



Building a Better Brookline

**Economic Development
Advisory Board**
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Meeting Minutes: December 7, 2015

Planning for a Changing Brookline Part Two: “How to Get What We Want from Developers”

Attendees:

EDAB Members Present: Paul Saner, Anne Meyers, Ken Lewis, Tom Nally, Carol Levin, Don Warner, Susan Houston, Marilyn Newman, Cliff Brown

EDAB Members Absent: Bob Sperber, Al Raine, Derrick Choi

Economic Development Division: Andy Martineau, Kara Brewton

Materials: Agenda, EDAB notes from 6/7/15, Powerpoint

Guests Panelists: Jennifer Gilbert, Ted Tye, Ken Goldstein, George Cole

There were approximately 60 residents also in attendance, including current Selectmen, members of boards and commissions, and the general public.

1. Opening Remarks/Introduction of Panel

- Paul Saner opened the meeting by explaining that EDAB has been sponsoring a series of workshops over the past several months. The first workshop focused on establishing criteria for successful redevelopment projects from a neighborhood perspective. It was suggested that tonight’s workshop focus on how the Town can position itself to be more attractive to commercial and mixed-use developers while achieving community goals. Unlike infill residential development, commercial development isn’t generally as of right, often comes with public benefits, generates 70% more in taxes compared to residential development without school impacts, and at some locations is an opportunity to re-develop blighted sites. The workshop features a panel of speakers including, Ted Tye, George Cole, Jennifer Gilbert and Ken Goldstein representing the perspective of a developer, consultant, Town Counsel, and former Chair of the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen.

2. Moderated Session

- Ken Lewis gave a presentation on several real estate finance topics and considerations while moderating the panel discussion.

Panelist Comments:

- There are numerous opportunities for transportation- oriented development in Brookline
- There is unprecedented job and population growth happening around the greater Boston area
- For a project to happen, it has to make sense for all parties involved (developer, community etc.)

- Brookline is subject to development pressures from the various education and healthcare institutions in the area
- There is opportunity for additional hotel development in Brookline as there continues to be unmet demand for hotel rooms in the Boston area
- The Cleveland Circle development was attractive because there was already a stake in the ground when the Town created the zoning to allow the project to move forward.
- Restaurants are challenging to include in a development program, unless it is a well-established chain. At times, developers will intentionally lose money by including a restaurant in their project because it helps attract other tenants and also helps build their brand.
- A timeline of 8-10 years of process is too long for a developer to wait for a project to start. The communities that think about what they want ahead of time and make those things known, are more attractive to potential developers.
- Well executed redevelopment projects that unlock the development potential of underutilized properties can serve as a catalyst for revitalizing entire neighborhoods, as was the case with the Waterstone senior housing development in Wellesley, which prompted a number of new shops and restaurants to open in the neighboring commercial area.
- Brookline needs to decide what the community's goals are and make those known upfront to developers.
- Developers used to purchase properties contingent upon receiving all of the necessary permits for the project. This is no longer happening, so developers are assuming a lot of upfront risk particularly in a community like Brookline where they are often purchasing a property not knowing if their project idea is acceptable to the Town.
- Brookline is attractive to developers because of its proximity to the Longwood Medical Area and other major employers.
- The Red Cab process is a good example of the community working with potential developers to figure out what it would take for a project to be feasible and acceptable by the community.
- Brookline has supply issues with office space. The Town is not viewed as a major commercial market because of the limited number of development opportunities present and because of prohibitive zoning.
- Programmed green space can make a big difference in a development vs requiring unprogrammed green space that does not lend any benefit to the community.
- Brookline has a limited number of identifiable development opportunities. We could generally name the sites that have potential for redevelopment. The Town should try to get out front of projects to identify what they want to see happen at those sites.
- Land costs are fungible. A developer can more accurately value property and negotiate accordingly when a community is clear about what the process and criteria are for a project to move forward.
- It takes a strong developer to get a project approved in Brookline
- The community and Town Meeting need to be on the same page for a zoning change to pass

- Fisher Hill and Red Cab are both great examples of the community saying what they want upfront and then working with developers to try and make it happen.
- Neighborhoods and the Town generally are most effective when they proactively attend meetings and are constructive in their participation, focusing on achievable goals and leaving emotion out of it. Neighbors need to participate early on in the process before “the train leaves the station.”
- Design Advisory Teams do a lot of the heavy lifting.
- The Town should design new zoning by-laws around transit oriented development and transit to encourage new kinds of development and new kinds of residences that do not require as much parking.

3. Audience Questions/Comments

- New ideas have an associated cost, how can the town get developers to build parking for existing residents? Parking is part of a larger community discussion. More developers and communities are addressing parking issues with services like Uber and Zipcar in mind. Developers are also building more bike parking in urban areas.
- The Town needs to decide what its goals are and what it wants. We need a clear vision and we need to make it known. We have opportunities to achieve community goals in target areas, but we get lost in the nit-picking
- The Planning Board does not have the opportunity to actually plan.
- As a Real Estate Attorney, I have had experience working in communities with town meeting and other forms of governance. Communities with more predictable processes attract developers to build the kinds of projects they want.
- Brookline’s process adds at least a year to a project timeline, which is a major obstacle.
- Brookline’s residents are very organized and tend to get into the finer details of a project which can make things very difficult for both the town and a developer. There are some issues that just should not be town meeting issues.
- The commercial developments in Chestnut Hill took 10 years. We have to decide what we want, but we can never do that and never get there. The moment neighbors get involved, the process is derailed. How do we get ahead?
- By the time a developer comes in with a project, he/she has already done their due diligence. When you introduce new variables like town meeting and fragmented neighborhood interests, costs go up, making a project more challenging.

4. Closing Remarks/Next Steps

- Anne Meyers closed the meeting highlighting several themes that came up throughout the evening that should be discussed further including:
 - Being proactive about land use decisions
 - Create more density and transit oriented developments
 - Work to figure out what kinds of projects the town wants, and develop more flexible zoning and a more predictable process/guidelines to support those goals.