

Economic Development Advisory Board Minutes

June 21, 2021

7 – 9 PM held remotely via Zoom

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

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

Staff present: Kara Brewton, Meredith Mooney, Victor Panak

Guests included: Alisa Jonas, Amy Emmert, Andrea Loew, Ann Burke, Carla Benka, Damon Graff, David Leschinsky, Devon Trevelyan, Evan Banks, Janice Kahn, Jeff Wachter, Jenn Mason, Jennifer Dopazo Gilbert, Jesse Baerkahn, Adam Conviser, Jim Conviser, Allison Yee, Karen Voght, Bill Reyelt, John VanScoyoc, Sean Lynn-Jones, Wendy Machmuller, Richard Tuck, Danny Danesh, Kelley Pope, Susie Roberts, Saralynn Allaire, Zachary Tuck, Sandra Saner, Robert Schram, Mike Toffel, Jeff Wachter, Andrea Loew, Wendy Friedman

Materials included: 6/21/21 agenda, 6/21/21 presentation by retail panelists (Jesse Baerkahn of Graffito SP, Adam & Jim Conviser of Conviser Property Group, Allison Yee of Popping Up Next); Biolab Subcommittee consolidated notes (6/13/21).

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.

Retail Panel

Sandi Silk introduced the retail panel, including Adam & Jim Conviser of the Conviser Property Group, Jesse Baerkahn of Graffito SP, and Allison Yee of Popping Up Next.

As a starting point, Jesse noted that everything they are doing at Graffito is through the lens of COVID recovery as well as equity. Their starting point is working with community engagement to understand objectives long before they get to the marketing and leasing phase. Successful retail requires supportive infrastructure such as seating/lighting, public art, events, etc. The ongoing trends of shoppers shifting to online platforms was significantly sped up during COVID: five years of expected online retail growth was compacted into five months. As of now, there is lots of leasing activity and widespread optimism. Challenges include shifting regulations, constructions costs, and labor shortage. Graffito is broadening their definition of retail, to think about ground floor activation.

Jim Conviser spends a lot of time as the sort of “peacemaker” between tenants and landlords. Labor shortage and the need for retailers to convert and compete online continues to be challenges. Streamlining permitting would be significantly helpful in all communities, including Brookline. For example, a deal they are working on at 1284 Beacon Street will require a Board of Appeals decision in

order to change the ground floor use from realty office/ restaurant to medical, and that is eight months of risk for both the landlord and potential tenant. They would also like to see opportunities to increase residential density in Coolidge Corner, as many buildings are still only one-story commercial buildings. They have seen a huge shift of businesses attracted to the JFK area now that several housing developments are completing construction. Adam Conviser added that Brookline had done a good job in keeping the parking requirements more flexible between uses, which is especially helpful to restaurants.

Allison Yee is seeing an increased demand for pop-up space and community engagement. Different brands are also collaborating together, to share financial, market, and labor resources. Pop-ups are very good at creating temporal, experiential environments, that can compete well with online shopping trends. Landlords are more open to experimentation right now for shared income rent models, shorter leases, etc. Locally in Brookline, she worked on Portabello Market's pop-up where Chobee Hoy's office was in Brookline Village. The store was based at The Street in Chestnut Hill, and the business owners ultimately decided to retire. However, one of their employees is now launching a sister business in Brookline Village, because she was able to test the market through the pop-up prior to signing a lease.

In response to Q&A:

- Allison Yee noted that municipalities often don't have a defined process for pop-ups or other one time events, which can lead to a lot of confusion about how to seek appropriate permits. Newton and Needham have permitted pop-ups well, and Ashland has actually put local funding towards a pop up space.
- Jesse Baerkahn stated that bringing down the barriers of entry would be helpful. For example, any entrepreneur that has to hire a local attorney to open a new location is too high of a barrier.
- Adam Conviser echoed Jesse's thoughts, noting that those permitting processes are very expensive as well – and are more likely to be borne by national tenants or banks that independent, start-up businesses.
- Visioning at a community- and neighborhood-wide results in a shared vision so that there can be a roadmap about which types of businesses or change of businesses should require a special permit or be allowed as of right.
- Forecast for restaurants – there is a lot of demand right now, especially for those spaces that already have restaurant equipment in place. The smaller operators, especially if they don't have outdoor seating or can't reinvent themselves, are going to continue to be in a lot of trouble. Staffing availability, housing affordability for employees continue to be growing reasons of why the restaurant industry is in trouble.
- Retail is likely stronger or will recover more quickly in Boston, but there have been 10-15% drops in rent in the core of Coolidge Corner (which had recently skyrocketed prior to COVID). Additionally, adjacent areas such as JFK with additional development of new spaces have driven down demand for the heart of Coolidge Corner.
- Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are one management structure, but strong business associations like in Kendall Square can sometimes be an easier structure and just as successful.

[Attached to the end of these minutes is text from the Q&A and chat features of zoom, most of which was used during the Retail Panel discussion.]

Review and Discuss Biolab consolidated notes from EDAB Lab/Life Science Subcommittee

The Subcommittee reviewed their notes to date on Biolabs; EDAB thanked them for their research and work to date. The conversation then turned to 10 Brookline Place. Tom Nally noted that Bulfinch properties, experienced developer with lab uses, hired Elkus Manfredi as their architect. They are considering a building with two different towers, approximately 125' tall. John VanScoyoc noted that with regards to the use, it will be a major challenge to be accepted by Town Meeting – which is why EDAB's work on biolabs, especially public health provisions, is so important. Paul Saner noted that the Subcommittee would be presenting a report to the Select Board later this year, and are speaking with Dr. Jett as a precursor to a formal study committee that might be formed following the current Boylston Corridor Committee's work. Typical lab buildings are approximately half "bench" lab spaces and half back office type uses.

Ken Lewis noted that he was pleasantly surprised by the outcome of 2 Brookline Place and was expecting the parking garage to appear much taller. He asked what the parking ratio might be at 10 Brookline Place. Tom Nally noted that Bulfinch was initially thinking 1.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet, but then backed off a little, mentioning 1.0 sp/Ksf. Bulfinch also noted that they were looking to design a parking garage with flat floors rather than sloped, and that the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) would be 6 or 7.

Carol Levin noted that there would be tension between what kind of massing works better for Station Street versus Boylston Street.

Sandi Silk added how important it was that commercial uses add to daytime populations.

In response to a question by Anne, Tom noted that the heights presented did not include any mechanical penthouses, and that shadow studies needed to be completed.

Paul Saner noted that Bulfinch was aiming to initially enter the market in 2023 following a Town Meeting Vote in 2022 to allow the use. There would likely be 2-3 years of permitting and another 3-4 years to build the structure.

[May meeting minutes were not reviewed]

Committee Member & Staff Updates

Paul Saner noted that the next couple EDAB meetings would likely include an update from the Boylston Corridor Committee, more information about the US Open, an update on the Local Rapid Recovery Program, regulations for biolabs, and maybe review of a façade loan. Therefore, EDAB members should plan on meeting on August 9th.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:00 pm.

EDAB Q&A

Jenn Mason 07:31 PM

The idea of Pop ups is so enticing. Besides helping small businesses try things out, they bring a continuous fresh reason to visit. However, the permitting process is already difficult for a fulltime business, how do you get a town on board that everyone has the idea of “yes! let’s figure out how to make this happen!” instead of, “yeah, we’ve never done that before, so we can’t really help you.”

Sandi Silk 07:44 PM

i think this was answered live - let us know if you have any follow up...

wendy machmuller 07:34 PM

Question for Allison - have you worked with Design Museum, an organization who is doing pop-up art galleries?

This question has been answered live

david leschinsky 07:52 PM

To any of the panelists: does having a BID help? and as a follow on - have you seen any change in property values in those districts that have successful bids?

Sandi Silk 07:58 PM

answered live

Janice Kahn 08:00 PM

Brookline is not monolithic - it is urban and suburban. Doesn’t retail need to be mindful of that.

Sandi Silk 08:00 PM

absolutely! thanks for the question, Janice

**** TEXT FROM THE CHAT FEATURE FOLLOWS BELOW****

19:07:53 From Carol Levin to Panelists : can we please get an explanation of “Place Making” and “Place Keeping”

19:14:02 From Derrick Choi to Panelists : Do we need to re-think ground floor activation in the new reality? Would love to hear about how you all have been re-tweaking the business model as of late.

19:14:32 From Jesse Baerkahn (he/him) to Everyone : Carol, good question...

19:15:29 From Jesse Baerkahn (he/him) to Everyone : At Graffito we don’t talk so much about place “making” — the places we work on already exist. Our focus is on amplifying, pivoting, bolstering n’hood... thus placekeeping vs placemaking

19:16:34 From Jesse Baerkahn (he/him) to Everyone : Derrick, yes.

19:31:48 From Derrick Choi to Panelists : Allison - what is the average hit rate for business that ultimately convert from pop-up to "permanent residence?" That being said, is my question soooooo totally 2019? Is the omnichannel world pushing us to continue to rethink the pop-up paradigm in the post-pandemic?

19:32:45 From Ken Lewis to Panelists : The US Open Men's Golf Championship is coming to The Country Club in Brookline in June 2022. Any creative suggestions as to how this national event could be leveraged to benefit local businesses?

19:34:17 From ann burke to Panelists : what entity helps make these matches fo the pop ups .. is this the city or downtown organization or someone else

19:35:00 From Janice Kahn to Panelists : The Street in Chestnut Hill, Newton has been doing pop-ups for a number of years

19:35:27 From ann burke to Panelists : the " corner spot" in Ashland . it was a patronicity project

19:36:03 From Allison Yee to Panelists : @Janice, yes - that's actually where I got my start, building out the retail incubation dept of The Street/WS Development

19:36:13 From Allison Yee to Panelists : @Ann, such a great project

19:36:53 From Allison Yee to Panelists : @Ann, UpNext has taken on the matchmaking work, in partnership with the towns/landlords

19:37:24 From Susie Roberts to Panelists : For Allison, With respect to permitting, are other towns writing zoning laws specifically for pop-ups?

19:38:04 From Allison Yee to Panelists : @Derrick, it's probably in the 30% range, though perhaps higher depending on the timeframe you're examining; though I do think there's a place for pop-ups even if/when all spaces are filled

19:38:38 From Allison Yee to Panelists : @Susie, locally, it's just beginning - that's the direction we'd all like to move

19:47:31 From Jenn Mason to Everyone : This has been great. As a small Biz owner in Brookline, I feel heard today esp by Jesse and Jim. Would love to know... what do we do to fix/improve this?

19:48:31 From Jesse Baerkahn (he/him) to Everyone :
<https://www.somervision2040.com/thepathsince2010/>

19:50:50 From Sandi Silk to Everyone : Question for Allison - have you worked with Design Museum, an organization who is doing pop-up art galleries?

19:54:06 From Allison Yee to Everyone : @Haven't worked with Design Museum yet, but we love art-driven pop-ups, as standalone or integrations with other retail environments.

19:54:42 From Susie Roberts to Everyone : Following on Jesse Baerkahn's suggestion for Brookline to check out Somerville's comprehensive neighborhood plan, I'm not sure if everyone is aware, but earlier this year, Linda Olson Pehlke (whom most of you know) helped Advisory Committee, Planning Dept and others to bring Dan Barden the architect of the Somerville comprehensive neighborhood study to speak to many of us interested in this topic. Brookline By Design is an organization that hopes to convince Brookline to do the same with over 500 people having signed a letter on the topic to do the same. I'd encourage everyone to check out this organization and make more noise about Brookline's conducting the same type of study. brooklinebydesign.com.

19:55:17 From Jesse Baerkahn (he/him) to Everyone : Seeing above... @Ken, anything you can do to make sure TCC uses local vendors for demand for good and food especially.

19:55:46 From Jesse Baerkahn (he/him) to Everyone : *goods and food (from folks going to the event)

19:55:59 From wendy machmuller to Everyone : Thank you Allison. There are some key contacts from Design Museum in B'Line who I'm sure would love to work with you.

19:56:25 From Allison Yee to Everyone : Thank you Wendy, would love to chat with them

19:57:21 From wendy machmuller to Everyone : I will get your email and connect you!

19:57:26 From Jesse Baerkahn (he/him) to Everyone : @Susie, exactly. Somerville by design is such a great comp (and massive undertaking) but will pay huge dividends moving forward and provides a great / powerful platform to City to engage with private development community to get what residents want <https://www.somervillebydesign.com>

19:57:46 From Meredith L. Mooney to Everyone : Closely related to tonight's panel discussion is the Town's participation in the state's Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) for Coolidge Corner & JFK Crossing: <https://www.brooklinema.gov/1971/Local-Rapid-Recovery-Plan> . The Town is convening a series of focus group discussions for this project. There are still a few spots available for tomorrow's Local Customer Base Focus Group (6/22 @ 6:30-7:30pm via Zoom). If you're a regular visitor/customer in Coolidge Corner & JFK Crossing and available to participate, contact Meredith L. Mooney (mmooney@brooklinema.gov) to register. We'd love your input and ideas for how Coolidge Corner & JFK Crossing can bounce back bigger and better post-pandemic.

20:00:02 From Jesse Baerkahn (he/him) to Everyone : Thanks all. Good Luck!!

20:01:41 From Kara Brewton to Everyone : For those in the audience: the consolidated notes for Lab/ Life Science Paul is referring to is linked in the agenda, and also at: <https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/24837/Life-Science-Consolidated-Notes-2021-06-16>

20:02:29 From Sandi Silk to Everyone : From Allison Yee.. @Janice, yes - that's actually where I got my start, building out the retail incubation dept of The Street/WS Development

20:03:01 From Sandi Silk to Everyone : Again, from Allison Yee - @Ann, such a great project

20:03:31 From Sandi Silk to Everyone : Again from A. Yee - @Ann, UpNext has taken on the matchmaking work, in partnership with the towns/landlords

20:03:52 From Sandi Silk to Everyone : From Allison.. @Susie, locally, it's just beginning - that's the direction we'd all like to move

20:17:32 From Jeff Wachter to Panelists : This is great. I'm so excited about the potential of life science research space in Brookline!

20:20:56 From wendy machmuller to Everyone : Very informative, thanks EDAB

20:23:03 From Jeff Wachter to Panelists : Speaking from experience, allowing BSL-2 research to occur is much more important, the need for BSL3 and 4 space is in markedly lower demand. BSL2 level is needed for most of the cutting edge bio research in life science today.

20:48:32 From John VanScoyoc to Everyone : I have another meeting to attend. Thanks for tonight's opportunity to speak. Great meeting (all topics).