

Economic Development Advisory Board Minutes

January 4, 2021

7 – 9 PM held remotely via Zoom

EDAB Board members (in attendance noted by Y/N)

Anne Meyers, Co-Chair	Y	Derrick Choi	Y	Carol Levin	N	Marilyn Newman	Y
Paul Saner, Co-Chair	Y	Alan Christ	Y	Ken Lewis	Y	Al Raine	Y
Cliff Brown	Y	Susan Houston	Y	Tom Nally	Y	Sandi Silk	Y

Staff present: Alison Steinfeld, Kara Brewton, Meredith Mooney

Guests included: David Gladstone, David Kroop, David Rockwell, Donna Treece, Henry Winkelman, Janice Kahn, Jenn Mason, Linda Pehlke, Steve Heikin, Joan Lancourt, Jonathan Klein; Claes Andreasen & Jim Batchelor of Arrowstreet (architects representing 209 Harvard St), Cam Merrill (attorney representing 209 Harvard St.), Chris Dempsey (Chair of Transportation Board)

Materials provided ahead of time to the Board & via links in the agenda included: bio of Sandi Silk, Planning Department webpage regarding 209 Harvard Street and presentations to Planning Board on 12/10/2020, presentation and Transportation Division link on Gateway East Bus Priority Lane dated 12/10/2020, link to Commercial Areas Update presentation to Select Board on 12/22/20 including 12/17/2020 memo regarding storefront survey and initiatives; minutes from 12/7/2020 with revisions

Powerpoint presentation made during the meeting: “Town of Brookline Department of Planning & Community Development”, 1/4/2021, A. Steinfeld; “Economic Development Advisory Board: 209 Harvard”, 1/4/2021, Jim Batchelor, Arrowstreet; “Discussion on Potential ‘Gateway East’ Transit Improvements & Roadway Changes, Brookline EDAB”, 1/4/2021, Chris Dempsey

Anne Meyers opened the meeting remotely via Zoom due to COVID, ensured all members were able to participate with audio and video, and announced that the meeting would be recorded.

Welcome to new EDAB member Sandi Silk

Anne Meyers welcomed new member Sandi Silk, and all Board members briefly introduced themselves.

Conversation with Director Alison Steinfeld about Planning & Community Development Department activities

Alison Steinfeld reviewed the Department’s responsibilities, ongoing and planned activities. A majority of the Department’s work is non-discretionary, either processes mandated by law (e.g., reviewing proposed developments under MA Chapter 40A or 40B) or initiatives assigned by the Select Board. This leaves very little staff time for proactive planning activities and longer-term projects.

From 2015 to 2019, over 800,000 square feet of residential development was permitted by 40B processes and only 36,000 square feet by 40A. The Department is undertaking a Multi-Family Study in the L, G and M zoning districts to identify regulatory barriers to housing and mixed use development. For example, while allowable heights may permit 4-story buildings, the permitted Floor Area Ratio (FAR) would usually preclude such building types. This project's results will feed into the Housing Production Plan update and a Parking Demand Study, which will look at residential parking ratios especially for our multifamily buildings.

In response to EDAB member questions, Alison noted:

- 1) The Town does have access to peer reviewers for traffic and parking studies for developments and anticipates hiring a parking consultant for the Parking Demand Study
- 2) Recognized there is often tension between different users when Complete Street Designs are moved forward
- 3) Agreed that parking ratios, buildings and site design being permitted now should take into account anticipated future reductions of individual car use
- 4) Agreed that the current Town Meeting warrant article review process, especially when warrant articles are filed at the last minute, causes significant strain on staff's ability to move forward with planned work; agreed that there is an underlying tension between thoughtful analysis and a political will to take action
- 5) We do not have the data broken out of how recent commercial development is split between those that have occurred due to Special District Overlays versus those permitted with the base, underlying zoning
- 6) The multifamily study will be conducted in house, without consultants

Presentation, discussion, and vote on recommendations to Zoning Board of Appeals regarding development at 209 Harvard Street

Attorney Cam Merrill, Jim Batchelor and Claes Andreason of Arrowstreet presented an updated design for 209 Harvard Street. This development proposes through a 40B Comprehensive Permit process to update the façade of an existing commercial building and add housing units in the rear where there is currently parking. Following the presentation, EDAB members and guest Steve Heikin (Planning Board Chair) offered the following comments to the development team about the commercial building:

- 1) As the building is west-facing, consider a solar screening system – e.g. a brise soleil solution of vertical shading fins – that could inexpensively and holistically transform the street-front appearance of the building that avoids significant cost, operational or structural impacts.
- 2) The double height communicating stair entrance lobby design with a communicating public staircase, originally presented on December 10th, 2020, showed a lot of promise with respect to activating the ground level and visual appearance of the commercial building. It was noted that the earlier proposal is worth re-examining. The façade and entryway design should integrate landscape and illumination strategies.
- 3) The front entry plaza design could more effectively recognize the side entrance for the residential component of the building.

Further discussion noted that while the applicant would like to make further improvements to the commercial façade, costs must be considered not only for overall financial feasibility, but also limitations

with the financing agency about utilizing the 40B process to significantly increase commercial profits. After further discussion, Cam agreed that they could come back to present again as the design progresses with the Zoning Board of Appeals process.

EDAB members generally agreed to have the Co-Chairs write a letter to the Zoning Board of Appeals offering these interim recommendations.

Presentation, discussion, and vote on Gateway East Bus Priority Lane

Transportation Chair Chris Dempsey showed some historic images and trolley lines at “Village Square”, centered between the current Fire Department and 10 Brookline Place. For reference, Washington Street is the name for the portion of road that is Route 9 at the Boston border, and then turns right towards Station Street at the intersection of High & Boylston Streets.

The Transportation Board will be taking a vote in a couple of weeks to recommend to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MA DOT) that one of the two vehicular lanes in each direction of Washington Street from the Boston border to the intersection of Station Street be fully reserved as a bus only travel lane. As a result of this configuration, a neck-down of two lanes to one on Boylston Street in the east direction just west of High Street would also be recommended.

Chris stated that roughly 25% of all travelers in these four and a half blocks are bus riders, and the 66 bus is the second busiest bus line in the entire MBTA system. Chris noted that trying out this configuration could also open up future conversations with MassDOT about whether and how Boylston Street up to Cypress might be treated more as an urban street than a regional highway. He showed an analysis that “highway” parcels such as the U-Haul and Audi Dealership bring to the Town less than \$5 of annual property tax revenue per square foot of property, whereas “street” parcels like La Morra restaurant and Homewood Suites bring in \$19-21 per square foot.

Discussion included: whether there was sufficient data pre-COVID to understand traffic impacts, especially eastbound traffic backing up on Boylston and/or likelihood of diverted trips into the neighborhood; questions on how to design the pilot to capture and then be able to analyze whether the pilot was a success; whether it may make sense to only have a westbound dedicated bus lane.

Following additional discussion and a unanimous vote, EDAB members agreed to have the Co-Chairs write a letter to the Transportation Board capturing the discussion to date and recommendation to move forward as a pilot, with details to be determined by the Transportation Board.

Approval of December 2020 meeting minutes

December 7, 2020 meeting minutes as linked in the agenda and a correction that “9th school” should read “9th grade of the high school” were approved by roll call vote (In favor: AC, AM, TN, AR, DC, KL, MN, PS, SH, CB; abstained: CL and SS).

The Commercial Areas Update & Other Business agenda items were not taken up due to time.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:35 pm.