

Joint Meeting of the Boards, Commissions, and Committees and the Department of Planning and Community Development Staff Responsible for Oversight of Development in Brookline

March 2, 2020

7:08 – 10:06 PM

Town Hall, 6th Floor Select Board's Hearing Room

Thanks to EDAB member Tom Nally for writing these meeting notes. Because this was a multi-Board & Commission panel, and there was not a quorum of any individual Board that discussed or voted on any specific topic, these notes will not be voted on as official minutes by each Board & Commission – they are provided here for reference.

Meeting Summary

Select Board member Ben Franco welcomed everyone to the meeting that is intended to educate and update board members and to improve coordination between Town boards. Mr. Franco reviewed the agenda, explained the use of note cards to submit questions for the participants, and offered special thanks to Ken Lewis who organized this session. He expanded on the meeting objectives and listed items outside the scope of his meeting.

Overview: Development Planning and Permitting in Brookline

Mr. Franco said that development in Brookline can get complicated and reviewed the alphabet soup of acronyms and the process associated with development in town. He also showed a chart of the organizational structure related to development.

Development Department Updates

Alison Steinfeld, Planning Director, described a chart of functions and staff in the Planning and Community Development Department. Polly Selkoe, Assistant Director for Regulatory Planning, described the function of her division and illustrated some examples of issues that she and her staff address. Kara Brewton, Economic Development Director, discussed the work of the Economic development and Long Term Planning Division in the areas of planning policy including drafting effective bylaws, data driven studies such as the Comprehensive Plan, research and development examples, smaller studies such as the Lower Boylston Street Corridor Study, and strategic planning activities such as development-related Town Meeting priorities. Virginia Bullock, Senior Housing Planner, described the importance of collaboration working with several departments. She described categories and

processes of project development for redevelopment of major parcels and for affordable housing.

Polly Selkoe described categories and processes for project reviews for design review, preservation, inclusionary zoning, appeals, and comprehensive permit site plan and design review. She discussed the example of the Waldo Durgin Special Permit Process and the process after Special Permit to illustrate the elements of project review. Tina McCarthy, Preservation Planner, described project reviews involving preservation, indicating that 60% of the cases require administrative review by staff. She reviewed projects of the Preservation Action Plan. Maria Morelli, Senior Planner, reviewed 40B statistics for 11 projects permitted between 2016 and 2019 that produced 199 affordable units, and three projects proposed in 2020 with 60 affordable units. She described examples of site plan and design review for 40B projects and elements of the review process.

Alison Steinfeld explained the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) is likely to hover around the 10% mark for the next several years and could change based on the total number of housing units counted in the 2020 Census. Ms. Steinfeld explained the new approach related to Warrant Articles that will focus on articles that need further evaluation.

Planning Department Questions and Answers

Mr. Franco raised questions submitted to him, first asking how the planning department staff coordinates. Ms. Steinfeld described weekly regulatory meetings. In response to a question, Ms. Steinfeld said that all pending 40B project applications will continue through the review process if Brookline has reached the 10% SHI level. A question was asked about how to make the Planning Department more productive. Ms. Steinfeld said that two years ago a study was begun that began to identify inconsistencies in the Zoning Bylaw and policy issues of note. The next phase of the will be underway as staff time permits. Mr. Franco asked about public input in the planning process, and public meetings and use of the web site were mentioned.

Development Board Updates: Membership, Accomplishments, and Policies

Planning Board: Chair Steve Heikin of the Planning Board began the next part of the meeting focusing on the work of the Boards and commissions. He described the composition of Planning Board membership and the disciplines represented, and he listed the key responsibilities including advising the Zoning Board of Appeals on projects requiring Special Permits or Variances, review and approval of sign and façade applications, Design Review and appointment of Design Advisory Teams, support and review of major Town planning initiatives, development of Design Guidelines, and making recommendations to Town Meeting on proposed zoning amendments.

Mr. Heikin then reviewed several significant projects and how they changed through the planning Board process. The Cleveland Circle project is mostly located in Boston, but part of the hotel is in Brookline. The program of uses evolved and the massing and design of the hotel, housing, and parking changed as the process continued.

A special committee developed a new zoning overlay district that was passed by Town meeting, and a Design Advisory Team helped to shape the design of the hotel now under construction at the intersection of Route 9 (Washington Street) and Brookline Avenue, the Hilton Garden Inn, creating a new gateway for the town.

Twenty Boylston Street, under construction at High Street, went through a Design Advisory Team process resulting in a better parking solution.

In Hancock Village a 36 unit 40B was revised to eliminate first floor parking, locate the entrance at grade, and improve the building design.

At 54 Auburn Street the building that originally filled the site was reduced from 29 to 12 units with larger setbacks and more site open space, more appropriate for its setting.

Mr. Heikin concluded his remarks describing three current initiatives of the planning Board:

- Review of design guidelines for the “Deadrick” projects,
- Enhanced requirements for Counterbalancing Amenities for projects in commercial districts and other significant impact projects, and
- Design Guidelines and possible zoning modifications for Beacon Street, a joint project of the Planning Board and Preservation Commission subcommittee.

Housing Advisory Board (HAB): Roger Blood, Chair of HAB, described the three elements of affordable housing established after the phase out of rent control in the 1980s: the Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw, the Affordable Housing Trust fund, and the Housing Advisory Board. The goal of the Board is to create and preserve affordable housing in Brookline.

He described the seven member Board that includes four members with diverse professional experience and three designated representatives required by the Bylaw.

The Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw requires multifamily developers to contribute to affordable housing units directly on development sites or indirectly by making a cash contribution to the Town’s Affordable Housing Trust (allowed for projects with six to 15 units). The Town can negotiate a range of affordable housing plans for large projects that exceed 15 units. Inclusionary Zoning has produced over 100 affordable units in more than 20 projects. The Bylaw will be strengthened in 2020 with a higher fee schedule and an expanded definition to include “workforce housing.”

The Affordable Housing Trust Fund has received \$14 million from 1998 to 2019 from payments from housing developers, contributions from the Town, and interest. The

Trust Fund provides predevelopment loans and longer term funding when subsidies are insufficient to make projects financially feasible in Brookline.

Mr. Blood reviewed seven projects to create and preserve affordable housing units:

- 100 Center Street to preserve affordable rentals in an “expiring use” building.
- St. Aidans where 36 affordable rental and condominium units were created.
- Olmsted Hill with 24 affordable condominiums.
- Dummer Street, and Brookline Housing Authority project with 32 low-income rental units.
- 51-57 Beals Street, done in partnership with the Pine Street Inn that provides 31 affordable lodging house units.
- 370 Harvard Street under construction with 62 senior rental housing units.
- Newbury College site that will include 18 moderate income/workforce affordable condominium units.

Mr. Blood described a project seeking to develop 40 to 65 affordable senior living units on the Kent Street parking lot. Responses to the RFP issued in 2019 are under review. At 90 Longwood Avenue, substantial renovation of 99 “micro housing” senior units are underway by the Brookline Housing Authority.

Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB): Paul Saner, Co-Chair of EDAB described the charge and membership of the Board. The Board makes recommendations on economic development, redevelopment, and renewal policies and economic development strategy to the Town Administrator and Select Board. The 12 member EDAB Board includes members with a wide range of expertise.

Mr. Saner cited five projects advanced by the Board, which have tax certainty agreements that will guarantee \$8 million in income for the Town:

- Homewood Suites hotel on the former Red cab site which required a zoning change.
- Hilton Garden Inn hotel part of the River Road zoning overlay district established for the Industrial island block.
- Cleveland Circle/AC Marriot Hotel
- Brookline Place Children’s Hospital Development
- Waldo Durgin Mixed Use development

Payments in lieu of taxes have been negotiated for 850 Boylston Street being purchased by Brigham and Women’s Hospital and 730 Commonwealth Avenue acquired by Boston University.

Mr. Saner summarized key findings of the Brookline Fiscal Advisory Committee (BFAC) and highlighted four charts that illustrate the Town’s growing budget gap, AAA rating

concerns, increasing debt service burden, and declining reserves. The key conclusion of BFAC is that the Town must adopt a multi-faceted sustainable approach to dealing with the structural funding gap before it becomes a crisis. The report provided 18 specific recommendations in four sections. Two economic development recommendations are:

- Aggressively pursue new economic development to increase the vibrancy of the town's economy, generate new property tax revenues, and minimize the burden on residential tax payers.
- Zoning changes to incentivize new development and encourage increased density in transit oriented areas.

Mr. Saner described analysis that demonstrated that to offset the debt service of a \$100 million school construction project funded by a 25 year bond at a 3.8% interest rate, tax revenue generated by approximately 465,000 square feet of new development would be required.

Mr. Saner showed several examples of "Single story temporary taxpayer commercial buildings along Beacon Street" constructed in the early Twentieth Century and recent "organic commercial development" under existing zoning located along Route 9. Before the 1970s, zoning allowed the Floor Area Ratio density for these sites on Beacon Street was 4.0 (allowing construction of a building with floor area of four times the lot area). It is now 2.0.

Opportunities for zoning reform were cited by Mr. Saner:

- Proactive up-zoning of mixed-use commercial corridors
- Contextual form-based density to incentivize financially feasible redevelopment opportunities
- Achieve multiple Town objectives: economic development, housing affordability, sustainability, and diversity
- New small business opportunities with ground level local service and retail
- Build upon the strength of Brookline's location, the Housing Production Plan, the Economic development Five-Year Plan, and Warrant Article 15 eliminating commercial parking minimums in the TPOD

Challenges for zoning reform include:

- Site size and dimensions and assembly opportunities in commercial corridors
- Multi-family residential highest and best use in the Boston metro market that expands residential development into commercial zones, as residential uses yields much less tax revenue per square foot than commercial uses that places little demands on municipal services

- Commercial up-zoning for larger “institutional quality” sites in advance of development puts the town at risk of new construction someday becoming tax exempt
- Residential concerns about density: traffic, parking, shadow impacts, etc.

Finally, Mr. Saner described the redevelopment of the Newbury College site and the process leading to the current status of the redevelopment plan. He quoted from the BFAC report saying that successful economic development is a complex process and depends upon a robust and opportunistic long-range planning process.

Preservation Commission: David King, Chair of the Preservation Commission, and Vice-Chair Elton Elperin, listed the members of the commission and indicated the eight local historic districts defined by Article 5.6 Historic Districts By-law. The commission also operates under Article 5.3 Demolition Bylaw to review proposed demolition projects. *Design Guidelines for Local Historic Districts* describe projects covered in historic districts including new construction and critical design details.

Mr. Elperin described some of the commonly reviewed elements in historic districts, and Mr. King illustrated the results of the commission’s reviews with original, before review, submittals, and approved photographs and drawings of 40 Dunster Road, Core House renovations on Walnut Street, 1 Wellington Terrace, and new construction set back from the street on 239 – 241A Walnut Street.

Mr. King discussed the demolition review process which offer results in more appropriate solutions that save or minimize changes to historic structures. He described projects at the Coolidge Corner Theater, 46 Station Street, and St. Aidans.

Projects undertaken by the Preservation Commission include review guidelines for Beacon Street, and evolving positions in response to climate change, the housing shortage, and changing practices for certain materials and details.

Climate Action Committee: Werner Lohe, Co-Chair of the Select Board’s Climate Action Committee, said that the committee is charged with focusing on environmental sustainability. The committee has 15 members including representatives of a range of boards and committees, advocacy groups, and citizens at large. Many professional disciplines are represented on the committee, which meets monthly.

Mr. Lohe committee’s mission and Climate Action Plan that includes the goals of zero emissions by 2050, promoting resiliency, making Brookline a leader in sustainability, promoting awareness on the need for action, serving as liaison between the Town and the public, monitoring the Town’s efforts, and reporting annually to Town officials and the public.

He reviewed the history of climate action in Brookline from origins in 2000 with the founding of Climate Action Brookline to 2019 passage of the enactment of the bylaw

prohibiting fossil fuel infrastructure in new construction and certain renovations, the first such restriction in the eastern United States. He focused on the origins of the efforts and recent work of the Select Board's Climate Action Committee created by Town Meeting in 2008. Leadership achievements include the 2017 Town Meeting resolution for a Net Zero Ninth School, and fossil fuel free design for the Driscoll School.

Mr. Lohe shared images related to climate change, public health, poverty, immigration, mass migration, unsustainable economic growth, and prosperity possible beyond growth. Mr. Lohe noted that St. Mary's Street is only 13 feet above sea level. He highlighted some desirable trends for fossil-fuel-free building upgrades, smaller residential units, on-site electricity generation and storage, construction materials with low embedded carbon, and greater density building up and not out. He said that the vision is redesigning civilization.

Board Chair Questions and Answers

Mr. Franco shared questions for Board Chairs from the audience. In response to a question, Mr. Heikin described the process of changing zoning with a required 2/3 vote of Town Meeting. Mr. Blood discussed the Governor's Housing Choice Bill, which he thought will eventually be passed by the legislature, that contain many worthwhile provisions including supporting zoning changes to allow density increases. Mr. King described concerns for allowing accessory units too large for their sites. Mr. Saner expressed support for the Governor's bill as it would allow more mixed use developments. Mr. Lohe said that the bill would get people to endorse change.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Mr. Franco summarized some of the points made in the meeting concerning activities of the very busy staff and the work of the many boards and committees focused on aspects of development in Brookline.

He discussed the post meeting challenges, saying that all participants are better informed about development and that collaboration is possible. He hopes that the discussion will continue in the form of an annual forum, that the boards and commissions can work together, and that government functions best when all voices are heard. It is important, he said, to reach out and make people aware of the process, and encourage diverse participation.

We need to set ourselves up for success and showcase the best of Brookline.