

Council of Economic Advisors
June 13, 2025
Meeting Minutes
Minutes Approved at October 10, 2025 CEA Meeting

Chair Heidi Frail called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM.

In attendance: Heidi Frail, Bhuren Patel, Matt Talcoff, Bill Mahoney, Shuaib Raza, Dina Creiger, Rick Putprush, Andrew Lyczmanenko, Mike Wilcox, Adam Meixner, Bob Hentschel, Chris Teachout

Town Staff Present: Amy Haelsen, Director of Communications and Community Engagement, Lee Newman, Director of Planning and Community Development

Matt Talcoff made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 10, 2025, February 14, 2025 and March 14, 2025 CEA meetings. Rick Putprush seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved by CEA members in attendance.

Lee Newman provided an update on major development projects going on in Needham. She started out with an update on the former Muzi Ford site at the intersection of Highland Avenue and Gould Street. The Needham Planning Board issued a special permit to allow 480,000 square feet of office and lab space and 10,000 square feet of retail space to be built at that site along with a structured parking garage to be built in two connected buildings and a separate parking garage. The building along Highland Avenue was approved for three stories with the building behind approved for five stories as was the parking garage.

The developer, Bulfinch, recently appeared before the Planning Board as they are having challenges finding a tenant for the lab space and are interested in exploring other options that would include retail, residential, medical office, 160 units of senior plus housing, an additional 200 to 250 market rate units, a medical office building of about 100,000 square feet and the potential of a hotel. They presented alternative conceptual site plans for these uses in a profile of four buildings on the periphery with interior surface parking with the remainder of the parking underground. This would require some zoning changes to implement which would trigger a fiscal impact analysis. The developer will be doing some community outreach to seek feedback on their proposal.

Plans for the project at 629 Highland Avenue include replacing five existing buildings with a 50,000 square foot medical office and 250 parking spaces behind that structure. One Wingate, also located on Highland Avenue, has a permit to put a third story on their building

and convert it from the nursing facility into 72 independent living units of which 12.5% or nine units will be affordable.

The new Boston Children's Hospital facility, located on First Avenue next to Tripadvisor in the New England Business Center, is a 224,000 square foot building which will be ready for occupancy in early 2026. It will provide pediatric specialty care and ambulatory surgical services. With this new facility, members discussed the interest in having connectivity to Needham Center and having additional retail or food service options in or near the NEBC and redevelopment of the Muzi Ford site would help serve this purpose. Heidi Frail also suggested that the CEA help to recruit a brew pub into the NEBD where zoning allows for this use as well as new development for the Town overall.

100 West Street at Avery Square, which is included in the MBTA Communities Act zoning, allows housing as of right under a four story of 44 units per acre. This will yield 189 units but can go above that threshold with a special permit. It's likely the Town will see a proposal for housing at that location in the coming months. Lastly, Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital met with the Planning Board recently to talk about creating 52 temporary valet parking spaces on two properties, 14 Oak Street and 20 Oak Street.

Ms. Newman also reported that the Town received a grant for \$45,000 from the executive office of environmental affairs to allow the Planning Division to conduct a comprehensive parking study to build upon the parking study conducted by Stantec in Needham Center and Needham Heights in 2023. This study will look at current parking requirements for various land uses around town and focus on the benefits and impacts of reducing the parking requirements. The Board wants to ensure that what is required for parking is consistent with what is considered a best practice.

The Planning Board is also involved in the review of the Town-owned Stephen Palmer building and has issued an RFP for a consultant to assist the Town in evaluating the building for reuse and then looking at alternative land use options on that property to include housing and any other uses that come out of the process.

Ms. Newman reported that the Planning Board plans to bring a zoning article to Special Town Meeting in October as they relate to the state's new regulations for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) which will help increase Needham's housing inventory which is beneficial to local businesses. In addition, the Board will be developing design guidelines for the Chestnut Street corridor which is an opportunity for which the CEA could be involved with by making recommendations.

Dina Creiger asked how developments along Highland Avenue might be able to do something to help lessen the impact on the surrounding neighborhoods and inquired about

being able to direct some of the tax benefits the Town is seeing from these developments to make improvements to the surrounding area. Heidi Frail suggested one of the roles of the CEA be to serve as ambassadors to different neighborhoods in Needham.

Motion to Adjourn from Matt Talcoff seconded by Shuaib Raza. Meeting was adjourned at 9:00 AM.