Meeting Minutes  
September 9, 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, Alan Christ, Cliff Brown, Derick Choi

Staff: Kara Brewton, Karen Martin

Materials Presented: PowerPoint presentation by Conviser, text of zoning warrant articles, previous meeting minutes

With a quorum present, Paul Saner called the meeting to order.

Minutes:

Paul asked the Board to approve the meeting minutes from July 8th. Derrick had comments on the Soofa part of the minutes and wanted to add that his thoughts regarding the Soofa installation were to “go big or go home” meaning, would Soofa consider a larger deployment as part of their initial roll out rather than only installing 3 to 6 signs in each commercial area. The Board agreed to add this language to page 3.

Susan stated that she would like to add the word “parking” before “zoning requirements” on Page 8.

Ken moved to approve the minutes. The Board voted to approve the minutes. Alan abstained since he was not at the July meeting.

Warrant Article Discussion:

The presenters for the first agenda item had not yet arrived, so Anne suggested that the Board begin the conversation on warrant article topics. Paul gave an overview of the different warrant articles and asked to hear who is interested in which and the reasoning why EDAB might want to discuss each one.

Anne asked to open the floor for discussion. Carol asked to clarify the warrant article numbers.
Cliff asked to explain the rationale behind EDAB taking up certain articles such as EV parking. Paul responded that EDAB should be considering if the articles directly impact economic development or our commercial areas.

**Conviser Presentation:**

The representatives from Conviser arrived and the Board returned to the first agenda item to hear their presentation. Susan introduced Adam and Jim Conviser and explained that she and Carol had met with them previously at Allium Market and asked them to put together a presentation about the retail market in Brookline. She stated that they are commercial market specialists and you can see their signs are hanging around town in our commercial centers.

Adam Conviser introduced himself and his cousin Jim and explained that they have been in business for over 20 years and that he grew up in the construction and development field. He stated that Conviser currently represents retail spaces in Boston, Brookline, Cambridge and Newton. He went on to explain that retail is their expertise and they serve as landlord reps and tenant reps. They have a lot of contacts and listings in Brookline and they have done about 40 retail leases in Brookline in the past 4 years, mainly in Coolidge Corner and Washington Square.

Adam explained that EDAB had asked them to present on the topic of the headwinds and tailwinds of retail in Brookline. They have created a presentation that discusses where retail was and where it’s going. The presentation explained how shopping patterns are changing and discussed current vacancies. Adam stated that there are a lot of reasons retail is changing. For example, KaBloom flower shop just closed this week. He said that flowers are now mostly purchased online and that there are no economies for retail storefronts at current prices. However, retail is alive and well, he said. The “Amazon Effect” is often exaggerated. Only 14.4% of all retail is done online. In fact, some online retailers are opening brick and mortar locations like Warby Parker. Baby boomers are returning to cities and millennials want convenience, he explained.

Adam and Jim went on to discuss the issue of rents and explained Triple Net Costs – rent + taxes + fees – and how they are being passed through to tenants. An average rent in Coolidge Corner may be $90/square foot but there is $20 of pass throughs added on top of that. Adam compared the rents of Coolidge Corner to Davis Square which has similar amenities but is substantially lower cost. New trade areas are opening up such as the area outside of Coolidge Corner in JFK Crossing where a new Tatte Bakery will open. Adam predicted that landlords will need to make corrections in rent up to 15 to 20%.

He also talked about competition for trade areas and the opening of new unique experiences like TimeOut Market in Fenway which is offering a new type of business model. He believes Coolidge Corner struggles with a lack of a daytime population and also has a lot of generational owners who are less interested in trying out new ideas and more interested in just continuing to collect rent. Businesses that continue to succeed will include experiential retail – things you can’t get online like Allium, Village Vinyl, Parlor, Union Square Donuts, Tatte and any type of boutique fitness. Adam cited examples of mixed-use development as being largely successful including 420
Harvard, 455 Harvard and the Cleveland Circle Cinema development. He believes a mixed-use development on the Centre Street lot would be a great use of that space.

Adam and Jim also described other factors in the retail market including rent correction, parking waivers, tax relief, liquor licenses, more flexible business hours and BIDs.

Paul asked about rent corrections and if Conviser sees the potential for rent corrections across all markets. Adam responded that he believes once tenants have left a space and the landlords begin to feel the pain of no rent coming in, that is when they may become flexible. He feels that landlords need to get down to rents in the mid-$70s to mid-$90s per square foot range.

Cliff asked about day time markets and how Brookline could have success like TimeOut Market in Brookline with low daytime markets? Adam responded that it could work in Brookline Village which is seeing impacts from Children’s Hospital already due to proximity to Longwood Medical Area. He stated that a project like Brookline Place could spur what we’re looking for even if perhaps on a smaller scale with creativity and the right developer.

Carol noted that Brookline has a lot of retail storefronts used as daycares. She asked if daycares have the economics to stay in Brookline with these rents. Jim replied that yes, based on the cost of daycares and the amount of money they bring in, they have the economics to stay. They can pay really good rent, he stated, but questioned if they add to the collective? Not really, he believes. They are dead doorways with no action, similar to banks.

Derrick asked about experiential retail and banks like Capitol One with its Peet’s Café – is the market reacting to these hybrid developments? Adam replied that he thinks they’re doing it because they are trying to come up with a gimmick to get people in but it is not the same as a unique coffee experience like 4A or Café Fixe.

Ken asked about parking and if Conviser gets resistance from tenants for spaces that have zero parking? Jim responded that parking is an issue and that you need enough parking so people can get to you and there can be a barrier when there is a requirement for parking where you have to go get a waiver. Nobody in Brookline really has parking, however, so it’s a relatively easy playing field he stated.

Susan asked about landlord landscape and ownership patterns. Adam responded that there are a lot of local landlords and contrasted between different landlord “styles” such as the owner of SS Pierce Building versus Lady Grace. He stated that there are no real big active developers but mostly landlords who want stable tenants, but have no interest in doing mixed-use developments.

Anne asked if Brookline’s permitting processes are more onerous than other communities and what can the Town do to help? Jim replied that they are not necessarily more onerous but it depends on the use.

Kara asked how common triple net leases are in similar commercial areas to Coolidge Corner. Adam replied that most retail leases are triple net except in some cases like office. Kara also
asked for examples of business types that Conviser works with that are not food establishments or banks. Adam gave examples that included medical, barber shops, salons, PT, fitness, children’s clothing.

Susan asked what will be happening to the Gen Sou En? Adam responded that Panera is still on the lease but they are close to another restaurant deal.

Susan stated that EDAB would like to leave Conviser with the message that the Board would like to be useful in whatever ways they can and she encouraged Adam and Jim to be in touch with Kara and her staff. She thanked them for coming tonight.

**Warrant Article Discussion (continued)**

The Board resumed its discussion on the Warrant Articles:

Paul stated that they seem to have identified four warrant articles for discussion.

Ken asked if it would be useful to allocate specific amounts of time to different articles. Paul stated that he envisions at least one hour to fossil fuel and 30 to 45 minutes for the others.

Marilyn asked for an explanation on the economic development issue related to the fossil fuel article. Paul responded that he does not believe anyone has analyzed the impacts on near term and long term construction and growth impacts.

Ken spoke about the microunits article and noted the difference between past examples of the Town negotiating and discussing a tax agreement with one developer versus this proposal which is a non-site-specific overlay district. Ken stated that the proposed increased density can support businesses but questioned how the Town would protect itself in maintaining the tax base for microunits.

Paul added that the proposed article also proposes to changes the public benefits provision and noted that Bobby Zuker has a long-term lease on the Santander building.

The Board discussed the proposed Short-Term Rental article and how short-term rentals related to economic development. Karen Martin gave background on the Town’s position and efforts to draft its own regulations.

Cliff asked if there should be an expectation of the petitioner to present certain economic-related impacts of their article and if they don’t have that information, should EDAB hear the article. Paul responded that it could still be heard but EDAB could decide it doesn’t have enough information to take a position.

Zoe Lynn spoke about Article 21 and the economic impacts of the proposed fossil fuel ban. She explained that this article is co-sponsored by three Select Board members and stated that she could use EDAB’s expertise to help shape the article to be more successful.
Cliff asked why EDAB would advise on this article without an analysis that shows whether or not this will hurt the Town. Carol stated that she doesn’t understand why the three Select Board co-sponsors give this article more priority than if they were any other three Town Meeting Members. Kara stated that EDAB’s feedback will be helpful even with all of the unknowns surrounding this topic.

Derrick encouraged establishing relevant criteria for EDAB discussion and stated that right now we are too lost in the details of the articles.

Paul pointed out that it would be great to have an outside expert to do an analysis of the impacts of this article.

Derrick asked if something similar could be done as the zoning sensitivity analyses that were previously performed where six categories were chosen and applied to upcoming projects.

Carol stated that she would like to see the change in delta between Silver LEED and all electric for a project like Waldo Durgin to see the difference in carbon emissions? She stated that it would be important to see if it makes sense for the cost or the ability to build the project.

Zoe described the Town’s goals are to achieve zero emissions by 2050 and that the target areas for reduction are housing and building stock and transportation infrastructure.

Ken stated that Brookline has 60,000 people on a planet of 7.3 billion people – we could go to zero emissions tomorrow and it won’t impact anything. The problem is so gigantic and our contributions are small but important to set an example.

Anne stated that EDAB will meet again next week on the 16th to hold public hearings on the warrant articles. Paul asked if EDAB should pick two articles for the hearing. The Board agreed that they will hear the fossil fuel article and the microunits article. Cliff suggested that EDAB members should compile questions that they have on these topics in advance and send them to Anne who will compile them and direct them to Kara and her staff to review prior to the hearing.

**Board and Staff Updates:**

Paul gave a brief update on the 30 Webster Street hotel which went again before the ZBA. Due to the fact that the management company is not well regarded, neighborhood concerns and an issue regarding the FAR variance, the case was continued and will return later this month.

Karen gave an update on the Holiday Inn which is currently rebranding and beginning renovations.

Paul gave Newbury College updates. He stated that the purchaser of the property has closed on the property and intends to create a senior care use. Paul explained that tomorrow the Select Board will be appointing a zoning committee to try to get a zoning change for next May. However, the purchaser is not happy with that timeframe and would like a sooner option. Paul believes this
is an exciting use for the east side of the campus that will spur economic development. The question remains on the west side and if it can become a school or municipal use. He added that there will need to be negotiations – the Town is to get the west side in exchange for the zoning change to develop the east side.

Cliff asked about the impact of the fossil fuel amendment on this project? Paul replied that the project could be exempted from the requirements.

Cliff stated that he will give the BFAC update at a later time. Marilyn gave an update on the Land Bank Study Committee. She reported that she brought EDAB feedback to the Land Bank Study Committee at its last meeting. The Committee decided not to bring forward a warrant article at this time to the November Town Meeting, because it had not reached closure on a specific proposal and wanted more time to finish evaluating information. Marilyn noted that there is another transfer tax warrant article on the current warrant that would also need legislative approval via a home rule petition. This alternate transfer tax proposal would be limited to funding affordable housing and is not tied to acquiring land.

Cliff asked about the amount of money that the proposed warrant article could collect and if there is proof of revenue. The Land Bank Study Committee had Gary McCabe come to its last meeting and he was able to give some snapshot estimated revenue numbers. Cliff stated that if the currently-proposed warrant article is being directed solely at funding the Housing Trust Fund, then based on these early estimates the Fund would quickly have capital to build new units.

Cliff asked about the amount of money that the proposed warrant article could collect and if there is proof of revenue. Marilyn replied that there are no numbers presented in this article but Gary had given some snapshot numbers. Cliff stated that if the proposed warrant article is being directed solely at the Housing Trust Fund, then the Fund will quickly have capital to build new units.

Kara gave an update on liquor licenses and stated that there are five licenses still available to be distributed but all others have been accounted for.

Paul stated that the last item on the agenda is a potential joint meeting with EDAB and HAB. Ken explained that with so much happening in town with 40Bs and commercial projects, staff could provide an overview about what is happening and help people know what is going on in town. He suggested a Q&A format and would also add the Planning Board in as well so that there would be a panel with Paul, Roger Blood and Steve Heikin. Ken suggested specifically reaching out to invite Town Meeting Members.

Kara suggested that Ken could meet with Roger and Steve Heikin. A tentative time of December was suggested after Town Meeting wraps up in order to compare notes on what was passed and the impacts of respective missions. Paul will take ownership of coordinating.

Meeting adjourned.