



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

DRAFT Meeting Minutes **April 6, 2020**

Co-Chair Anne Meyers hosted this virtual meeting using the Zoom platform.

EDAB Members Present: Anne Meyers (Co-Chair), Paul Saner (Co-Chair), Cliff Brown, Derrick Choi, Alan Christ, Susan Houston, Ken Lewis, Carol Levin, Tom Nally, Al Raine, Donald Warner (arrived later in the meeting as noted below).

EDAB Members Not Present: Marilyn Newman

Staff: Kara Brewton, Meredith Mooney

Guests: Jeff Wachtner, Jules Milner-Brage, Jennifer Gilbert, Steve Heikin, Mark Zarrillo, Linda Olson Pehlke, Mike Toffel, Joan Lancourt, Tommy Vitolo

Materials Presented & linked through the online agenda ahead of time: draft February Meeting Minute including edits by Paul Saner; draft revised letter to the Town Administrator & Select Board regarding Brookline Fiscal Advisory Committee Recommendations (including edits by Anne Meyers 4/6/2020).

After a quorum of EDAB members was present on Zoom, Anne Meyers opened the meeting including announcing the meeting was being held virtually in accordance with the Governor's advisories. The weblink and phone number had been properly posted on the Town's online agenda and meeting calendar. She made sure by roll call vote that all EDAB members could hear the meeting and their equipment was appropriately functioning (Anne Meyers, Paul Saner, Alan Christ, Cliff Brown, Derrick Choi, Susan Houston, Ken Lewis, Tom Nally, Carol Levin, Al Raine). Additionally, all guests at the meeting were verbally identified, including one call-in guest. Anne asked that each speaker identify themselves before speaking, and noted that while this was not a public hearing, that people could use the "raise hand" button or actually raise their hand if they would like to speak. The call-in guest was not muted.

- 1) Approval of February Meeting Minutes** – approved as edited by roll call vote (8-0-2). YES: Anne Meyers (Co-Chair), Paul Saner (Co-Chair), Derrick Choi, Alan Christ, Susan Houston, Ken Lewis, Tom Nally, Al Raine. Cliff Brown and Carol Levin abstained as they were not at the February meeting.
- 2) Small Business Update** – Meredith Mooney reviewed the Business Resources webpage built out over the last couple weeks, targeted at assisting Brookline businesses during the COVID-19 disruption. Three virtual Town Hall meetings focused on small businesses and non-profits had been held, and will continue to be held weekly Thursdays at 9 am as long as they are useful to the business community. The first and third meeting included Congressman Kennedy and Representative Tommy Vitolo joined the first meeting. These virtual meetings are being hosted by the Small Business Development Committee, chaired by Select Board member Raul Fernandez.

Economic Development staff is working with the Community Development Division to propose a business assistance program utilizing anticipated additional Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

Anne Meyers noted that she has participated and found the meetings very useful – and thanked the staff for pulling together and simplifying the tons of information in such a short amount of time.

In response to several questions by EDAB members, Meredith noted that:

1. No individual business had yet told us that they were permanently closing although many are extremely worried about the ability to reopen. We do not see any particular commercial area more impacted than others at this time.
2. While the media reported that some banks were only processing Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans for commercial customers with existing mortgages, an existing business relationship was not a federal requirement for businesses to apply for the loans.
3. Approximately a third of restaurants are offering pick up or delivery operations.
4. The Chamber of Commerce is hosting a list of businesses that are open in Brookline. Derrick Choi also recommended using drizly.com for deliveries from Wine Press.
5. Many storefront-type businesses are reporting that they have already laid off significant amounts of their employees.
6. We are hearing specific stories from a handful of businesses reaching out to their landlords for rent payment delay, and those businesses were surprised how positive the conversation went.

3) Economic Activity in Brookline

Representative Tommy Vitolo talked about how the state legislature recently passed the municipal relief bill, which includes the ability for municipalities to defer property tax payments. He also discussed that the various delays of payments will have implications for state finances, too. The legislature is considering not taking a summer recess to keep taking up business related to covid-19.

[Don Warner joined the meeting.]

Kara Brewton gave three commercial development-related updates.

Children’s Hospital Boston has decided to suspend all construction for now. While they could possibly apply for relief as a medical institution, they felt that they could not efficiently continue a safe construction environment since they were focusing on interior spaces. Additionally, they noted some intermittent lapses of material availability due to intermittent manufacturing. They hope to resume in May, but are concerned about how fast they will be able to ramp back up to an efficient construction site.

Regarding Waldo Durgin, Chestnut Hill Realty is still having positive conversations with potential hotel operators and still hopes to pull enough information together to begin a Special Permit process this Spring. Their site work at Hancock Village is still moving forward, however, they anticipate future delays as various construction groups call for cease of operations.

The hotel at 700 Brookline Avenue is now stopped due to the Governor’s updated construction order. Attorney Jennifer Gilbert added that the owner, Claremont, had applied for a waiver from the state due to their location and anticipated support to the functions of the Longwood Medical Area.

Derrick Choi added that although some of his projects at Logan Airport would still be allowed by the Governor’s order to move forward, the painters and carpenters unions have called for a standing down – effectively stopping those projects.

Kara Brewton reported that many smaller inns and bed and breakfasts were reporting effectively being shut down at this point; we have not yet heard data from our larger hotels but expect rooms tax to be significantly reduced due to lower occupancies and the delay in collecting taxes.

In response to EDAB members’ questions, two Planning Board members that attended the meeting (Steve Heikin and Mark Zarrillo) stated:

1. It was not entirely clear yet how to fairly hold Planning Board meetings where the proposed project would attract large public interest. Smaller renovation projects might be easier to facilitate, and they have already held façade review Planning Board meetings virtually. If Town Meeting was ramping up to hold their meeting virtually, then it seemed like the Planning Board could follow the same protocol as that is further developed.
2. The state had now issued regulations to allow for 40.A Board of Appeals cases (including Planning Board recommendations) and Preservation-related 40.C cases to not be subject to the state regulated review periods.
3. The Planning Board could consider delaying any final decision to an additional public meeting by the Board to allow for any additional input by the community in between the two meetings.
4. They agreed that they would push to move the Planning Board meetings forward, and that they needed to have another conversation with Regulatory staff.
 - a. Paul Saner noted that the other two divisions were holding public meetings, [as were Transportation and Conservation](#), and that the Advisory Committee was planning on holding public hearings. Paul requested that the Planning Department come up with a plan to move forward with Planning Board & Board of Appeals cases that include abutter comments as happening in Needham, Newton, Walpole, and other communities. He also added that the Department's webpage needed to be updated to reflect that EDAB & the Housing Advisory Board were now conducting virtual public meetings.
 - b. Attorney Jennifer Gilbert noted that many of her clients were waiting to hear guidance from the Town about *when* they expected business to resume. In addition to new applications, her clients were also looking to simply get final design reviews approved. She noted that the longer a timeframe to permit a project, the more costs were incurred – which would result in less ability for a developer to reduce the scope of the overall project.

Cliff Brown [stated](#) that individuals of the former Brookline Fiscal Advisory Committee and a couple [of](#) Advisory Committee members had created a crude excel model to look at Town revenue and cost impacts, with the ability for anyone to input various volatility factors related to Covid-19. He believed that the FY21 draft budget is no longer relevant. He agreed with a couple [of](#) individual School Committee members that were asking to sit down with members of the Select Board and Advisory Committee to discuss a current, updated budget. Jules Milner-Brage thanked Cliff for this modeling effort.

4) Spring 2020 Town Meeting

Paul Saner reported that the election was now going to be June 9th, with Town Meeting [tentatively scheduled to be held beginning June 23rd](#). There are 41 warrant articles, and it was likely that the Town Meeting would prioritize [in addition to the annual budget](#) the seven articles related to the Newbury College site redevelopment and the one article related to liquor licenses. [Paul stated it was unclear when non prioritize articles would go before Town Meeting. Those wouldn't need to be refiled even if those were differed to the Fall Town Meeting.](#)

Paul thanked Cliff Brown for assisting with the drafting of the warrant article explanations related to the Newbury College redevelopment, and invited EDAB members to review that information. He also added that an April 29th meeting was being scheduled that would include town consultants Pam McKinney and McCall & Almy. [There was discussion of EDAB holding a public hearing on these articles at its scheduled May 4th meeting.](#) During the meeting, Derrick Choi posted the link to the Warrant Article explanations, which was also provided in the agenda and to EDAB members ahead of time.

Jennifer Gilbert reported that Welltower has directed their architects to continue finalizing the design for the redevelopment of the Newbury College site. She and her client are frustrated that the Preservation Commission does not have a meeting planned in the near future. On March 31st, Welltower held a two-hour virtual site walk with a couple [of](#) Preservation Commission members. Jennifer noted that Welltower received some really good feedback, and that they would be filing for a “lift” of the demolition delay; they are waiting to hear when the application could proceed. Kara Brewton asked what would happen to the project if the Preservation Commission did not meet, or if they did meet, decided not to lift the demolition

stay. Jennifer could not represent her client's response at this time, noting that Welltower could choose to wait out the stay from last November, which would be May 2021. On the other hand, Jennifer stated that not lifting the stay could put the project in jeopardy; she was not certain and not speaking for the client either way.

Regarding liquor licenses, Meredith Mooney reviewed the warrant article sponsored by the Small Business Development Committee, which would effectively redistribute any unused licenses from Washington Square to Coolidge Corner or Brookline Village and would extend those licenses by two years. She thanked Representative Tommy Vitolo and his aide, Ben Kaufman, for developing the proposal with staff so that the remaining licenses available in Washington Square didn't go unused.

Representative Vitolo recommended to the Moderator and the Select Board that if it were possible for this warrant article to be heard in June, there was a high likelihood that the legislature could take it up prior to the summer recess, which begins July 31st (and the recess may be delayed). Tommy added that if Town Meeting passed this article, it would give him time to work with Chairman Chan. He also noted that as he does with all Town Meeting votes directing his work, that he would abstain from the Town Meeting vote but it expected it would likely pass Town Meeting.

Meredith Mooney believed that the Waldo Durgin site had already applied for one of the available licenses, but was not sure whether Raj Dhanda had changed his 40B Comprehensive Permit to include a restaurant use at 1299 Beacon Street.

Paul Saner asked which [other](#) warrant articles EDAB would like to hold a public hearing on. Cliff Brown, Susan Houston, and Carol Levin all noted that they thought they needed more time to review the articles again as well as to have a better understanding of which articles may be more relevant given the impacts of Covid-19, including financial impacts on whether real estate projects would be able to move forward and what those implications would be for the Town's risk with any warrant article.

Cliff Brown suggested that EDAB members could inform Town Meeting and Select Board members as to how they thought estimate revenue should be evaluated, since those topics were familiar to EDAB members – including local options and new growth. Al Raine agreed, and noted that it may take some time to differentiate between theoretical impacts and useful data. Kara Brewton added that those discussions should include Deputy Town Administrator Melissa Goff's knowledge as a starting point, since she was tracking all of these factors. Kara also wanted to confirm, but believed that the FY21 budget did not rely on significant new commercial property tax growth from any specific commercial development project. Finally, Kara noted that any rent loss that commercial buildings see over the coming months would not affect individual commercial property tax values until July of 2021 – that we would see impacts for a long time to come. Carol Levin noted that she also wouldn't count on any volunteer Payment in Lieu of Tax (PILOT) payments from medical office non-profits for the remainder of this year.

Paul Saner [stated the consensus was](#) EDAB did not need to take up any warrant articles until much later. Kara suggested, and EDAB members agreed, for any EDAB public hearing on the liquor license warrant article to be held in conjunction with other Boards hearing the article (e.g., Advisory Committee). This would simply reduce the burden of potential restaurants to participate in public hearings while keeping up with Covid-19 impacts.

5) Review and discussion of recommendations from Brookline Fiscal Advisory Committee

Paul Saner introduced the letter that he and Cliff Brown drafted for EDAB to send to the Town Administrator and Select Board members. The letter effectively requests a designated Select Board member to be assigned to Economic Development issues [and support for Recommendation 12 about expanded economic development, both as set forth](#) by the Brookline Fiscal Advisory Committee. He believed this letter was timely, as the Select Board had not yet taken up Economic Development recommendations. [He indicated Select Board Member Franco confirmed the timing to transmit this was appropriate, which he supports. Paul](#)

[added that the letter reflects two observations from the March 2nd Development Summit: reference by four board chairs for the need for zoning reform; and, inadequate Planning Dept. resources.](#)

Cliff Brown shared the draft with everyone participating on the Zoom platform. Anne Meyers also read the entire draft verbally for the benefit of our call-in participant. Following discussion about which reports and future anticipated studies should be included in the letter, EDAB members made a couple [of](#) minor edits including missing punctuation and formatting. Additionally, there was some discussion about how to appropriately reference the members of the Preservation Commission that participated in the March joint Board meeting regarding development. Paul Saner volunteered to double-check the sentence reflecting the Preservation Commission participant's view with those members (Elton Elperin and David King).

[Steve Heikin commented on recent efforts involving several members of Preservation and Planning including himself and Mark Zarrillo to look at zoning changes along Beacon St. He indicated this WILL NO LONGER BE supported by Planning Staff.](#)

EDAB then voted to have the Co-Chairs submit the amended letter, unanimously, by roll call vote: Al Raine, Susan Houston, Tom Nally, Ken Lewis, Cliff Brown, Alan Christ, Carol Levin, Don Warner, Derrick Choi, Paul Saner, and Anne Meyers.

6) Other Business, if any.

Paul Saner asked EDAB members to send him and Anne any suggestions for topics of future EDAB meetings, in addition to Warrant Article public hearings and Carol Levin's call to discuss near, medium, and long-term impacts to the Town's financial health.

Additionally, some EDAB members discussed how they could help gather more data from commercial property owners in Town. Kara Brewton noted that individuals could start with the property assessors' database. While landlords may still be reeling from the change of revenue impacts for the next couple [of](#) weeks, Kara noted that it would still be helpful for us to contact landlords and at least get more current business contacts, and make sure that both landlords and businesses knew about how to access the Town's Business resources page, to sign up for the Brookline Business News blast via the Town's Notify Me system, and to learn about the upcoming anticipated property tax deferral.

Finally, Ken Lewis asked that the record reflect that he was extremely impressed that Representative Vitolo was still wearing a suit, even so late in the evening while everyone else was more relaxed at home.

Meeting Adjourned.