



Building a Better Brookline

**Economic Development
Advisory Board**
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Meeting Minutes: June 8, 2015

Attendees:

EDAB Members Present: Paul Saner, Anne Meyers, Derrick Choi, Ken Lewis, Tom Nally, Al Raine, Carol Levin, Don Warner, Susan Houston, Marilyn Newman, Cliff Brown

EDAB Member Absent: Bob Sperber

Economic Development Division: Kara Brewton, Andy Martineau

Guests: There were approximately 60 attendees representing most Town boards and commissions as well as those with an interest in commercial areas.

Materials: Agenda, 1180 Boylston St. Summary, Context Map, breakout session worksheet, powerpoint

Introductions and Planning for a Changing Brookline Workshop Overview

Paul Saner provided a brief overview of the meeting agenda and purpose. He referenced several people, including Sergio Modigliani and Larry Koff who attended EDAB's April meeting, indicating a desire from some residents and other Boards to take a broader approach towards planning. They pointed out there is no one entity or person responsible for long term planning in Brookline. Rather, we have a constellation of smaller groups, all thinking about a particular issue. That led to the convening of this multi-board workshop, talking about redevelopment criteria for long-term mixed use commercial district properties. EDAB is especially interested in defining criteria for buildings that are smaller than, say, 50,000 square feet of building area. This meeting is hopefully a first in perhaps a series of multi-Board workshops.

Red Cab is the classic example of a great committee planning process. Several previous attempts to redevelop the site failed. Developers lost money and neighbors were very concerned. During the committee's deliberations, there was no developer proposal that the committee was crafting zoning for. Rather, volunteer professionals including neighbors created an economically viable range of possible new uses based on "form-based" zoning that fit to the site and its surrounding environs, leading to the hotel now under construction.

1. Strategic Asset Plan & Large Parcel Studies Update

- Alison Steinfeld provided a brief overview of two upcoming studies in Fiscal Years 2016 and 2017, to be completed by the Planning Department with the assistance of a consultant.

2. Recent Changes & Developments in Commercial Areas

- Kara Brewton gave a brief presentation of both commercial and residential developments over the past several years. With or without specialized committee work, there is

significant residential development in our commercial areas. Additionally, there is a wide range of development sizes, which in some years can add up to very large changes in our commercial areas.

- Members of the Planning Board, Advisory Committee, and Board of Selectmen have asked us what's next, while pointing to the fact that mid-sized properties of a half-acre or less are the ones most in need of investment, redevelopment, and new commercial tax growth.
- Staff receive inquiries from developers and property owners asking what the Town would like to see happen. Staff knows more about the types of things the Town does not want and would benefit from knowing more about the various criteria people associate with a desired/successful redevelopment.

3. Redevelopment Site Example: 1180 Boylston St.

- Andy Martineau provided a brief overview of the site and neighborhood where the owner of 1180 Boylston Street is proposing a mixed commercial use redevelopment that is not feasible under existing zoning.
- The district has seen many banks and other service uses move in over the past two years. Neighbors would like to see a greater variety of uses that benefit the neighborhood.
- Andy noted that other groups have looked at this district in the past, making several recommendations to improve the pedestrian experience, functionality and aesthetics.

4. Break-out Session: Successful Redevelopment Criteria

- Andy introduced the breakout session asking each table to answer a series of questions regarding both the redevelopment example and the district.
- Each table spent the next 40 minutes discussing criteria for successful redevelopment both on the site and in the context of the surrounding neighborhood.

5. Reporting Back: Successful Redevelopment Criteria

- Each table reported back their criteria for successful redevelopment as well as discussed various issues related to the process for any redevelopment proposal to move forward in Brookline.

Discussion of Criteria/Site/ Neighborhood Issues

Traffic/Parking/Circulation:

- Hammond Street Intersection is a major issue
- Shallow parcels make it challenging/expensive to satisfy the parking requirements
- The district needs better connectivity for pedestrians and public transit
- Route 9 is a barrier to better ped circulation
- Parking will be a challenge at 1180 Boylston and elevated parking will be expensive
- Look at Coolidge Corner as a model of multi-modal connectivity
- Future developments needs to insure there is adequate operational spaces for loading etc.
- Transportation Demand Management should influence development and inform criteria for success from a transportation standpoint

- We are talking about encouraging investment, but using the same tools and parking standards that prohibit it
- Walkability/complete streets and pedestrian experience are priorities
- Flesh out transportation criteria to make the corridor work better and reassure burdened neighbors
- Ask developers to contribute to improving the walkability of the intersection (pavement materials, colors, midway pedestrian refuge, signal timing if needed, etc.) to increase pedestrian comfort in patronizing multiple businesses in the areas on one trip
- Use TDM policy to incentivize the development's use of public transit (bus and train) for employees and visitors
- Minimize parking ratio minimums and maximums to the extent feasible, and forbid near-street surface parking
- Require employers to charge employees for parking, and subsidize MBTA passes
- In exchange for subsidizing a new bus & shuttle shelter at the site to make use of public transit more attractive, grant a concession of some sort
- Require right-sized freight delivery vehicles, and efficient but neighbor-friendly freight operations

Zoning/Regulations:

- Encourage density, height and efficiency
- Encourage the use of environmentally friendly building materials.
- Incentivize different and mixed uses
- Look for ways to create artist live/work space, millennial housing and identify appropriate locations for 40B housing
- Take a village approach to aggregate and address many of these issues
- Consider form based zoning regulations like that of Red Cab
- Rezone thoughtfully with the entire Rt. 9 corridor in mind, not just site specific
- Find a way to up zone the parcel, and make it attractive to the neighborhood and successful for the developer, in order to jump start a trend with adjacent properties This could lead to rezoning much of the district to increase density and thereby create more of an urban room or village feel
- Specify step-down or sky-plane massing to blend with the residential neighborhood just behind. Require active ground-floor use and encourage mixed use within the parcel.
- Build in flexibility and predictability
- Establish regulations that enable developers to contribute more to the area vs. site specific improvements
- Incentivize uses that activate the street
- Face the need to provide low-income housing, perhaps on Rt. 9 as part of a mixed commercial/residential corridor, as a way to fend off future 40B proposals
- In considering the highest and best use for any parcel or district, seek to retain basic services like service stations that are unloved but sorely missed if absent

Design Considerations:

- Consider urban vs. suburban scale
- Design for the future, not just what is needed/wanted now
- Commercial properties need to have secondary frontage facing the neighborhood
- Design should link with neighboring parcels, uses and transit
- Need to consider form and function for the neighborhood
- Encourage the use of green building materials

- Need access to more than one small parcel to create an efficient design
- Do not turn your back on Route 9 like Chestnut Hill Square
- Create a real destination where people want to be
- Integrate public art, public spaces and other amenities

Big Picture Items:

- We are talking about creating a number of micro visions, not a complete overhaul or change to the zoning by-law
- Need to balance governance, fiscal needs with a collective vision from the neighborhood
- Neighborhoods want to know what uses will be in a new development
- Need to keep in mind financial feasibility, taxes and the economics of a project. A developer is not going to invest in a property where there is no reward to offset the risk.
- This area should be a gateway to Brookline
- Really listen to the neighborhoods as that, with at the time no developer at the table, is what finally prompted the creation of the Davis Path committee and ultimately the zoning and criteria for the hotel
- Linking the tax benefits of a potential project might help people better understand the economic benefits of a project
- Quality of life is a primary consideration
- Is there a demand for more medical office in Brookline?
- Need to understand the history of why previous attempts to up zone this particular area were not successful
- Any zoning change requires 2/3 support of Town Meeting, so it will be critical to get neighborhood support
- Brookline has a history of supporting an idea until it is about to happen in your neighborhood. People then mobilize to get it in front of town meeting and people end up against it because next time it could happen in their neighborhood.
- These are all umbrella issues. The criteria we establish should be a means to begin solving some of the larger problems and improve the process for doing so
- The Town should think about acquiring open space before the opportunity to try and control what happens on them passes
- What don't we have that we need?
- The neighborhoods are siloed. They need to meet and figure out what they want
- Many surrounding towns and cities have found ways to appeal to developers. We could do the same thing
- How does the Town get of its own way?