2019

Rick Putprush moved to adopt the Minutes of October 2, 2019. Glen Cammarano seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

2. CEA/Select Board Chair/Vice Chair Meeting Update

Mr. Block and Anne Marie Dowd, Vice Chair, met with the Select Board Chair and Vice Chair to identify joint core area of focus for 2020. Three areas of focus were selected for their potential economic development impact:

1. to identify the composition of the existing core businesses by clusters and then to identify the congruent ancillary medium size businesses to approach and attract;
2. to continue the efforts to extend the Industrial Zoning to HC1, HC2 & HC3; and
3. to foster and support a strong small business community.

Also discussed was the selection of the new Economic Development Director.

3. Industrial Zoning (HC1)

Lee Newman, Director of Planning and Community Development, reported that the proposed zoning change from Industrial Zoning to Highway Commercial 1 failed to obtain the necessary 2/3 majority by 22 votes. Concerns about the proposed zoning change were about traffic, density and scale.

The Planning Board (PB) met on December 3rd to determine whether to reintroduce a modified zoning change at Spring Town Meeting. Planned in this effort is to (i) meet with the Finance Committee; (ii) allocate funds to reengage the consultants to adjust presentation materials; and (iii) continue the PB subcommittee meetings on the issue. Ms. Newman noted that there was a 2001 study by Goody Clancy identifying that a rezone would have an economic benefit for the Town.

Liz Grimes is leading the PB subcommittee comprised of members of the CEA, Select Board, Finance Committee and PB to determine the next steps and response to the concerns raised regarding density, FAR, and traffic impacts. There will be meeting December 17th at 8:00 a.m.

Moe Handel advocated to proactively engage Town Meeting and the Finance Committee members throughout the process as there are many competing Town issues on their plates. Communication and education on the subject must be improved.

Adam Meixner advocated reaching out and surveying Town Meeting members to better understand their concerns on HC1.

Mr. Block encouraged CEA members contact Town Meeting members. The main issue for the opposition is the traffic impact. However, the Traffic Report indicated that the traffic issue wasn't as bad as the perception.

There was concerned that decision makers do not reflect the demographics most impacted by this zoning change, namely 30-40-year-old family households. Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager, countered that the Town's new Public Information Officer is communicating with this population through social media channels.

4. Economic Development Director Search Update

Ms. Fitzpatrick updated that the Economic Development position search will take place in 2020.

5. Babson MCFE – Needham Business Score Card - Update

Ms. Newman reported that the Babson MCFE program had selected the Town's Score Card Application for consultation by Babson students. The consultation services will begin in January through June. Ms. Newman will be meeting with Ms. Fitzpatrick to discuss the program details prior to the execution of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Town and Babson. She will update Mr. Block after the meeting.

6. Update on Needham Crossing/N² Innovation District/Infrastructure Improvements

a) Signage Update

Michael Wilcox reported that Normandy had approved the hiring of a consultant to improve the wayfinding and pedestrian experience in Needham Crossing; and that the refashioning of 5 existing gateway signs is on hold so that they can be included in the design consultant's scope of work. Designs are expected to be ready in early 2020 for review and comment. Ms. Fitzpatrick reported that there is a proposed budget appropriation of \$25,000 to leverage the work. She will meet with Mr. Wilcox to discuss further.

Mr. Wilcox noted that obtaining easement approvals from property owners for sign locations are challenging and ongoing. Mr. Wilcox asked for Ms. Fitzpatrick's assistance in the sign easement location request on DCR property.

Ms. Newman stated that once the sign designs are ready, they are required to go before the Design Review Board.

b) N2 Traffic Improvements

Daphne Collins, Zoning Administrative Specialist, reported that the Engineering and Highway Department have advanced the following:

Kendrick Street and Fourth Avenue preliminary Traffic Light Study

Accident counts at the intersection are being collected and the study on no-left on Kendrick Street to Fourth Avenue and no-left on Fourth Avenue to Kendrick Street is in the queue.

300 First Street

The Town painted 40 foot by 8 feet long triangles on the corners of the driveway of 300 First Street to discourage parking right up to corner. This was in response to a complaint placed by Intrum Corporation that their tenants were having difficulties exiting their driveway on to First Street because of blocked sight lines onto First Street.

Third Avenue and Kendrick Street Interchange Redesign and Reconstruction

Ms. Fitzpatrick reported that the interchange is slated for redesign and reconstruction as required by the Normandy MEPA permitting requirements. It will require a small taking from the Coca-Cola site. The project is not yet funded. Funding is to come from traffic mitigation funds and Normandy.

7. Downtown Business Initiatives

a) Parking Signage Update

Ms. Fitzpatrick reported that the downtown parking wayfinding signs were installed. The Town Engineer ordered three additional signs for possible additional locations. Ms. Collins will forward the map identifying the location of the parking signs to CEA.

b) Small Business Saturday – November 30, 2019

Tina Burgos reported that the Small Business Saturday was hit or miss. She thought there was less traffic than last year though there was more marketing this year. She thought the late marketing efforts may have affected the outcome. She was disappointed in the lack of support from the Chamber.

She described the tactical implementation of the marketing efforts was done by the local businesses. The Chamber provided only limited marketing support which was principally member to member at the tail end of the campaign which was of little consequence to the downtown businesses. The need for local businesses is marketing efforts to consumers. Anne Marie Dowd inquired if this would be one the responsibility of the Economic Development Director. Ms. Newman said that it was.

Mr. Block understood that local businesses are so frustrated by the lack of support from the Chamber that they are thinking of discontinuing their membership. Ms. Burgos said that the \$450 annual Chamber membership fee is a hardship for many small businesses.

Ms. Burgos provided copies of *Where to Go in Needham*, a fold out map identifying all the small businesses and restaurants in downtown, that she funded and printed with the help of Studio LaPlancha, a local graphic designer. She thought this type of initiative directed to consumers benefitting both the business community and consumers would be an appropriate initiative for the Chamber to support. She has found the Chamber not to be interested in cooperating or discussing these types of initiatives. She is particularly concerned as many small businesses and restaurants are struggling.

Mr. Block suggested reconvening the Small Business Subcommittee for 2020 to focus on the needs of Needham's small businesses. Mr. Block would like to see the future Economic Development Director and the Public Information Officer working on CEA initiatives that support and foster small businesses.

Ms. Burgos said that there is a group of local businesses that meet to support each other in the absence of support from the Chamber. She was providing Instagram training to this group. This group will be meeting in 2020 to decide their priorities. Ms. Fitzpatrick expects the future Economic Development Director to support this group and these kinds of initiatives.

Mr. Handel thought that if the Chamber is not delivering on their support of small businesses, as was understood from the transitioning of the Needham Business Alliance over to the Chamber, they need to be made aware. Mr. Block will meet with Greg Reibman regarding the concerns raised and to garner more support for small businesses.

Ms. Burgos informed that the *Where to Go in Needham* maps are being made available to Louise Condon to include in newcomers' packets. It was suggested that the maps be available to hotels in the Needham Crossing area and at town festivals – such as Needham Lights and Winter Arts Fest.

Discussed was the need for promoting Downtown businesses directed to the Needham Crossing, Trip Advisors and BID-Needham Hospital employees.

Members to serve on the Small Business Subcommittee are Mr. Block, Ms. Burgos, Ms. Dowd, Mr. Handel, and Mr. Putprush.

Ms. Fitzpatrick informed that there is an \$8,000 request to Town Meeting to cover Town Festivals which are no longer funded by the Needham Business Alliance and cannot be funded by the Chamber because they are cultural activities and not business drivers.

c) Needham Lights – December 14, 2019

In response to Ms. Burgos direction that Needham Lights is primarily a downtown restaurant driver, Ms. Collins reported that downtown Needham restaurants were invited to place materials promoting their restaurants at a table dedicated to #EatShop Needham at the event.

d) Downtown Snow Removal Pilot Program

Ms. Collins reported that the special sidewalk snow removal equipment has been purchased and is being inventoried into the Town fleet. It is expected to be ready for the next snow event.

e) Free Downtown Holiday Parking

Ms. Fitzpatrick reported that there will be no Free Downtown Holiday Parking this year. There were complaints that the free parking spaces were being occupied by employees for long term.

f) Olin College

Mr. Putprush suggested Olin College be approached to conduct a contest for engineering students to arrive at solutions to traffic problems.

8. Planning and Community Development Business Permits Issued

Ms. Newman reported on Planning Board business Special Permits:

- Boston Children's Hospital plans to buy the property next to Trip Advisors to locate their children's orthopedic department and for medical offices. The property must be rezoned to allow the use. Children's Hospital is considering a Citizen's Petition instead of a Zoning Article. They will be preparing a Traffic Study and Fiscal Impact Analysis. Children's Hospital will be meeting with the Select Board and Finance Committee within the next 30 days. They expect to come before the PB at the end of January. A Public Hearing is expected in February prior to the Spring Town Meeting. Children's Hospital is committed to paying full real estate taxes. They plan on providing a shuttle service.
- NBC/Universal was issued a Certificate of Occupancy and is open.

Ms. Collins reported on the following Zoning Board of Appeals business Special Permits:

- Dunkin, 397 Great Plain Avenue and 1201 Highland Avenue changed ownership to ND Donuts, LLC.

9. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 a.m.