

# Minutes

## Economic Development Advisory Board

March 7, 2022 7:00PM  
Held remotely via Zoom

*Committee members (in attendance noted by Y/N):*

Anne Meyers, Co-Chair	Y	Derrick Choi	Y	Carol Levin*	Y	Marilyn Newman	Y
Paul Saner, Co-Chair	Y	Alan Christ	Y	Ken Lewis	Y	Al Raine	Y
Cliff Brown	Y	Sandi Silk	Y	Tom Nally	Y		

*\*Arrived late or left early*

*Staff & consultants present:* Meredith Mooney, Sophie Robison, Jonathan Meyers

*Guests included:* David Gladstone, David Meyers, Janice Kahn, Debbie Miller, David Leschinsky, John VanScoyoc

*Meeting materials included:* [Agenda](#), [Current Boylston Street Corridor Study Committee draft zoning language](#), [PDF compilation of Economic Development & Long-Term Planning's ARPA requests](#), [Excel Document summarizing project funding requests](#), presentation by Jonathan Meyers

Anne Meyers opened the meeting remotely via Zoom due to COVID, ensured all members were able to participate with audio and video, and announced the meeting would be recorded. She noted that the speaker, Jonathan Meyers, is her son.

### **Featured Speaker: Jonathan Meyers (Partner at HR&A Advisors) on Emerging Trends for Sustaining Vibrant Retail and Commercial Districts**

Derrick introduced the speaker series and tonight's speaker, Jonathan Meyers. Sandi spoke to the context for tonight's conversation and that this is part of EDAB's effort to better understand opportunities to support and sustain healthy and vibrant retail and commercial districts.

Jonathan shared a short presentation, highlighted topics include:

- How can policies (zoning, taxes, codes) support the community-wide benefits of retail?
  - How much of local property value is driven by access to retail and services?
  - How much of what you value at a community level (multi-generational appeal, walkability, etc.) is driven by access to retail and services?
  - What are the specific policies and tools that can and should reflect those values?
- A holistic approach helps understand a response to "dark stores" (see examples from the Wall Street Journal, etc.)
- Some examples from other communities:
  - Policies to track, monitor, (and fine?) vacant retail (ex. Cambridge, MA has considered a vacant property registration; Newburgh, NY; Frederick, MD)
  - Zoning/Land Use/Tax Approaches to Ground Floors (recognize that BUSY does not always = Retail; abatement of retail taxes can support other development, see Lower Manhattan, Detroit)
  - Public/private approaches focus on retail (BIDs, "Main Street" programs, etc.) – see Selden Arcade and Open on Main

## **Comments from the Board**

The board discussed the perspective of retail as infrastructure and how the private and public sector benefit from treating it as such. There was also discussion of how regulation of retail can help to promote diverse businesses; Jonathan highlighted the differences between using zoning versus tax policy to regulate retail, and noted better outcomes when using tax policy (ex. Columbus, OH; Cincinnati, OH).

There was significant discussion about the many variables at play when regulating retail, especially through tax structures. Jonathan spoke to the size of stores helping to manage the number of chain stores, the consolidation of properties under single landlords or landlord who don't mind having a vacant storefront while they seek new tenants, etc. Jonathan noted that one of the big areas that many property owners consider when filling their retail spaces is how the retail space can increase the value of what's on the upper floors of the same building.

Jonathan also discussed how changes in the management of the public right of way during COVID can continue to support and help grow commercial districts. Jonathan discussed how prescriptive communities should be in the regulation of storefronts themselves, and what the "window" looks like, as well as how we can think about business owners versus property owners.

Another question posed was around why businesses without great street traffic and vibrancy generation choose to locate on main streets, and what the pros/cons of these types of businesses are (ex. Banks often pay a rent premium justified by the storefront as advertising).

## **Comments from the Public**

- David Gladstone: How much is too expensive for parking meter rates which negatively impact the business districts if prices per hour are raised too quickly? How many parking spaces are necessary to sustain economic vibrancy in the business district? There are many opinions on this especially from the sustainability side where the belief is people will use public transportation in lieu of having sufficient parking spaces. The fear is that many people use autos and will drive where there is plenty of parking and the meters are priced accordingly. Jonathan spoke to the types of uses that need more parking than others (ex. Office sometimes suffers from lack of parking), and the value of transportation engineers and planners in assessing these questions.
- Janice Kahn: In Brookline there is a lot of advocacy to build housing; retail seems to have less advocacy. – Do you have strategies for balancing housing and retail development?

## **Update on Boylston Street Corridor Study Committee**

Tom Nally provided an update on the work of the Boylston Street Corridor Study Committee, specifically speaking to the expected zoning change proposals. Tom discussed that the zoning is still a work in progress, and that the next meeting will be this Wednesday. Tom noted many of the challenges to building on the sites along Boylston Street that are impacting the zoning discussions, and how the Committee is considering the needed mix of uses to build a viable and vibrant streetscape.

The Committee is also considering a set of design guidelines and a couple of overlay districts, including the Boylston Street East Overlay and the Brookline Hills Overlay district. Tom reviewed the work accomplished by the Committee's consultant who identified the constraints of attainable redevelopment. Given the Committee's discussion of the presented constraints, Tom

overviewed the contents of the current draft zoning. Next steps are for the Committee to submit a Warrant Article, at which point EDAB will be asked for further review of BSCSC's work.

### **Comments from the Board**

- Did the Committee consider incentivizing different uses with varying FAR's? No.
- Tom was asked to elaborate on the proposed draft zoning incentives to get to higher FAR levels. There was some discussion of the development of the design guidelines, and how they would be implemented/further edited.
- The Committee discussed how their approach will help deal with the interim period between the road's current condition (essentially a state highway), and the ideal vision down the road, including the balance of Brookline's vision versus MassDOT's needs.
- The Committee would like an update on what's happening with the bus lane pilot along Boylston Street. Neither Tom, nor staff, had any new information at this time.
- What were the Committee's deliberations relative to incentivizing particular ground floor uses, or requirements on the size/etc. of retail uses? Tom answered that the Committee did not get into this level of detail, though there was some light conversation around this relative to uses such as museums and fine arts. The Committee's primary concern is getting more pedestrian-based retail.

### **Staff and Committee Member Updates**

- Meredith Mooney provided an update on the Town's roll out of ARPA funds. Last week's Select Board meeting provided some clarity on process and next steps; the Select Board will develop a scoring rubric to review the next round of ARPA proposals. After this, budget considerations will be prepared, and the goal is for the first round of funding to be distributed in May. See two documents explaining the ARPA proposals reviewed by the Town in the agenda.
- Ken Lewis provided an update on the US Open, including expected location and number of attendees, as well as updates on the use and promotion of local vendors. David Gladstone provided an update on a raffle being run by the Chamber to promote local businesses. Ken noted promotional activities that are ongoing, including a banner art competition, and a charitable fundraising effort, and some other ongoing lecture nights through spring 2022.
- Paul Saner noted that there is no update current on 10 Brookline Place.
- Paul Saner provided an update on past and upcoming expected Warrant Articles, including the Attorney General's ruling on fossil fuel free requirements (document linked in agenda). Paul also provided an update on the 845 Boylston Street project and the Town's 40B status.
- Paul Saner noted that there was an extension of the online meeting waiver under the State Emergency Order through July 15, 2022.
- Meredith Mooney noted that there have also been some discussions on updates and changes to Brookline Day, specifically around moving it to Coolidge Corner.
- Sandi Silk provided an update and some comments on the MBTA Smart Communities Guidelines, especially as they relate to by-right zoning.
- Sandi Silk also noted that she and Derrick are open to doing another speaker/panel like tonight after the Warrant Article/Town Meeting season, and called for Committee members to think about topics or people they might like to hear from.

### **Closing**

The next meeting will take place on April 4, 2022.

\*\*Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:59 pm.