



Building a Better Brookline

Robert Sperber, Founder Emeritus

Anne R. Meyers, Co-Chair
Paul Saner, Co-Chair
Cliff Brown
Derrick Choi
Alan Christ
Susan Houston
Kenneth Lewis
Carol Levin
Thomas Nally
Marilyn Newman
Alden Raine
Donald A. Warner

April 7, 2020

Dear Select Board Members and Town Administrator Kleckner,

On behalf of the Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB), we wish to applaud the Town and Economic Development staff's quick actions over the last several weeks to try to mitigate the extraordinary impact the COVID-19 crisis has had on our business community. While no one knows the longer-term effects, we remain optimistic, given Brookline's location, that opportunities will emerge to advance Town objectives as long as the Town vigilantly pursues long term economic development planning. Given the near-term impact COVID-19 will have on the Town's budget, a longer-term economic development strategy is, in our view, more important than ever.

EDAB is aware that prior to COVID-19 the Select Board and Town Administrator were in the midst of reviewing the recommendations set forth in the Brookline Fiscal Advisory Committee's (BFAC) report, which, understandably, has been put aside. EDAB is requesting that you appoint a Select Board Member to be the development liaison (BFAC recommendation 2e) and adopt BFAC's Economic Development recommendation #12. Details about the rationale for these are below.

At our April 6th meeting EDAB took the opportunity to reflect on key themes emerging from the March 2nd Development Forum as well as BFAC's Economic Development recommendations. The Board voted unanimously to present the following observations and advice for your consideration:

1. Development Forum Key Observations:

- Four of the board chairs who presented at the March 2nd forum (Planning, Housing, Economic Development, and Climate Sustainability), clearly stated that zoning reform is needed to advance the objectives of their boards as well as other Town initiatives. Two Preservation Commissioners also generally supported zoning reform.

- Greater commercial density in particular was cited, an acknowledgement that existing zoning has failed to induce much-needed activity in our mixed-use corridors.
- Another theme from the Forum is that the Planning Department is resource challenged.

2. Select Board Responsibility for Economic Development and Long-Term Planning: (Recommendation 2e)

- We strongly advise that one Select Board member be designated as having ongoing primary responsibility for coordinating the Town's overall economic development strategy and activities, inclusive of zoning reform and robust opportunistic long-range planning.
- Such a designation would not absolve the rest of the Select Board from participating in economic development activities. The responsible Select Board member will report annually to the Select Board, Advisory Committee, and Town Meeting, and will provide leadership on broader public education. Other Select Board members will need to provide leadership to zoning and other study committees.
- The designated Select Board member should use all existing and to-be-developed tools including the 2016 Housing Production Plan, the 2018 Major Parcel Study, and the 2018 Economic Development/ Long Term Planning Division 5-Year Strategy and Work Plan, which identify study corridors and target initiatives.
- Leadership is needed to ensure working group coordination amongst Board Chairs involved in Development matters, directly supporting the Director of Economic Development and Long-Term Planning, and ensuring availability of sufficient resources, including consulting, to accomplish this over time.
- We advise that you commit now to make this a standing board member assignment after the Town election when the new board is organized.

3. BFAC Economic Development Recommendation (#12):

EDAB recommends that the Select Board adopt this recommendation as soon as practical. This BFAC recommendation includes a commitment to "Aggressively pursue new economic development to increase the vibrancy of the town's economy, generate new property tax revenues, (and) minimize the burden on residential taxpayers ... To this end, enact zoning changes to incentivize new development and encourage increased density in designated areas. A significant commitment to strategic planning and public education will be necessary to achieve this goal." Also, "Brookline has a need for more housing and values walkability, sustainable development, and open space. Development, in addition to increasing Brookline's fiscal resiliency, can also address these other goals."

Thank you for your dedicated service to the Town in these trying times.

Anne Meyers / Paul Saner, Co-Chairs

cc: Alison Steinfeld, Steve Heikin, Werner Lohe, David King, Elton Elperin, Roger Blood, Advisory Committee (via Lisa Portscher), & School Committee (via Robin Coyne)