



Building a Better Brookline

Robert Sperber, Founder Emeritus

Anne R. Meyers, Co-Chair
Paul Saner, Co-Chair
Cliff Brown
Derrick Choi
Alan Christ
Susan Houston
Kenneth Lewis
Carol Levin
Thomas Nally
Marilyn Newman
Alden Raine
Donald A. Warner

Meeting Minutes February 4, 2019

EDAB Members Present: Paul Saner (Co-Chair), Anne Meyers (Co-Chair), Cliff Brown, Derrick Choi, Alan Christ, Susan Houston, Ken Lewis, Carol Levin, Tom Nally, Marilyn Newman, Al Raine, Donald Warner

Staff: Trevor Johnson, Meredith L. Mooney

Materials Presented: Agenda (2/4/19), Revised Draft Meeting Minutes (1/7/19), Revised Draft Subcommittee Meeting Minutes (11/6/18), 2018 Draft Storefront Survey Memo, 2019-2020 EDAB Meeting Dates, Sample bios for EDAB webpage, Pop-up Presentation, Summary of the Conflict of Interest Law for Municipal Employees

Members of the Public: Jules Milner-Brage

With a quorum present, Paul Saner opened the meeting.

- **Approval of Meeting Minutes:**

- **January 7, 2019 meeting minutes were approved unanimously as amended.**
- **November 6, 2018 subcommittee meeting minutes were approved unanimously as amended by the subcommittee.**

- **2019 Façade Loan Program Promotion (Meredith L. Mooney):**

- Meredith L. Mooney called EDAB's attention to the Façade Loan Program promotional flyer included in their packets and asked for EDAB's help in promoting the program. Economic Development and Long-Term Planning opened applications for the Façade Loan Program in mid-January and had been promoting the program, applications for which are due on April 15, on social media.
- Anne Meyers asked about outreach to the Coolidge Corner Merchants' Association (CCMA).
 - The CCMA has helped amplify Façade Loan Program promotion on social media.
- Derrick Choi asked if the Façade Loan Program promotion on social media has gained much traction.
 - No, however, the promotion has been retweeted several times.
- Don Warner inquired about how much money is available in the revolving fund.
 - Trevor Johnson estimated about \$22,000.
- Ken Lewis asked how much \$10,000 will get you in façade improvements.
 - \$10,000 would most likely account for modest enhancements, however, competitive applications are typically for larger-scale projects that include energy

efficiency or accessibility improvements, priority for which is included in the project scoring criteria.

- Derrick Choi noted that accessibility improvements can be complicated and more costly.
- Ken Lewis wondered if BrooklineHub.com would be a valuable channel for promoting the Façade Loan Program. Others questioned Brookline Hub’s relevance.
- Susan Houston suggested pitching a piece on the Façade Loan Program, including interviews with past loan recipients, to the TAB.
- Anne Meyers inquired about the application process.
 - Staff scores applications. Eligible projects are presented to EDAB prior to seeking approval from the Select Board.
 - Staff will likely review applications in May or June.
- **2018 Storefront Survey Findings (Meredith L. Mooney):**
 - Meredith L. Mooney presented the 2018 Storefront Survey findings, which were outlined in a draft memo to the Select Board. The Town-wide vacancy rate increase can be attributed to vacancy rate increases in Coolidge Corner and along Commonwealth Avenue. Economic Development and Long-Term Planning staff will continue to monitor vacancy rates in those two commercial areas closely; at this point, however, this recent increase does not indicate an emerging trend that could pose long-term challenges to the vitality of Brookline’s commercial areas.
 - Marilyn Newman asked if the Coolidge Corner vacancies had been analyzed further.
 - Meredith explained that a significant amount of the Coolidge Corner vacancies were in fact under agreement, but appeared vacant at the time of the survey and were counted as vacant per the survey methodology. Several other vacancies were located on properties slated for development. The majority of the remaining vacancies had been vacant for no more than two years.
 - Ken Lewis asked for clarification about who the target audience is for the report, and suggested that the following edits be made to the draft memo:
 - Correct misleading “percent increase” to “percentage point increase”;
 - Consider a more nuanced conclusion than simply stating “the current vacancy rate increase does not appear to pose a long-term challenge”;
 - Add an acknowledgement of potential contributing factors, such as high rental rates, as well as the anticipated opening of recreational marijuana storefronts.
 - Carol Levin pointed out that the regional vacancy rate is calculated based on square footage, while the Town’s vacancy rate is calculated by storefront, and asked that this key difference be noted in the memo.
 - Cliff Brown suggested that comparing Brookline’s vacancy rate to similar communities would be a more accurate and useful indicator.
 - Don Warner asked if any outreach had been made to brokers to determine why the storefronts that had been vacant for two or more years remain vacant.
 - Susan Houston volunteered to work on exploring that question.
 - Paul Saner suggested that staff circle back with EDAB prior to the 2019 Storefront Survey for a review and discussion of the survey methodology.
- **Pop-Up Presentation and Discussion:**
 - Meredith L. Mooney gave a short presentation on retail pop-ups, outlining uses and benefits, as well as key issues and challenges to consider in exploring establishing a pop-up pilot program in Brookline.
 - Susan Houston identified effective activation of public space as a problem, and also inquired about Emily Isenberg’s role in pop-ups.

- Anne Meyers explained that Emily works with brokers and retailers to organize and design pop-ups, and also specializes in placemaking.
 - Don Warner inquired about the vacancies at the Arcade building, and noted that the Arcade would be a perfect fit for pop-ups. Based on personal experience, Don reported that pop-ups are very labor intensive, and that there's not enough incentive for a landlord to provide space to rent.
 - Al Raine commented that filling a vacancy for a temporary period is useful – some revenue is better than no revenue – but it's a lot of work.
 - However, if there is an emerging issue with retail vacancies, pop-ups could be a tool for addressing that, perhaps through a master lease and pop-up programming strategy, which would be a major undertaking.
 - Derrick Choi added that unless it was through a master lease, a pop-up program would probably be unsustainable. It would also be difficult to quantify the benefits of such a program.
 - Al Raine mentioned examples of public art programming in Boston.
 - Ken Lewis and Derrick Choi both noted that the Arcade would be a great incubator space for pop-ups and new businesses in Brookline.
 - Carol Levin noted the need for more events and programming in the winter for retailers.
 - Susan Houston asked if EDAB could identify a landlord to explore these ideas with.
 - Paul Saner posed the question 'Can EDAB play a role in what retail goes in to a potential pop-up?'
 - Given that no one seemed to oppose to further exploration of some sort of pop-up initiative in Brookline, Paul Saner suggested that the Board seek input from the Coolidge Corner Merchants Association and the Brookline Chamber, and continue to explore this idea.
- **EDAB Work Plan Review:**
 - Strategic Communications Projects:
 - Meredith L. Mooney provided an update on recent efforts to increase Planning's social media presence, and highlighted the need for EDAB's help and expertise with developing talking points about economic development, as well as other content.
 - Susan Houston expressed interest in working on the Division's website, newsletter, etc.
 - Paul Saner noted that this was a staff led initiative, and EDAB members can work directly with Meredith on communications projects.
 - Commercial Development:
 - Paul Saner identified seeking new business opportunities in our commercial areas is an EDAB focus area that needs improvement. The co-chairs will seek to add agenda items to future EDAB meetings to brainstorm ideas for recruiting new businesses/business types.
 - Outreach and Promoting Business Success:
 - Paul Saner added that EDAB needs to do a better job with outreach, especially in areas that aren't well represented in Brookline's business organizations (e.g. Washington Square).
- **Board and Staff Updates:**
 - **Airbnbs Update** (Trevor Johnson):
 - If the Town does not pass an additional local option to collect an additional tax, the state would start collecting and remitting taxes on short-term rentals, even though short-term rentals are not currently an allowed use in Brookline.

- Select Board Chair Neil Wishinsky is currently a proponent of legalizing short-term rentals at Spring Town Meeting with a 1-year sunset provision.
 - There's also a need to pass a by-law around general health and safety, a sort of "Building Code Lite" to apply to short-term rentals.
 - Marilyn Newman inquired about the issue of transparency in posting short-term rentals.
 - Cliff Brown inquired about revenue estimates.
 - Trevor Johnson responded that total revenue is not clear and that they're still working on methods for those estimates. There's an additional 3% community impact fee. 35% of that fee would be for affordable housing or general infrastructure.
 - Ken Lewis asked about how the law would conflict with condo associations.
 - Trevor replied that condo associations would always have control.
 - Marilyn Newman added that this could create some momentum for condo associations to change their policies regarding short-term rentals.
 - Trevor added that the Town could establish a local registration process that would back up condo association authority.
 - Cliff Brown commented that the Town does not seem willing to devote resources to policing short-term rental policy enforcement.
 - Trevor replied that that issue has been raised with the Building Commissioner. Building is currently struggling to complete the Lodging House inspections, so bringing on an additional person to work on enforcements – and possibly achieving economics of scale for lodging house and short-term rental inspections – has been discussed.
- **Boylston Street Open House Recap** (Trevor Johnson):
 - The Boylston Street Corridor Planning Study hosted an Open House on January 16, bringing the conversation to a larger audience, and expanding upon the process started with the Visioning Group. There was great attendance; over 70 people attended and participated in the Open House activities. Staff is now in the process of distilling feedback and comments gathered at the event.
 - Tom Nally explained the Open House's format and process for gathering comments and feedback. There was good discussion.
 - Derrick Choi inquired about the demographics of Open House attendees and asked if any businesses attended.
 - Trevor explained that some businesses and property owners did attend, and that a good number of Town Meeting members from other areas of Town were there, as well, which was encouraging.
- **Newbury College** (Paul Saner):
 - Paul Saner, along with 10 others, was appointed to the Newbury College Advisory Group.
 - The Town anticipates that an RFP will be issued by the brokerage firm that Newbury College has retained.
 - The response period to the RFP will be at some point in March. It's unclear if the college or broker will have additional rounds.
 - Newbury's goal is to close in late summer and have a signed purchase and sales agreement to present to the Attorney General around July 1.
 - The college tried to sell the property a year ago, but then the Attorney General informed them of the required process.

- The Town will likely engage a real estate investment advisor, who has experience in other mergers and acquisitions in higher education.
 - George Cole will likely be voted as the twelfth member of the committee.
 - Paul will keep EDAB advised.
 - Marilyn Newman asked if the Attorney General would take into account other public purposes of the property beyond price.
 - Paul Saner responded that the college would look to maximize its mission.
 - Carol Levin inquired about how the Attorney General would view the Town using eminent domain.
 - Paul replied that that was unclear.
 - Ken Lewis inquired about how the college's timeline might align with the Town's 40B safe harbor ending.
 - Paul had pointed out an affordable housing buyer as a possibility.
 - Cliff Brown added that a better assessment of market value is needed.
- **Waldo-Durgin (Alan Christ):**
 - The Coolidge Corner Study Committee is in the fourth revision of design guidelines, and will soon be going through the first draft of zoning.
 - The whole parcel is in one zoning district.
 - One tricky aspect of the zoning is that the mixed use zoning overlay may include the entire block, not just the building, so the FAR writing is more complicated.
 - Ken Lewis asked if they'll have a more active uses for the ground level.
 - Alan explained that there is co-working and internet café space on the ground floor.
 - Anne Meyers added that the committee is meeting on Wednesday regarding zoning.
 - Paul Saner explained that there's a tight timeline for Chestnut Hill Realty's sustainability commitments and targets.
- Ken Lewis asked when **2 Brookline Place** will open.
 - Trevor Johnson replied that he would inquire and follow-up with that information.
- Paul Saner provided an update that a proposal for a hotel at **30 Webster Street** would be on an upcoming Planning Board agenda. The project would require zoning relief, especially around parking. The district does allow hotel use, however.
- **Parking Benefit District:**
 - Paul Saner explained that there's the possibility that a Parking Benefit District warrant article might be filed for May Town Meeting. There are still some issues that need to be worked out with Advisory.
 - Anne Meyers added that she had attended a meeting about the proposed Parking Benefits District last week with Brookline Village merchants.
 - Additional revenue above the Town parking rate could be used to make enhancements in a given parking district.
 - Most of the meeting attendees were interested in the idea, but executing the concept will be complicated.
 - A survey is currently being circulated amongst Brookline Village merchants to gather feedback.

- Brookline Village is a better pilot area because it's smaller than Coolidge Corner.
 - Ken Lewis asked if the Town parking lot would be included in the Parking Benefit District.
 - Anne replied that she hadn't seen a map of the proposed Parking Benefit District boundaries yet.

- **Housekeeping Items:**
 - **Conflict of Interest Training:** Staff asked EDAB members to sign and return the Acknowledgement of Receipt page from the Summary of the Conflict of Interest Law for Municipal Employees, which members had received and reviewed prior to the meeting, for Town staff to keep on record.

 - **FY20 EDAB Meeting Calendar:** EDAB members received a schedule of EDAB meetings from July 2019 through June 2020.

 - **Future vote on EDAB chairs (Paul Saner):**
 - Paul Saner suggested that EDAB should vote on its leadership, and that he, Anne Meyers, and Kara Brewton feel strongly that it's best to maintain the Board's co-chairs given EDAB's size and scope.
 - The co-chairs believe that it would be good to take a formal vote at an upcoming meeting and wanted to give EDAB members advanced notice.

 - **EDAB Member Bios (Co-Chairs):** Templates for EDAB member bios, which will be added to EDAB's webpage, were included in the meeting packet.
 - Anne Meyers and Paul Saner assessed members' comfort with including their email addresses on the Town website as a way of promoting transparency and encouraging citizen feedback.
 - Cliff Brown added that members could create a specific email address for EDAB/public purposes.
 - Given that some members were uncomfortable with posting their email addresses online, it was decided that only the co-chairs would list their emails.

 - **Agenda Preparation (Paul Saner):** The co-chairs wanted to demystify how agendas are put together. The current process is that the co-chairs meet with staff 7-10 days prior to the EDAB meeting to draft the agenda. Members should contact the co-chairs to add or lead agenda items.

Meeting adjourned.