



**SMALL BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Small Business Development Committee Meeting

January 26, 2021 | 9:00 – 10:00am | via Zoom Videoconference

Committee Members in Attendance: Raul Fernandez (Chair), Anne Meyers, David Leschinsky, Melissa Tapper Goldman, Debbie Miller, Elias Audy, Talia Glass, and Debbie Raisner Thompson

Committee Members Absent: Raj Dhanda

Staff: Meredith L. Mooney and Caitlin Starr

Members of the Public: None

Materials Presented: 1/26/2021 meeting agenda, 9/22/2020 and 10/22/2010 draft meeting minutes, [2020 Storefront Survey memo \(PDF\) and attachment outlining the initiatives the Town has undertaken since March 2020 to support businesses \(PDF\)](#), [Economic Development Division's December 22nd Select Board presentation regarding the 2020 Storefront Survey](#) (jump to timestamp 37:30), and [a PDF of signed legislation \(H5067 - An Act pertaining to liquor licenses in the town of Brookline\) approving the reallocation of Brookline's special liquor licenses, which the SBDC advocated for last spring Town Meeting](#)

Zoom Recording Link:

https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/6t5PJrXdrzLQKvu7krCBrymAZWmT6a82yEZ_oPxE5-VEoHBxknK0ve9yAqimlk

Meeting Minutes

With a quorum present, Chair Raul Fernandez convened the meeting at 9:10am.

Approval of September 22, 2020 and October 22, 2020 Meeting Minutes

- September 22nd and October 22nd, 2020 meeting minutes were unanimously approved with typo corrections.

Public Comment

- No public comment was given.

Chair's remarks and updates:

- The SBDC is uniquely positioned to support local business recovery post-COVID. The Select Board has been incredibly receptive to proposals (e.g. implementing 15-Minute Delivery Only signs,

decreasing and postponing licensing fees) support of efforts to support the business community throughout the pandemic, and will continue to do everything reasonable and possible to support Brookline businesses during this difficult time.

- Economic Development and Select Board staff have been working on some committee housekeeping items, specifically updating the committee's charge. The three proposed amendments to the committee charge include: implementing a cap of 15-members and specifying 3-year staggered terms, broadening the committee's initial focus on paying special attention to women and minority-owned businesses, and providing more flexibility around the committee chair position.
- The Select Board has been interviewing prospective committee members, who will soon be appointed the committee.

Staff Updates:

- **2020 Small Business Development Committee Recap:** A recap of the committee's 2020 activities was given. Subcommittees met regularly through January and February 2020. The Commercial Areas Subcommittee was preparing to facilitate a commercial areas visioning exercise with the full committee in March just before the pandemic hit. In response to the pandemic, the SBDC and Economic Development Division began hosting weekly virtual town hall meetings with the business community, which were initially well received and attended. Over the summer, those meetings transitioned to once a month. Staff would like to receive guidance from the SBDC on the future of those monthly virtual town hall meetings. During fall of 2020, the committee was primarily focused on warrant article review. After a year of being very reactive, the committee now has the opportunity to meet consistently for more robust discussion and planning around how best to support Brookline's small business community.
- Staff provided a quick recap of the 2020 Storefront Survey, as well as key business support initiatives the town has undertaken, notably licensing fee relief, the Small Business Relief Grant Program, and expanded outdoor dining. Detailed information about these initiatives can found [here](#).
- With the Small Business Development Committee's guidance, Economic Development staff have been working with various Town Hall departments to develop updated outdoor dining guidelines for the spring 2021 outdoor dining season, as well as draft warrant articles that would allow the Town to permanently retain its COVID-era outdoor dining program for Spring 2021 Town Meeting.
- Economic Development has been working with Community Development Division staff to advocate for additional Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to replenish the Town's Small Business Relief Grant program, as well as start an e-commerce technical assistance program.

Committee Discussion:

- The committee revisited its scope and focus and reaffirmed that the SBDC's focus is supporting storefront businesses, with the goal of eventually expanding to include non-storefront businesses (i.e. 2nd floor, offices).
- Available lists of local businesses and contact information were reviewed with staff.
- The committee's top priority as businesses struggle to recover from the pandemic should be to provide support and resources to local businesses and commercial areas to ensure that the community and customers return to Brookline storefronts.
- The committee advised Economic Development staff to not apply for CDBG funding for an e-commerce technical assistance program, but instead prioritize seeking additional resources to provide direct financial assistance to struggling businesses.
- The urgent need for small business employees to be vaccinated, as well as opportunities for the Town to support this need, was discussed at length. It's unclear what role the Town will play in the vaccination effort given how little vaccine supply the Town has received to date. Also unclear, to what extent the Town can deviate from the state's vaccination schedule. Select Board Member Fernandez will relay those questions to Dr. Jett, Brookline's Public Health Commissioner. The possibility for a centrally located private vaccination site was also mentioned.
- Potential commercial area activations discussed: an outdoor performance venue a la the Central Square BID's [Starlight Square](#), outdoor movie screenings with the Coolidge Corner Theatre, and more experimentation with repurposing of public spaces (e.g. parking lots) to support local restaurants.
- Potential business assistance initiatives discussed: resources for businesses in lease negotiations and renegotiations (related to the on-going issue and burden of high commercial rents). Anne Meyers volunteered to research and identify commercial lease experts who Brookline businesses could be directed to for assistance.
- Select Board Member Fernandez encouraged the committee to think critically about who can realistically be tasked with executing some of the commercial area activations and business assistance initiatives discussed during this meeting and going forward (i.e. business organizations partners, Town staff).

Other Business

- No other business was discussed.

Meeting adjourned at 10:20am.