

Minutes

Economic Development Advisory Board

June 20, 2023 7:00PM

Held remotely via Zoom

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

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

*Arrived late or left early

Staff & consultants present: Victor Panak, William Dorfman, Aaron Norris, Maria Morelli

Attendees included: Brian Ladd, Carol Gladstone, Christopher Mutty, Janice Kahn, Katha Seidman, Katherine Florio, Perry Grossman, Stephanie Ebbert, Lisa Shatz, Linda Pehlke, Gina Hahn, Mike Toffel, John Van Scoyoc

Meeting Materials: <https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/2936>

- Presentation from Maria Morelli and Sandi Silk
- Presentation from Victor Panak
- Table of Uses – Work in Progress – 6-16-23
- Use Definitions and Standards – Work in Progress – 6-16-23
- Harvard Street SubDistricts Map
- Draft Linkage Nexus Study Agreement and Contract 6-1-23
- Contract Attachments
- Memo to HAB on Linkage Fee Contract 6-1-23
- BAMC Presentation to EDAB June 20, 2023

Meeting Recording:

https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/tVrCVYbzX2A22K5kIQMZYKz_nh3kJAf-WHhZm1lxI_g1v1O7iicgditPJk63t22.hFpYiVFeW834ZSgB

Opening Remarks

Anne Meyers opened the meeting and Paul Saner provided a summary of the meeting's agenda, recent activity on the MBTA Communities Act, and upcoming EDAB meetings for the summer.

Presentation from Planning Department Staff and Sandi Silk on Elements of Harvard Street MBTA Communities Act Compliance Strategy; Board Discussion and Possible Vote

How to encourage/ensure that new development along Harvard Street includes a ground-floor retail component.

Maria Morelli and Sandi Silk provided the Board with a presentation on how to encourage new development along Harvard Street to include ground-floor commercial uses. Part of the presentation involved discussing the specifics of a “GFC incentive” that was recently supported by the Housing Advisory Board. The incentive would allow a developer to increase the AMI levels for their affordable units if they provide ground-floor commercial uses. Ms. Morelli described specific elements of the incentive proposal that provide for permanent build out of the ground floor as a “warm white box” enabling commercial use, and for a meaningful minimum amount of commercial use. With respect to the minimum space metric, Ms. Morelli noted that the town’s form-based zoning consultant Opticos Design recommends a 30-foot minimum depth for ground floor commercial uses, which would be appropriate for the generous and meaningful GFC financial incentive under consideration.

Ken Lewis asked a clarifying question about some of the numbers and data shown on the presentation slides. Ms. Morelli and Mr. Lewis discussed details of the Harvard Street proposal. Mr. Lewis objected to the characterization of the Harvard Street proposal as “cohesive” when it excludes the properties at the most prominent intersection in Coolidge Corner.

Zeina Talje suggested that getting successful retail businesses along Harvard Street will require strong support. She asked that Maria summarize some of the comments she has received from residents and businesses in and around Coolidge Corner. She did so and then went into detail on the elements of the incentive strategy.

Cliff Brown asked Ms. Silk about the mechanics of tenant improvements. As part of her answer, Ms. Silk discussed why first-generation businesses have a harder time being successful due to high tenant improvement costs and how that disproportionately impacts independent businesses. Mr. Brown then asked whether the incentive could be tied to a requirement that new businesses be local or independent. Ms. Morelli suggested that it might be possible and that it will probably be looked into by Economic Development staff.

Progress on development of a new table of uses for the Harvard Street corridor.

Victor Panak provided the Board with a presentation on the work in progress on a new table of uses and use regulations for the proposed new zoning for Harvard Street. Mr. Panak summarized feedback heard at the May 8th EDAB meeting and reviewed some of the key changes that were made to the subdistrict names and boundaries. He then went into detail on the proposed use table and the proposed use definitions and standards.

Paul Saner asked whether new businesses moving into existing unchanged spaces would be grandfathered. Mr. Panak indicated that a new business moving into such a space would be grandfathered provided that it was replacing a similar business.

Al Raine said that most of his comments from the previous meeting had been addressed by the newer version of this proposal. He asked that Planning staff revisit the restriction of 15,000sf retail businesses to lots of 25,000 sf. He didn’t feel like the numbers were appropriate.

Sandi Silk asked about how the proposed zoning would help facilitate transitions from currently special permitted businesses to new by-right businesses and also asked whether the zoning includes sufficient flexibility for the Town to adapt to and address new unanticipated business types. Mr. Panak indicated that many of the revisions to the documents were driven by a desire to introduce more flexibility.

Tom Nally applauded the revised proposal but cautioned about prohibiting certain uses from the storefronts even if they don’t necessarily receive customers through the front door – he provided a print shop as a good example. Mr. Panak indicated that this concept is an objective of the work but that translating the objective into actionable zoning language is an ongoing effort.

Ken Lewis asked about how the proposed zoning would be able to adjust to future unanticipated changes in the commercial environment, especially given that the zoning would be part of the Town's MBTA Communities Act proposal and therefore subject to review by DHCD for any future amendments. Mr. Panak indicated that the table has broad definitions intended to allow the Building Commissioner to accommodate new business types as they appear. He further indicated that he believes DHCD's review would be expeditious if future amendments to the zoning have no effect on the housing portion of the MBTA Communities Act compliance.

Anne Meyers asked if there was any public comment. There was none.

The Board decided to continue discussing the Town's approach to MBTA-CA compliance.

Cliff Brown asked for more information on the timing and content of the MBTA-CA Multifamily Permitting Committee's upcoming update to the Select Board. He suggested that EDAB should wait to take any votes until all proposals are available. Mr. Saner answered by discussing the timeline of the Town's response to the MBTA Communities Act and the expected presentation to the Select Board. He noted that EDAB's focus is on one specific issue of the rapidly evolving Planning Department Harvard Street proposal – how to encourage ground-level commercial and the structure of any potential incentives.

Al Raine said he supports the proposed ground-floor commercial incentive.

Ken Lewis provided some clarity on some of the compliance strategies being considered by the MBTA-CA Multifamily Permitting Committee.

A member of the public requested to speak.

Public Comment

Lisa Shatz (252 Summit Avenue) asked whether the plan still needs 2/3 of Town Meeting for adoption. Ms. Morelli said that a simple majority vote would only be an option if the proposal required residential uses which is not desirable.

The proposed motion for the Board was displayed on the screen.

Al Raine indicated he is supportive of the motion. He thought that Ms. Silk's market research is a key piece of information that supports the concept of a ground-floor incentive and he believed the incentive would be useful in any zoning for Harvard Street. He suggested that the incentive and favorable market could even make a commercial mandate redundant.

Marilyn Newman also expressed support for the incentive concept as described. She noted that, going beyond the Housing Advisory Board approval, the language in this proposed motion includes two key elements addressing EDAB's concerns with respect to commercial vitality and local retail vibrancy. This motion envisions the expansion of the minimum commercial depth requirement (30 feet versus the 15 feet in the town's current commercial space mandate), and a mechanism for implementing and enforcing long term investment in the ground floor retail space. These elements will be developed further as part of the incentive.

Sandi Silk suggested striking the reference in the motion to the Harvard Street proposal so that the motion focuses only on the incentive, the market analysis, and general compliance with the MBTA Communities Act. Mr. Lewis and Ms. Newman agreed with the change.

Paul Saner offered the following motion, as amended.

MOTION:

In connection with the Town’s efforts on compliance with the MBTA Communities Act, the Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB) supports the concept of a ground-floor commercial use incentive that would allow a project sponsor to provide new inclusionary zoning units at additional income levels (as recommended by the Housing Advisory Board at its June 7, 2023 meeting) in exchange for the inclusion of a minimum amount of ground-floor non-residential space outfitted to a minimum “warm lit box” standard, with these details to be further defined.

Financial analysis conducted and presented to EDAB at its May 8, 2023 meeting (by an EDAB member who is a real estate professional) indicates that ground floor commercial rents are currently greater than apartment rents net of expenses. An incentive of the type outlined above would further enhance and reinforce the viability of ground-floor commercial uses under the proposed zoning.

Al Raine seconded the motion.

EDAB voted unanimously in favor of the motion, with votes as follows:

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

Y = Yes N = No A = Abstain na = Absent

Staff and Board Updates

Linkage Fee Program

Victor Panak briefly summarized recent activities on the Linkage Fee Nexus Study, noting that a draft of the contract for the Nexus Study had been circulated to the Board and would be presented to the Select Board the next week. He also noted that the contract had been reviewed by the Housing Advisory Board on June 7th and that they had approved the use of Housing Trust Funds for the project. Mr. Panak discussed the timing of the study.

BAMC Program: Brookline Art Makes Community

Aaron Norris provided the Board with a presentation on the Brookline Art Makes Community project. He reviewed the art placement plan, the different types of art (sculptures, murals, utility box art), the art selection process, and the maintenance program. He also gave an overview of the project as a whole, touching on its inception as an ARPA-funded project, the creation of a directory of existing art, the kick-off engagement event in November 2022, and the results of the art survey. Board members expressed excitement for the project and a member of the public asked that the program be expanded to include art in the Chestnut Hill Village area.

Life Science Regulations

Will Dorfman discussed the progress of the draft life science regulations under development by the Brookline Public Health Department and noted that the first community meeting on the draft regulations would be held on June 24th.

The meeting was adjourned.