



Building a Better Brookline

Draft Meeting Minutes

May 6, 2019

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

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

Staff: Kara Brewton, Meredith L. Mooney

Materials Presented: Agenda (5/6/2019), Revised Draft Meeting Minutes (4/1/2019), Photo and text from the Planning Department's April 24, 2019 Instagram Post regarding a pop-up art display in Coolidge Corner (4/24/2019), Memo regarding the Massachusetts Vacant Storefronts Program (5/1/2019), PowerPoint Presentation presented by staff on Vacant Storefronts Eligible for the Massachusetts Vacant Storefronts Program in Brookline Village and Coolidge Corner (5/6/2019)

Members of the Public: None

With a quorum present, Paul Saner opened the meeting.

- **Massachusetts Vacant Storefronts Program:**

- Economic Development and Long-Term Planning staff sought EDAB's input on the Town of Brookline's application for the Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program (MVSP).
- Kara Brewton provided background:
 - Included in the Governor's economic development legislation in 2018, created in March 2019, and administered by the state Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, MVSP uses the state's Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) tax credits to encourage businesses to move into storefronts that have been vacant for a year or more.
 - The program came to ED-LT's attention through an article in the Boston Business Journal.
 - Businesses could receive up to \$10,000 in the state's Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) tax credits, which are refundable (i.e. recipients receive a refund, even if it's more than what they owe in taxes, as opposed to a nonrefundable tax credit, in which recipients can only receive a tax credit up to the amount of taxes that they owe).
 - To participate in the program, municipalities first have to apply to designate a specific commercial area as a Vacant Storefront District, and identify eligible storefronts within that district, as well as funding dedicated to support the program. Businesses that occupy eligible storefronts can then submit an application to receive the EDIP tax credits.

- Businesses can receive a dollar-for-dollar match of municipal funding in EDIP tax credits. The Town of Brookline will identify the existing Façade Loan Program as its matching funds.
 - This program is an attractive opportunity for the Town to receive state funding, which Brookline often does not qualify for.
 - Additionally, being an early participant in this new state economic development program could provide a valuable PR opportunity for the Town.
 - It's unclear how impactful a Vacant Storefront Program will be in Brookline, but staff still considers participation in this program a worthwhile experiment.
 - Staff presented several slides with photos and addresses of eligible vacant storefronts in Brookline Village and Coolidge Corner.
 - Staff expressed particular interest in hearing EDAB's feedback on:
 - Whether this is a worthwhile program for Brookline to participate in; and
 - Which commercial area or areas should Brookline seek to designate as a Vacant Storefront District.
 - EDAB then discussed:
 - Which commercial areas (Brookline Village, Coolidge Corner, or Washington Square) would be the best candidates for a Vacant Storefront District;
 - The Board concluded that Brookline Village was the best candidate.
 - Brookline Village, Brookline's second largest commercial area, has three times the number of eligible vacant storefronts compared to Coolidge Corner.
 - With various large-scale development and transportation infrastructure projects, as well as a Parking Benefits District, in the pipeline, the Brookline Village commercial area also has a more exciting story to tell.
 - How a Brookline Village Vacant Storefront District would be marketed;
 - To retail brokers, through Brookline's business advocacy organizations, etc.
 - How participation in this program would impact staff time;
 - The boundaries of the proposed Brookline Village Vacant Storefront District;
 - The potential for promoting specific types of retail use through this program.
 - **EDAB then voted unanimously in favor of Brookline's application to designate Brookline Village as a Vacant Storefront District.**
- **Update on Warrant Article 16 to establish a Parking Benefits District in Brookline Village:**
 - Meredith L. Mooney updated the Board on the warrant article's revised language, and recapped the Transportation Board, Advisory's Planning & Regulation Subcommittee, and the Advisory Committee's recommendations, commentary, and questioning around the proposed warrant article.
 - EDAB members discussed:
 - Several concerns:
 - Staffing and administration of a parking benefit district (PBD) will likely have unintended consequences on staff time. Staff should keep track of time spent on Parking Benefit District administration.

- PBDs are likely to proliferate throughout Brookline’s commercial areas. It’s also likely that there will be unintended consequences from the replication of this model throughout the town.
 - PBDs could potentially set a concerning precedent in terms of removing certain activities away from the current decision-making process and governing structures.
 - Given many EDAB members’ concerns and skepticism around both the effectiveness of the Parking Benefit District model and the Brookline Village business community’s support for a PBD, perhaps EDAB should have taken a position on this warrant article and contributed more to the PBD warrant article discussion.
 - Positive and/or potentially beneficial aspects of a PBD:
 - As demonstrated by Business Improvement Districts, creating a dedicated source of funding can create a more cohesive business district.
 - Kara Brewton added that a PBD structure will make it easier for the sort of operating item requests, which are often requested by the business community, to be fulfilled.
- **Staff Updates:**
- **Boylston Street Study:**
 - Kara Brewton reported that ED-LT is currently drafting a \$9,500 contract for Pam McKinney to analyze the commercial development potential along the Rt. 9 corridor stretching from Gateway East to Newton.
 - Board members provided the following suggestions regarding the scope of Ms. McKinney’s study:
 - Include exploration of uses to benefit the residential community.
 - Explore the question of would a change in the parking ratios for key development sites have a beneficial impact on use potential.
 - Capture impacts of NETA on Rt. 9 vehicle and foot traffic.
 - Explore the demand for retail.
 - Examine the whole corridor, not just a handful of specific sites.
 - Address what a change in use of the Old Lincoln School would do for changing the character and use of Lower Boylston.
 - Include parking as a use.
 - Paul Saner reported that he is in the process of setting up a meeting with the EDAB co-chairs, Kara Brewton, and Bernard Greene, who will likely be the next Chair of the Select Board, about starting the Lower Boylston Street Visioning Process.
 - **June 2019 EDAB Meeting:**
 - Instead of its regular meeting in June, EDAB will hold a special meeting on a date when Pam McKinney is available to make her presentation.
 - **Announcements & Upcoming Events:**

- There will be a conversation about economic development, the strategic asset plan, etc., and there's an expectation that a subset of EDAB will meet with at least the Policy subcommittee, if not the entire BFAC committee, to discuss the issues that Pam McKinney raises in her report.
 - **Pop-Ups (Anne Meyers & Meredith Mooney):**
 - While continuing to explore the feasibility and potential use and benefit of pop-ups in Brookline, in April, EDAB and ED-LT successfully played matchmaker between Brookline Open Studios and the Arcade's Leeder Management, and facilitated the installation of a pop-up art display in a vacant storefront on the first floor of the Coolidge Corner Arcade.
 - The image and text from the Planning Department's Instagram post promoting the pop-up art display as well as EDAB and ED-LT's role in facilitating the pop-up was included for reference in EDAB members' meeting packets.
 - **Meetings with Rep. Tommy Vitolo (D – Brookline):**
 - Paul Saner reported that he had had two recent meetings with state Representative Tommy Vitolo. One meeting regarding Waldo-Durgin, a project of which Rep. Vitolo is very supportive, and another meeting with Anne Meyers, Kara Brewton, and Meredith Mooney, during which topics of discussion included:
 - Rep. Vitolo's membership and activity on various Joint Committees, including, Tourism, Community Development, etc.;
 - Rep. Vitolo's interest in being helpful to EDAB, as well as attending a Coolidge Corner Merchants' Association meeting and doing outreach to the business community; and
 - Brookline's new special liquor licenses.
- **Miscellaneous:**
 - Cliff Brown inquired if it's possible to get an understanding of what the City of Newton is doing in terms of zoning changes to encourage development along Washington Street and elsewhere? Would anyone in City Hall share their estimates about potential tax revenue for their recent zoning changes? How would these changes impact school attendance?
 - Kara Brewton responded that she would be happy to investigate. Already knowing a bit about that process, Kara added that the developer did a few things to help facilitate the rezoning process, including investing in a visioning study and presenting that vision in a particularly effective, experiential way.
- **Approval of Meeting Minutes:**
 - **April 1, 2019 meeting minutes were approved as amended by a vote of 12-0-1.**
 - Susan Houston, who did not attend the April 1st meeting, abstained from the vote.

Meeting adjourned.