



TOWN OF BOXBOROUGH PUBLIC MEETING Meeting Minutes

Economic Development Meeting
July 16, 2020
7:30 PM
Zoom Meeting

Joint EDC and Planning Board Agenda Items

EDC Members Present: Rich Guzzardi, Kristin Hilberg, Mark White, Joe Ferguson, Nate McKinley

EDC Members Absent: Dawn Willis and John Neyland

Planning Board Members Present: Mark Barbadoro, Cindy Markowitz, Robin Lazarow, Rebecca Verner and Mark White (EDC Member)

Also Present: Simon Corson, Town Planner, Becky Neville (Fin Comm) John Markiewicz (Select Board), Barbara Salzman, Diana Lipari, Hugh Fortmiller, Franci Nolde, Maria Neyland

Minutes

Motion was made by Rich Guzzardi, seconded by Mark White and moved unanimously by roll call to approve as drafted the minutes of May 21, 2020.

Motion was made by Mark White, seconded by Kristin Hilberg and moved unanimously by roll call to approve as drafted the minutes of June 4, 2020.

Motion was made by Mark White, seconded by Kristin Hilberg and moved unanimously by roll call to approve as drafted the minutes of June 25, 2020.

New business

Rich reported that he and Sandy Genna, the town assessor, attended the foreclosure auction for 60 and 70 Codman Hill Road on June 30. The buildings are currently assessed collectively for approx. \$14mil, the opening bid was set at \$8.5mil by UniBank. There were no bidders, and the bank bought them back for \$8.5mil. Rich believes Sandy will be reaching out to the bank as the new property owner.

Wes Fowlks asked the EDC to look into developing a plan to help local office parks prepare their locations for the possibility that businesses will be moving out of more congested areas and into the suburbs. Rich spoke with Lincoln Properties who owns 1414 Massachusetts Ave (Scott Brown) on the topic who indicated that they surveyed their urban tenants in Boston and 60% indicated no interest in moving to the suburbs. Many of them were exploring more remote opportunities. Simon is also reaching out to other property owners to poll them on what could be done with their properties to attract urban tenants. Calls are made and Simon is waiting for responses.

Cindy Markowitz called Planning Board meeting to order at 7:50pm by roll call attendance.

Rich thanked the PB for joining the EDC meeting and then recapped the Annual Town Meeting experience with regard to getting the EDC warrant article approved. Discussed the effect COVID has on the need for either drive through or curbside pick-up relative to current zoning bylaws and the Governor's order to allow outdoor dining during the virus. M. Neyland noted that that BoS voted to allow outdoor dining and there is nothing in our bylaws to prevent curbside pick-up at the 3 restaurants we currently have in town. Regarding curbside pick-up, Town Counsel informed the BoS that if we are silent on it, curbside is allowed. Mark Barbadoro indicated that the bylaw change only applied to Specialty Food Shops, and that the restriction on service directly to vehicles is limited to those establishments fitting the definition of Specialty Food Shop, and not other food establishments in town. The sentiment of town meeting was to address the issue in our bylaws, this will need further investigation/research.

UMASS study and update

Due to the virus, the in-person charettes have been cancelled, however voice-over presentations are being developed along with a story map to be posted on the EDC website to inform residents. Remote community feedback opportunities are being explored with UMASS. Rich and Simon will report out on this at the next EDC meeting. It was noted that the EDC webpage needs to be streamlined to make it more accessible to the public and more focused on the study and the various materials. There's a need to do social media outreach to draw public to the website when the presentations and story map are ready.

Rich summarized the contents of the Phase 1 technical report, asked for opinions and then passed the meeting over to the Planning Board for further comments and consideration.

Mark Barbardo noted that he had sent a letter to the EDC pointing out some inaccuracies in the UMASS report and asked if his concerns had been shared with the authors; Rich confirmed that it had. Mark intends to send an updated letter to the EDC to ensure that Phase 2 is begun with the correct information. Cindy will also share her input in writing with Rich.

In the context of the four scenarios that UMASS has provided to date, Mark B. suggested that the Master Plan be followed with regard to how the town is developed. Rich acknowledged this and agreed that there should be balance between the different models presented by UMASS to create a scenario that works for all.

Mark White also noted that the EDC has already discussed that we would need to cherry pick from each of the four frameworks as currently written to create something that will work in Boxborough.

John Markiewicz commented that as the former co-chair of the Master Plan Committee, the majority of the participants at that time chose town character over lower taxes. That said, the Master Plan indicates suggested locations for development such as the areas surrounding the hotel and Paddock Estates, and that these locations are also part of the UMASS scenarios. John noted that the public needs to supply additional input to help pick and choose how we make zoning changes and move forward.

Rich agreed, educating the public is the first step and that we will likely proceed with the charrette in a virtual manner since an in-person format is unlikely at this time. UMASS is moving to a virtual platform. A preliminary idea includes the following:

1. Create a Zoom format to allow for a UMASS presentation and Q/A in September.
2. After the presentation, run live feedback sessions (virtual breakouts) for residents to make comments

3. Host a community meeting to review the outcome of the meetings. UMASS believes this is possible and is working with Simon to develop strategies.

Robin asked if UMASS has considered how a post-COVID world could impact how the study plays out since the study was done pre-COVID. Rich commented that it was discussed with UMASS, and that any post-COVID assessment is hard to predict. This could potentially come out in the market assessments that UMASS will conduct.

Cindy asked if any market survey research will be done in time to have it available as part of the online charettes. Rich said that is the plan with the survey being done during July and August, the plan is to keep the work going and have the information available. Simon will continue to communicate with UMASS and will keep us updated

Mark B asked how the boards plan to manage expectations from the public? Simon believes that the UMASS experts will be moderating this.

Mark W. suggested that the Planning Board should be part of the discussion and formulation of the questions posed at the charettes. He also expressed concern that Zoom could present a challenge.

Simon acknowledged these are new and different times and he believes UMASS will be up for the challenge. Rich commented that UMASS has been making considerable investments in online communication and understands that they need to make it simple so all residents can have the opportunity to participate regardless of technical abilities.

Rich asked for comments from the public. Maria mentioned that the library has been offering a series of workshops online and would be happy to share their experience with the EDC.

Francie Nolde stated that the sustainability committee would like to be included in the discussion with regard to economic development and energy efficiency/limiting carbon emissions overall. Some of the charette questions should address this.

Cindy asked what happens after the charettes are done? Does the EDC have a timeline in mind for next steps? Rich indicated there are no timelines per se, however the EDC plans to keep working on “low hanging” fruit for small changes in zoning or policies. Larger focus items would need to take more time and consideration.

Cindy commented that the Planning Board and Select Board reviewed action items in the Master Plan in January, and she would like to see these discussions continue to keep the momentum going.

Barbara Saltzman seconded Francie’s comments about sustainability. When looking ahead, sustainability is going to become more and more important.

Hugh Fortmiller commented that a technical report review on the effect of COVID 19 on our lifestyles needs to be incorporated into a long-range plan, including how we may be living post-pandemic. The things we thought were important pre-COVID may no longer be relevant and perhaps we need to slow down and see how the pandemic is going to affect us moving forward.

Rich called for any other input. Maria mentioned that the Select Board will be looking at putting together a committee regarding inclusivity in town across all aspects of life at their meeting on July 27. This will include businesses, housing, town-wide services including public safety and government and will be a big part of economic development moving forward.

Doing Business in Boxborough

The meeting was turned over to Simon and Nate to discuss the process of developing a business in Boxborough. Nate reported that they plan to develop a one-page document to guide applicants towards getting their certificate of occupancies including a list of departments/people who are involved.

Simon shared his screen with his work to-date: a road map for applicants to use to guide them through the permitting process as well as increase the efficiency of their application process (who to be applying with either in order or concurrently). This will also help the various permitting departments collaborate more efficiently. John M suggested that the chart includes contact information for the responsible parties at each step. Nate also suggested all department heads need to be encouraged to get on board in a timely manner and participate in the development of the flowchart.

Rich and Nate brought forward the idea of EDC liaisons for new businesses to help them/welcome them to town and also give the board insight into the challenges they're facing. Simon is currently managing this. Mark. S. expressed his concern that with board turnover, using volunteers could become a continuity problem. Nate clarified that the EDC member would be a participant in the process, not taking the place of the professionals we have at Town Hall now.

Mark B described his experiences working in several towns in Massachusetts. Acton used a process called "flow" when he was there. An application would be managed as a process document. If something couldn't or wasn't signed off on, the department responsible for that piece would reach out to the applicant. Oak Bluffs also had a process where department heads would meet at scheduled times to review applications and manage the permitting process. Fitchburg has an online portal to manage this, applicant and professionals get information in real time.

The boards agreed that in order to encourage business development, Boxborough needs to create transparency as well as built a culture to make the town more business friendly.

Simon suggested we get buy-in from department heads, a meeting with all including Nate (as a local business owner) would be a good way to develop a user-friendly document for both staff and the public. This may not be ready for the next EDC meeting, but Simon will do his best to make it happen.

Upcoming meetings:

August 20, 2020

September 17, 2020

Meeting was adjourned at 9:30, moved by Mark W. and Seconded by Rick, role call vote to adjourn.

Cindy adjourned the Planning Board immediately after by role call vote.

Exhibits:

- Minutes from Meetings on May 21, 2020
- Minutes from Meeting on June 4, 2020
- Minutes from Meeting on June 25, 2020
- UMASS Phase I Technical Report