

Draft Meeting Minutes June 25, 2019

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

EDAB Members NOT present: Alan Christ, Cliff Brown, Derick Choi

Staff: Kara Brewton, Karen Martin

Materials Presented: PowerPoint presentation “Route 9 Corridor Study: Market and Development Opportunities” by Pam McKinney

With a quorum present, Paul Saner opened the meeting.

- Paul introduced Pam McKinney, real estate advisor, who was hired to consult for the town on potential uses along the Route 9 corridor that will help inform the Boylston Street Corridor Study Committee’s discussions for future opportunities.

Pam McKinney introduced herself and presented a Powerpoint presentation on uses and market opportunities. Her presentation focused on a set of uses that include: office, lab, hotel, retail, housing, health care, mixed use and parking. Pam explained that she looks to evaluate how uses occupy parcels and emphasized that she is not giving recommendations but rather just options and how they could relate to zoning and dimensional requirements

Housing:

Pam explained that the demand for housing is almost indefinite in the Boston area and that the two main cohorts who are seeking housing in the Brookline market are millennials and empty nesters. She stated that there are wide possibilities along Route 9 for housing and that most of the constraints are related to parcels and finding an appropriate site utilizing infill development. Most parcels are very small so smaller scale development is most likely.

Hotels:

Pam explained that there is still demand for hotels on Route 9 despite the recent and soon-to-be construction of two hotels at the eastern end – Homewood Suites and Hilton. She stated that the demand for hotels in Brookline is driven by the Longwood Medical Area and proximity to downtown for business people. Specifically, select service and extended stay models do best. She believes that the Chestnut Hill

end of Route 9 is a good and appropriate location for an additional hotel(s) that has not yet been tapped into and that it is very likely a hotel will come to that area.

Retail:

Pam stated that retail is not simply one thing and can range anywhere from a stand-alone store, like CVS, to a strip mall. Demand for brick and mortar retail is changing and in order to succeed these days, a store needs to appeal to convenience or something attractive – the product or the merchant to become an “environment” or “destination” for patrons.

Also, retail today is often seen as an amenity to what’s upstairs due to the prevalence of mixed use development. She discussed options for ground-floor retail below either residential or office uses. Residential rents can go up based on what amenities are on the ground floor. Often, however, retail square footage rent rates are too high for the type of businesses you want to attract. Pam believes that opportunities for stand-alone retail on Route 9 are low because retail prefers to be agglomerated around nodes. She sees the most opportunity in ground floor retail with other uses above. One challenge, she noted, is the availability of parking for customers.

Office R + D:

Pam explained that office demand has not always been strong but has seen a sudden increase driven by the tech boom. A lot of office construction has been driven by institutional markets who are the largest scale office users and occupants in this area – namely Longwood Medical Area. She explained that office uses are typically not speculative but rather there is a tenant in mind when they are being built and they need to be pre-sold or pre-leased.

She further explained that the tech market has particular requirements for siting of locations in order to assist with employee recruitment. They are looking for a “place” for their employees which can be hard to create from scratch. Pam admitted that she is not sure that these types of places exist along Route 9, so office may be hard to attract. There may be possibilities for small incubator or co-working spaces for startups, but not room for big corporations. Office condos are another possibility.

Lab/Life Sciences:

Pam explained that values for lab facilities are extreme – reaching \$300 per square foot in areas like the Seaport. Lab spaces need to support users, she stated, and have huge physical requirements and a huge footprint. She doesn’t see any places along Route 9 that would fit this need.

Pam then presented a table of parameters showed parcel-related requirements for each of the previously described uses. She noted that hotels, for example, require wide lots that can be relatively narrow but need a lot of visibility from the street in order to attract guests. R+D spaces, for example, could vary based on user but typically square, large lots and need a lot of parking. Medical office uses require similar parcels to office spaces but with added parking to accommodate patients. A lab however, is very different and needs a BIG space. Residential uses can be smaller lots and visibility is not as important.

The advantages to Route 9, she summarized, are that it has potential for hotels and residences and that it has a lot of frontage. The disadvantages are that it has a lot of traffic, lack of convenience due to one-way divided highway, small sites, a slope and that it’s mainly already entirely built out, even if with uses that are less desirable.

Public Comment:

Sergio Modigliani asked about the differing needs of empty nesters versus millennials and also asked for a definition of millennials.

Ken Lewis asked if Pam sees any existing offices on Route 9 as redevelopment opportunities. Pam replied that most of the existing offices would be too valuable to tear down now and that sites would need to determine if it is viable to redevelop. These sites also have very valuable parking, she added.

A resident asked about parking congestion caused by NETA and the Old Lincoln School and how parking needs could be met, possibly with a parking garage. Pam replied that a garage could be a solution but Route 9 is very long so a garage in one place might not serve the entire corridor. She suggested that any new use accommodate its own parking on-site.

Another resident commented that when travelling inbound, drivers don't stop in Brookline for shopping but rather in Newton where all of the desirable uses are because there are virtually no amenities in Brookline.

A resident asked specifically about what use could be envisioned for the current U-Haul site. Pam explained that that site is about one acre and could perhaps fit a condo building/infill residential.

A resident asked what would happen to current demand projections if we hit an economic crisis. Pam responded that the office markets would be hit first and institutional markets would be hit the least. She also stated that residential demand would stay relatively stable.

A resident asked where affordable housing fit into this analysis. Pam stated that there would be some proportion of affordable units in every new housing development. She added that there is demand for units anywhere below 150% Average Median Income (AMI).

Paul Saner asked about Pam's thoughts on independent or assisted living facilities. Pam replied that the underlying economic rates of these types of facilities are not enough for it to compete with land in this area.

Tom Nally noted that some uses can make it through recession and some cannot. He stated that big things are not going to happen on Route 9 but many small things would be improvements.

A resident noted that the narrow lot sizes on Route 9 make development nearly impossible unless you are able to increase height to 8 or 10 stories. He asked if Pam's analysis would change if you could go higher. Pam responded that for residential uses, yes. She pointed out the cost differences between wood frame vs. steel frame construction and how parking needs to be accommodated on small parcels.

Another resident asked if increases to FAR would help development. Pam stated that nothing can happen at the current FAR of 1.0. She said FARs of 3, 4, or 5 would be needed to induce change. Neil Wishinsky stated that the question is how much density we are willing to accept.

The presentation portion of the meeting wrapped up. EDAB continued discussing Board updates.

- The Board discussed the next meeting to take place on July 8th and whether there will be a quorum. It appears that enough members will be present to have a quorum.

- Marilyn explained that she would like to give an update on the work of the Land Bank Study Committee which is advocating for a real estate transfer tax to be presented at Fall Town Meeting. She is looking for input from EDAB, particularly Ken Lewis.
- Susan Houston stated that she is working to have ConViser (broker for numerous retail spaces in Town) come to an upcoming meeting either in July or September
- The Board briefly discussed the Boylston Street Study Committee and one Board member asked for an explanation on why only one portion of the corridor is going to be the focus of the committee.
- Kara gave an update on Meredith Mooney's presentation last week to the Massachusetts Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) for certification to designate Brookline Village, as a Certified Vacant Storefront District. Kara explained that the presentation went very well and thanked Susan Houston for her support in helping with the application and presentation preparations.

Meeting adjourned.