

Economic Development Advisory Board Minutes

March 8, 2021

7 – 9 PM held remotely via Zoom

EDAB Board 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	Susan Houston	Y	Tom Nally	Y	Sandi Silk	Y

Staff present: Kara Brewton, Meredith Mooney

Guests included: David Gladstone

Materials provided ahead of time to the Board included: 3/8/21 agenda, draft 2/1/21 minutes with revisions, Spring 2021 Town Meeting Warrant Article & Explanations

Information shared via Zoom during the meeting: presentation “Spring 2021 Town Meeting: Warrant Articles 29 & 30; Proposals to extend and expand Brookline’s outdoor dining program” (3/8/2021, M. Mooney), presentation “The Art of the Possible” (3/8/2021, D. Choi & S. Silk); image of 209 Harvard Street façade proposal (3/8/2021)

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

Approval of February 2021 meeting minutes

February 1, 2021 meeting minutes were edited including a grammatical error and a clarification that the ballot referendum effort by A Better City would establish a Commission **to study** whether to become a City. The revised minutes were then approved by roll call vote (in favor: AM, PS, CB, DC, AC, SH, CL, KL, TN, AR, SS; abstained: MN).

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

Meredith Mooney summarized how restaurants had utilized outdoor seating during COVID, including the Town’s temporary program to allow outdoor seating in parking space parklets, which was extended through the winter months. Warrant Articles 29 & 30 propose to make these expanded areas permanently allowable, and removes the 6-month maximum currently in place. Discussion included:

- Temporary Guidelines (which are not addressed in the Warrant Articles)
 - Recently increased insurance liability for use of public property from \$250,000-\$500,000 to \$500,000 - \$1,000,000

- Potential precedent setting if there is no fee for on-street parking for restaurants during COVID
- All outdoor seating parklets in parking spaces would be the same size, about 2.5 parking spaces, independent of restaurant store frontage length
- Demonstrated interest from restaurants: 5 existing outdoor seating license holders expanded their seating, and a couple dozen restaurants newly applied for outdoor seating; have not yet seen desire to operate 12 months/year, but there is interest in extending the six months into the shoulder seasons as well as one-off warm days throughout the year; staff expects outdoor seating to be popular for the next year or two during recovery, but in the long term the total number of outdoor seating spaces will likely slowly decline as some on-street locations are not ideal for guests' enjoyment

Anne Meyers then opened the public hearing.

David Gladstone spoke on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce, and shared some quotes from restaurants regarding outdoor seating:

- Zaftigs' outdoor seating represented 80% of the guests they seated in the 2020 season; the patio is beneficial to rehiring employees, scheduling more hours and increasing sales
- Michael's Deli – outdoor dining is critical to the survival of neighborhood restaurants; moving forward, well-designed and attractive outdoor dining areas could only be beneficial for the entire town of Brookline
- Jin's – had not yet applied, but interested in two parking spots in front of their restaurant
- Vine Ripe Grill – restrictions are changing by the minutes; it is imperative that restaurants be able to accommodate diners in an outdoor setting; restaurants are closing daily
- Prairie Fire – outdoor seating is important because it gives a restaurant the opportunity to serve guests safely outside, given the current climate, while also helping to balance the reality of distancing guests inside. It also adds the cultural element of a vibrant community when the spaces are given real design structure

David also added that as a business lender, he has a bunch of restaurants that took federal loans, and it freed them up to be able to use that money for their payroll and spend anywhere from \$5,000-\$8,000 on building the outside spaces that they have.

After hearing no other comments from the public or EDAB members, Anne closed the public hearing. EDAB then VOTED by roll call vote (in favor: AM, PS, DC, AC, SH, CL, KL, TN, AR, SS, MN; abstained: CB) to support Warrant Articles 29 & 30.

Discussion regarding future EDAB speaker series

Sandi Silk & Derrick Choi presented some ideas on a potential speaker series at EDAB. The purpose would be through a series of conversations to remind people the reason why EDAB is pushing for economic vitality and commercial development at the end of the day.

Key objectives would be to (i) reinforce the goal of promoting commercial development with a discussion series centered on the question of "How does this grow our Town's tax base?" and (ii) providing a monthly discussion forum within EDAB meetings to have timely discussions on key issues focusing on the sustainability of Brookline's commercial districts and beyond. Topics might include: assessment of commercial districts from a local commercial broker, strategies for rethinking retail,

reconsidering our key asset categories (e.g., looking at market trends of use types moving forward), identifying new goals & performance standards for commercial development, whether public parking should be relocated along side streets, retail mix, developing themes for corridors by business type, hearing from startup businesses that have been subsidized by development rents, a marketing video clip highlighting why businesses have located or even expanded within Brookline even during COVID, supporting activators like events, attracting business types to meet other demographics within Brookline, etc. Their thought is to maybe start this in April.

Discussion with EDAB members and staff included:

- whether sessions should also shape conversations going on about planning in Town
- coordinating and leveraging the speakers lined up for the Lab Subcommittee
- inviting speakers from other communities with innovative programs
- likely EDAB member-driven effort, at least in short term
- maybe identify a highest priority of all the ideas presented, and measure success by implementing specific program or zoning changes
- defining better whether the main audience is EDAB with some incidental public or the broader public (likely the broader public)
- if one of the goals is to bring people that otherwise wouldn't come to Brookline by normal market forces, then maybe we should be inviting people like Commonwealth Kitchen or the Workforce Development Board rather than or in addition to local brokers reporting on business as usual
- the "state of retail" might be a good earlier topic, and the Chamber would be interested in partnering on that topic, perhaps to plan for in May; Sandi & Derrick will craft an outline for that topic
- synching up with the Lab Subcommittee perhaps in June, and then maybe other asset types in July
- Board members would provide any additional thoughts to Derrick & Sandi in the next couple weeks

Review Warrant Articles submitted to determine future public hearings

EDAB members reviewed the index of Warrant Articles that will be heard this Spring. Following additional discussion, Paul suggested EDAB take up at their next meeting Articles 39, 25, 26, and 20.

Other Business/ EDAB & Staff Updates

- Upcoming warrant article review hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, hosted by Anne Meyers
- Meredith Mooney had applied for on behalf of the Town, and successfully received, \$90,000 in technical assistance funding as part of the state's long-term rapid recovery program; details will be fleshed out with the state but hopefully would help move the Coolidge Corner Business Improvement District formation process forward
- Owners of La Morra are opening a second restaurant at the ground level of the hotel at 700 Brookline Avenue, including proposals for outdoor seating on River Road; Kara Brewton is assisting with drafting the plans for them
- Update on 209 Harvard Street's current streetscape proposal

- Budget process, hopeful restoration [per the Town Administrator's proposal](#) of second Economic Development planner position which was cut during COVID as it happened to be a position that was empty and the Town was trying to minimize layoffs

Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:35 pm.