

# Economic Development Advisory Board Minutes

August 9, 2021

7 – 9 PM held remotely via Zoom

*EDAB Board members (in attendance noted by Y/N)*

Anne Meyers, Co-Chair	Y	Derrick Choi	N	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	N	Tom Nally	Y	Sandi Silk	Y

*Staff present:* Kara Brewton, Meredith Mooney

*Guests included:* Karen Voght, Mary Sabolsi, Janice Kahn, Wendy Machmuller, David Leschinsky, Jason Ruth, David Gladstone, Naomi Sweitzer, Jonathan Klein, Joan Lancourt

*Materials included:* 8/9/21 agenda; 7/12/21 minutes as revised by Paul Saner, Ken Lewis, and Marilyn Newman; presentation on pros and cons of proactive rezoning of commercial sites (8-9-21, K. Lewis & P. Saner)

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.

## **Review and approve draft July 12th meeting minutes**

July 12<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes were approved with revisions by roll call vote (in favor: TN, MN, KL, SS, PS, CB, CL, AC, AM; abstain: AR).

## **Staff updates:**

Regarding the Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) for Coolidge Corner & JFK area, staff will be meeting with six subject matter experts funded by the state, and the final joint EDAB/ Small Business Development Committee meeting to review the final scope of the LRRP will likely be September 23 at 6pm. Projects being discussed include parking utilization and management, reprogramming the Center Street Lot, looking at Commercial Area Activity, streetscape improvements, outdoor dining toolkit, and a marketing/branding proposal for the area.

There is now an application portal open to the public for ARPA funding, including the just over \$30 Million already allocated to the Town. This portal also includes a participatory budgeting feature for residents to weigh in on how much various categories of ARPA funding should be allocated. External organizations and citizens will also be able to request ARPA project ideas. An initial read of those applications is tentatively scheduled for September/October, and we have a couple years to spend the funding. The portal will also be the reporting platform as funding is allocated.

Cliff Brown added that the Select Board has committed to a fairly robust community participation in the decision making, and noted that not all of the funds are available today. Additionally, he reminded everyone these are one-time funds, which should not be used to fund normal operations. In response to a question by Al Raine, Kara noted that at least some of the federal housing assistance announced for rental aid is being funneled through MassHousing Partnership.

With regards to staffing updates, Sophie Robison will be joining us the end of August as an Economic Development & Long-Term Planner. She has about four years experience working for the City of Pittsburgh as a planner, and has done work on the neighborhood scale for their university/medical district as well as community-wide including their public engagement guide. Anne Meyers added that during the interview she noted that she was interested in working in a different form of government than a City. Kara also noted that Director Alison Steinfeld has publicly announced her retirement, although the exact date is not yet known.

### **Discussion regarding the pros and cons of proactively rezoning large commercial sites**

Paul Saner & Ken Lewis gave a presentation including noting that:

- Existing zoning has resulted in virtually no organic commercial growth except for where EDAB has strategically gone through and changed zoning site by site
- Several property owners of larger, underutilized sites do not have any intention of changing the current use of their site in the near future
- Larger sites could lend themselves to becoming non-tax producing if they are developed in the future for non-profit, institutional uses.
- When there is an upzoning of a site, the value of the site and therefore tax base increases
- Currently when we work on individual sites, we negotiate a recorded long-term agreement (95 years) that the property will pay the equivalent of property taxes even if they otherwise are not required to do so. This has not been tested legally, but it is on record.

Pros to proactively rezoning large commercial sites include:

- Positive signal to the marketplace
- Redevelopment without having to go town meeting for every site

Cons to proactively rezoning large commercial sites include:

- Potential loss of tax certainty if properties become owned/used for non-profit uses
- Opportunity for enhanced public benefits
- Marginal reduction in control of design and use (beyond the typical Major Impact Project/ Design Advisory Team process)

When properties do become exempt from property tax, the Town does not “lose” the revenue; those values are shifted to other taxpayers (the degree to which is also influenced by the yearly adjustment of the split tax rate between residential and commercial/industrial/personal (CIP) properties).

Ken Lewis then described three underutilized larger commercial sites as examples: 1280-1330 Boylston Street, 270 Boylston Street, and 523 Harvard Street. He noted that, to be clear, “analysis does not equal advocacy”. This exercise looked at proposed Floor Area Ratios of 3.0 to 4.0; a combination of life science, retail, office, and medical office uses; and assigning 22% of land value as

percent of total value as typically done by the Tax Assessor. The net property tax growth due to the land value increasing from rezoning (not including any redevelopment actually moving forward) would see approximately \$1.5 Million for 1280-1330 Boylston, \$106,000 for 270 Boylston, and \$416,000 for 523 Harvard Street. This kind of action would result in about a 40% loss of net income, which may or may not be sufficient to encourage the property owner to redevelop their property. An example of the land valuation impact can be seen with the Waldo-Durgin parcels, where immediately following the Town Meeting vote to increase developable area, there was a 43% increase in land value change over the prior year.

Sandi Silk added that having appropriate zoning in place will shorten the redevelopment time of commercial properties. She proposed that it might make good public policy sense to even consider as of right redevelopment opportunity (value) at the same time as property tax increases due to rezoning efforts. Kara Brewton noted that rezoning could be written to not be in effect for a couple years to give landowners time to reposition their property prior to significant property tax increases.

In response to questions by Mary Sabolsi, Paul Saner and Sandi Silk noted that there is no organic commercial growth without significant community process and rezoning efforts; these have historically been coupled with significant mitigation and public benefit outcomes.

### **Life Sciences Research Subcommittee update**

Paul Saner reviewed the handouts related to life sciences, including defining the lab sciences use as well as an outline of regulatory processes that could be added with respect to public health issues. This report will come back to EDAB in September including a public hearing, for a potential vote in October, that would then make recommendations to the Select Board. Paul does not anticipate that any zoning changes related to life sciences would be ready for Town Meeting until Fall 2022.

The proposed use would only be permitted by Special Permit in General Business districts, industrial districts, and office districts. The zoning definition will be further refined and reviewed with respect to not inadvertently triggering special permits for existing technology businesses that may not be life science "labs."

Marilyn Newman reviewed the public health regulatory outline, noting that the use around the country is very heavily regulated by numerous state and federal authorities. In Brookline, the Director of Public Health has the role of the Board of Public Health and therefore has the authority to implement additional regulations. Several communities have a citizen-based committee (in addition and in concert with the Public Health Advisory Council) to assist public authorities in overseeing this use, to supplement state and federal regulations, but also to provide transparency to the community in how those standards are being implemented. Dr. Jett agrees with the subcommittee that this would be a helpful construct in Brookline as well. The subcommittee is only proposing permitting Biosafety Levels One and Two, as recommended by Dr. Jett.

Mary Sabolsi commented that the group's work to date is very well researched and documented; Mary is a retired infectious disease specialist with a Masters in Public Health, and her public health work included investigating outbreaks. While she thinks it would not be likely, she would not want Brookline to permit any primate-based research activities. Mary also wanted to clarify that biosafety levels don't necessarily mean which agents are being worked with, but rather what standards are in

place to adequately safeguard the public under different conditions. Finally, she recommended that the Subcommittee consider getting additional advice from state officials, especially with regards to the quickly evolving technology changes.

Carol Levin then reviewed some of the findings in the draft executive summary in addition to the earlier discussion: there are only a limited number of life science opportunities in Brookline, those redevelopment opportunities would have a positive net impact on the Town's financial position, that with the proposed public health regulatory structure there would not be a risk to the public's health and safety, and these uses would bring more daytime employees to our existing retail and restaurant businesses. The subcommittee believes these uses should be considered within corridor studies. Finally, the report will include some visual examples of lab uses as well as the current life science market.

EDAB members agreed that the evening of September 29<sup>th</sup> would work well for an evening public hearing on this topic.

#### **Board member updates**

Paul Saner and Cliff Brown attended the recent Brookline Fiscal Advisory Committee meeting; no further action is required at this time. He also noted that he hopes the Housing Production Plan will be underway in September and that he is most interested in any specific zoning changes and a recommendation about creating a formal commercial linkage program.

Ken Lewis noted that the agreement between the USGA and the Town has now been presented to the Select Board in summary form, but the Community Participation Committee has not yet met.

Tom Nally stated that the Boylston Street Corridor Study Committee will not be submitting any warrant articles this fall. Additional work will likely include a broader range of allowable Floor Area Ratios, coupled with an economic feasibility analysis. The Committee also seems to be fractured a little bit on "how much" development might be appropriate in this corridor; some have called for the Committee to be more bold than the analysis completed to date. Paul asked for any EDAB members to let staff know about potential real estate consultants that could provide some of the economic feasibility analysis that Pam McKinney (now retired) has provided the Town in the past.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:00 pm.