TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Economic Development
781-455-7550 x213

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS
WEDNESDAY, January 11, 2017 7:30 AM
Charles River Room PSAB

Present: Matt Talcoff, Chair; Moe Handel; Glen Cammarano; Virginia Fleisher; Rick Putprush; Bob Hentschel; Marty Jacobs; Peter Atallah; Jack Cogswell; Stuart Agler; Adam Block; Russ MacTough; and Devra Bailin.
Not Present: Ted Owens; Michael Wilcox; and Bill Day.
Also Present: Anne Weinstein; and Dan Matthews

I. Approval of Minutes

After introductions and welcoming of new members, the members approved the Minutes for the meeting of December 7, 2016.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting Dates

Our next meeting is scheduled for February 1st. Future meetings will be scheduled for the first Wednesday of the month (unless a holiday) in the Charles River Room at PSAB.

III. Plastic Bag Ban

Devra noted that she was asked to canvas the business community and the comments she received back were summarized in the handout provided to the members. The proposed ban would prohibit the distribution of plastic bags less than 4 mils in thickness; give businesses a time period of between six months to a year to adjust to the ban; require that businesses use completely biodegradable bags made out of 100% recyclable materials with 40% post-consumer recycled content; exempt thin-film plastic bags without handles such as newspaper, laundry/dry-cleaning, produce, meat and bulk food bags; and give the Health Department the authority to administer and enforce the ban with fines.

Devra brought to the members' attention the actual Wellesley plastic bag ban and the draft proposal from Natick, which were provided by Dan Matthews to clarify the information the members received from the proponents. Devra noted that concerns expressed by businesses included: excessive thickness of the plastic bags deem reusable (4 mils vs. 2.5 mils per CA standards) and costs thereof, the excessive cost of paper bags requiring 100 % recyclable materials with 40% post-consumer recycled

content, the need for exemptions for small businesses, the need for exemptions for certain plastic uses, and the lack of uniformity State-wide.

[After the CEA meeting, Devra received comments from three other businesses. One business noted that, although they use a heavy weight reusable plastic bag, moving to 4 mils thick plastic bag requirement would increase their cost four times; a paper bag requirement would be ok but requiring 40% post-consumer recycled content adds unnecessary costs; and thought there shouldn't be exemptions for some businesses. Another business noted that he uses 2.5 mils plastic bags with reinforced handles and these are certainly reusable; his plastic bags are also made from 40% recycled materials; 4 mils is extreme; a delay in implementation of 6-12 months would be inadequate for him to deplete his supply; he noted that he recycles plastic both at home and at the business and 95% of it comes from packaging not from carry bags; and he estimates his business only distributes to customers 10 bags per day, which in the scheme of things, is a minimal impact. Another retailer noted that, at his other location, the City has implemented a ban; in researching the issue he found that every municipality has its own standards making it hard for a merchant with stores in other towns to comply; he also noted that the City hadn't adopted any standards as to the allowed thickness so there was no way to assure compliance; he uses 3 mils bags which are very thick, durable and reusable; and 4 mils is excessive.]

Members noted that the issue is complex: light weight carry bags gum up recycling efforts and mess up the RTS; mandating a thickness of 4 mils for a reusable plastic bag seems unjustified; biodegradable bags are not really biodegradable in landfills; paper bags requiring 40% recycled materials increase costs and the environmental advantages are not clear; the expense to small businesses, given their impact on the issue, is problematic; exemptions to small businesses of 3500 sq. ft. or less seems sensible; the lack of a State standard and consistency in regulation is an issue even for larger retailers (CVS, Walgreens, Roche Bros, Staples, Petco); economic impact on especially small businesses of standards imposed in one community where neighboring communities don't have a ban; alternative of charging consumers for the bags (Canada and Europe)—is this an unlawful tax?; a prior bill in the General Court exempted businesses of 3000 sq. ft. or less and authorized a charge of 10 cents per bag; and what is the likelihood that the State will step in. Anne will check on status of a new bill being filed.

[Anne reported back: "As you know, the Legislature is beginning a new session. All Bills that were filed in the last session that were not successfully passed into law must be refiled. The Senate passed an almost $40 billion budget bill last session that included a provision banning single-use carryout bags at all retail establishments that are 3,000 square feet or larger, or have at least three locations in the state. However, during final budget negotiations this outside section was eliminated. Our office has contacted a few of the lead sponsors on proposed legislation from last session to see whether they have any plans to re-file. At this time, they have indicated that they are considering legislation for this session but have not made a commitment yet. All new legislation must be filed by this Friday, January 20 at the close of business. Our office can review if any legislation on a statewide ban is filed and get back to you. Of course, if there is legislation filed it must go through the bill process and therefore the exact timetable if and when it were to become a law would be somewhat unknown."]

By concurrence, the members advised that the BOS be aware of the various complexities of the regulation, including the following:

1. Monitor the progress on the State regulations.

2. Not propose any regulations which will exceed likely State standards.
3. Be mindful of the adverse economic impact on small businesses.
4. Limit application to single-use plastic check-out bags.
5. Exempt businesses having 3500 sq. ft. or less total space in Needham.
6. Not adopt a reusable thickness standard which exceeds customary reusable standards (4 mils is excessive).
7. Carefully consider the efficacy of the 40% post-consumer recycled content with 100% recyclable material for paper bags, as the former dramatically increases cost and positive environmental impacts are unclear.
8. Make sure that exemptions for certain uses are included in the regulation if the application extends beyond single-use plastic check-out bags.
9. Allow a delay in implementation for those affected businesses needing to deplete supplies.

The members are took no position regarding adoption (or rejection) of the ban at this time.

IV. Update on Needham Crossing (Signage and Babson Consulting Club)

Devra distributed the work from the Babson Consulting Club to the members. Cole Kraus, the President of the Club, is trying to find a date when the students could make their presentation to the CEA members.

As previously noted, Devra met with Mark Rubin at 197 First Avenue to discuss a workable location for a "Needham Crossing: Gateway to N^2 Innovation District" sign visible from Route 128N. The proposed location was discussed, which also includes Town-owned land, and is acceptable in theory to Mark, who required more detail. Devra obtained Steve Tanner's help in reviewing the sign location, orientation, and design. Steve Tanner reviewed the location and determined that there were too many underground conduits in the area and proposed a different location on Maric's land. Devra is waiting for the details from Steve before meeting again with Mark Rubin. Steve is working on it.

We are awaiting the BOS's response to the suggestion that we just rename Kendrick Street "Kendrick Street at Needham Crossing"? Then the actual exit could be so noted. Moe will forward the request to BOS.

V. Downtown Banner By-Law

There was discussion of the reintroducing the banner by-law amendment. The members suggested that Devra reach out to both the NBA and NNC (which she did) and obtain their support. Devra will also explore options for tightening up the regulations to reduce the confusion at Town Meeting as to what could be promoted on such banners and by whom. Members noted that other towns utilize downtown banners and that they are helpful in getting the word out about community events. Moe agreed to (and did obtain) a placeholder at the annual TM for the by-law amendment.

There was also discussion of the very active FaceBook Needham group with over 5000 followers. The Town should explore ways to utilize it to get the word out about community events. Has Sandy Cincotta or IT communicated with its organizer? Devra will inquire.

VI. Update from the Downtown Subcommittee: Detailed discussion and prioritization of streamlining initiatives

The members began discussing this issue again. As to the parking moratorium, Marty noted that the Planning Board's parking study, which was a prerequisite for imposing the moratorium, has not happened yet. Although the Board voted to do the study and Lee indicated that regulations could be put in place, there has been no implementation.

Because of the shortage of time and the complexity of the issues, the members decided to set aside our discussion until our March meeting, which will be dedicated to the topic. It was also suggested that a ZBA representative attend as well. [Devra extended the invitation to Jon Schneider, the ZBA Chair; he is out of Town until mid-April but will send the invitation to the other members to see if someone is willing to attend.]

VII. Update on Industrial District Subcommittee

Devra simply noted that she is still waiting for Mark Gluesing, who was hired to make the elevation drawings for the CEA's meeting with the neighborhoods about zoning changes, to complete his work. [Devra spoke to Mark who believes he can complete the task by mid-February.] It was noted that it is now not possible to get this on the May TM Warrant, which may mean we miss the cycle. Due to time constraints, no further discussions were held about this.

VIII. Update on N^2 Innovation District

Devra noted that initial fundraising has gotten the Chamber to 40% of the goal to fund two years of operation. Our recommendation was provided to the BOS regarding the importance to Needham of funding this initiative. Because of time constraints, no further discussion was had.

IX. Update on Downtown Events

Devra invited members to participate in the January 31st Reimagine Needham being held in Powers Hall from 6-9. Devra will forward the signup link to interested members.

X. Update on Infrastructure Improvements in Needham Crossing, Downtown, and Elliot Street/Central Avenue Bridge.

Due to time limitations, this topic was not addressed.

XI. Other Business

Devra provided members with an article about Israeli high tech company Kaminario. Kaminario has opened its corporate HQ at 75 2nd Avenue and has just received an infusion of $75 million in capital.

XII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 a.m.