



**SMALL BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Small Business Development Committee Meeting

March 9, 2021 | 9:00 – 11:00am | via Zoom Videoconference

Committee Member Attendance: *Attendance noted as Yes (Y) or No (N)*

Raul Fernandez, Chair	Y	Jenn Mason	Y
Elias Audy	N	Anne Meyers	Y
Tracy Chen	Y	Debbie G. Miller	Y
Raj Dhanda	N	Colleen Suhanosky	Y
David Gladstone	Y	Debbie Raisner Thompson	N
Talia Glass	Y	LeRoy Watkins	Y
Melissa Tapper Goldman	N	Andrew Weiner	Y
David Leschinsky	Y		

Staff: Meredith L. Mooney and Caitlin Starr

Members of the Public: None

Materials Presented: 3/9/2021 meeting agenda, 1/26/2021 draft meeting minutes, [revised Small Business Development Committee charge](#), May 2021 Town Meeting warrant articles proposing amendments to the [general](#) and [zoning](#) bylaws to allow expanded, year-round outdoor dining, and [Planning Department slide deck presentation regarding Warrant Articles 29 and 30](#)

Zoom Recording Link: <https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/301aEqPe-FhJcNKXtBDuSL8aD6niX6a8gyRL8vcFyEvAhqGKymhYVRQEAA1O7nYZ>

Meeting Minutes

With a quorum present, Chair Raul Fernandez convened the meeting at 9:13 am.

Chair’s Remarks

Select Board Member Raul Fernandez opened the meeting by welcoming new committee members and encouraging the committee to be action-oriented and to work with staff to develop proposals to bring before the Select Board, which in recent years has demonstrated a strong willingness to support Brookline’s small business community.

January 26, 2021 Meeting Minutes

The committee voted 4-0-5 on the January 26, 2021 draft meeting minutes. [The fact that this was the first meeting to include five newly appointed committee members accounts for the high number of abstentions.]

Committee Member Introductions

As the first meeting with five newly appointed committee members, the meeting began with committee members introducing themselves and describing their interest and involvement in support Brookline's small business community and commercial areas.

Public Comment

No public comment was given. No members of the public attended the meeting.

Staff Updates: Meredith L. Mooney provided a quick recap of the SBDC's accomplishments to date and updates on several key projects and issues.

- **SBDC Accomplishments to Date:**

- Sponsoring a warrant article to redistribute underutilized special liquor licenses to higher need commercial areas, which was passed by Town Meeting in June 2020.
- Championing the creation of a Business Improvement District (BID) in Coolidge Corner by encouraging the Select Board to direct Town staff to support the BID formation efforts and the BID Steering Committee.
- Advocating for retaining the Town's COVID-era expanded and year-round outdoor dining with Town staff.
- Hosting a virtual town hall meeting series, a forum for businesses to receive updates directly from Town staff, ask questions, and discuss important issues, for Brookline businesses and nonprofits during the pandemic.

- **Updates:**

- **Outdoor seating Spring 2021 Town Meeting warrant articles:** Due to the success of the Town's temporary COVID-era expanded and year-round outdoor seating program, a multi-department staff working group have updated the Town's temporary outdoor dining program guidelines to allow for a seamless transition from a temporary to a longer-term program should Town Meeting approve two warrant articles filed by the Economic Development Division of the Planning & Community Development that would allow the Town to continue some or all of its COVID-era outdoor dining program.
- **Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP):** The Town applied for and received a grant for \$90,000-worth of technical assistance through the state's new Local Rapid Recovery Program, a COVID economic recovery initiative, to support the Coolidge Corner and JFK Crossing commercial areas. Staff will keep the committee updated on what this grant means for the Town.

- **Small Business Relief Grant Program CDBG Application:** With guidance from the Small Business Development Committee, Town staff applied for \$50,000 in funding through the Town's annual federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) allocation to replenish the Town's COVID-era Small Business Relief Grant Fund. Economic Development staff also met several times with the Community Development Division, which administers the Town's CDBG program, to request that \$100,000 of the remaining supplemental CDBG funding received through the CARES Act be put towards replenishing that grant program, as well. Staff will keep the committee updated.

Debbie Miller joined the meeting at 9:25am.

Presentation, public hearing, and vote on general and zoning bylaw amendments to allow year-round outdoor restaurant seating:

- Meredith L. Mooney, Economic Development Planner, gave a [presentation](#) on the warrant articles 29 and 30, which were sponsored by the Planning & Community Development Department. At 10:15am, Raul Fernandez opened the public hearing on Warrant Articles 29 and 30 (WAs 29 and 30) regarding the future of outdoor dining in Brookline and sought questions and comments from committee members.
- No public comment was given.
- Committee discussion focused on the need to develop a most holistic vision for our commercial areas, and the enhancing the commercial area atmosphere by encouraging much more of an "outdoor life" post-COVID, which WAs 29 and 30 align with. Weighing the trade-offs in taking away parking inventory to support outdoor dining as a commercial area amenity was also discussed.
- Repurposing parking spaces for outdoor dining will further constrain parking supply in Brookline's commercial areas, where parking availability is already a pain point. The committee expressed serious concerns about those potential impacts, and the importance of maintaining enough parking supply to accommodate visitors who are not able to walk, bike, or use public transit to visit and patronize our commercial areas. However, the committee does not view these potential concerns as a deterrent to continuing expanded outdoor dining, but rather as an important area of focus for subsequent SBDC discussions and recommendations. Several related transportation-related policies were identified for further discussion and exploration:
 - Revisiting the idea of consolidating Coolidge Corner's commercial parking by constructing a decked parking structure on the Centre Street parking lot was discussed. Consolidating parking would present the opportunity to remove on-street parking and expand Coolidge Corner's sidewalks to accommodate expanded outdoor dining and enhance the walkability and aesthetics of Coolidge Corner.
 - Reimagining other centrally located parking areas, such as the alleyway connecting Harvard Street with the Centre Street Lot and behind the Coolidge Corner Theatre.

- Providing adequate employee transportation and parking solutions. Transportation challenges to and from Coolidge Corner were identified as an issue for local businesses hiring and retaining employees. Many employees of local businesses cannot afford to live in or near Brookline and are often commuting from farther outside the area.
- Raul Fernandez mentioned a proposed initiative he had been working on with the Town's Transportation Administrator, Todd Kirrane, and Boston City Councilor Michelle Wu, and Cambridge City Councilor Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler regarding a fare-free MBTA Route 66 Bus Route, which would allow riders to hop on and off to patronize businesses along the route, as well as provide an affordable commuting option for employees who work along the route. Committee members expressed interest in this idea.
- The public hearing was closed.
- **The SBDC unanimously supported (9-0-0) a recommendation of favorable action for Warrant Articles 29 and 30.** Expanded, year-round outdoor dining will bring added vibrancy to Brookline's commercial areas and continue to provide a critical lifeline to Brookline restaurants and retail businesses alike throughout the remainder of COVID and during the post-COVID recovery process.
 - Outdoor seating is specifically identified in the SBDC's charge; the committee was tasked with exploring the viability of and providing recommendations about outdoor seating as a potential tool for supporting a thriving business community and the community at-large. Adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic expedited both the SBDC's exploration of and Brookline's experimentation with an expanded outdoor dining program.
 - The Town's COVID-era outdoor dining has been a success both in terms of restaurant participation, as well as positive feedback from the community at-large regarding the added vibrancy and activity that expanded outdoor dining has contributed to our commercial areas over the past year.
 - This COVID-era outdoor dining program is tied to the Governor's COVID state of emergency order and will end 60 days after that emergency order is lifted. Due to restrictions in our current General and Zoning By-Laws, the Town will be unable to accommodate restaurants interested in continuing expanded outdoor dining (e.g. in parking space parklets) post-COVID. Warrant Articles 29 and 30's proposed amendments would allow the Town to continue its experimentation with an expanded outdoor dining program.
 - The Town's COVID-era outdoor dining program has been an essential lifeline to Brookline's restaurants during COVID. Continued access to expanded outdoor dining post-COVID will continue to be critical for local restaurants. Restaurants currently have three phases ahead of them: getting through the remainder of COVID, post-COVID economic recovery, and the new normal. For the remainder of COVID, even as vaccinations ramp up, restaurants anticipate that customers will still maintain a strong preference for outdoor dining.
 - During the post-COVID economic recovery, which is anticipated to take 2-3 years, even as diners feel more comfortable returning to indoor dining, continued access to expanded outdoor dining will be critical. Many restaurants depleted their savings, assumed a lot of

additional loan debt, and accrued other debts, especially in back-rent owed to landlords, to keep themselves afloat through the pandemic. Additional revenue from expanded outdoor seating capacity will enable - and perhaps even expedite - restaurants' ability to make themselves whole again during the post-COVID recovery period.

Other Business

- No other business was discussed.

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 am.