



TOWN OF BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS

MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE

MINUTES: JANUARY 12, 2017

Members Present: / Tom Hall / Carlton D. Hunt ☐ TBD

Guests: Andrew DeIonno of the Bridgewater Community and Economic Development Office (CED); Diane Dobson, Curve Street; Pete Colombotus, District 5 Town Cuncelor.

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 PM January 12, 2017 in Rm 201B of the Academy Building. The chair, with the concurrence of the committee, added two topics to the agenda. Duxborrow 40B ZBA process and Clarmont property development concepts. The December 8, 2016 minutes were approved with no changes (motion by Hall, Hunt). Motion passed (2,0)

Old Business

Mr. DeIonno addressed the committee's request for his thoughts on how the Town could reach a 20% commercial tax base. He indicated he had met with the Town Manager on the subject and conveyed that the Town Manager is in the process of "fast tracking" strategies for economic development but needs more time to develop ideas. The committee requested those thoughts be presented to the committee at the next meeting. General strategies could include a top to bottom review of current zoning in the town (possibly by a third-party consultant), clarifying areas where commercial development could be enhanced, modernizing performance standards, identifying appropriate uses and siting interactions to include interchange improvement at routes 104 and 24, and better means to attract businesses. The chair recalled that the planning and siting of the commercial developments at that 104/24 intersection included an improved north bound on ramp to route 24. Those agreements need to be brought forward as development in that area of town advance. Adding an off ramp from Route 24 northbound to relieve pressure at the 104 entrance to Bridgewater is another concept.

CED input on progress towards completing goals in the 2014 Master Plan that address open space and housing actions will be provided to the chair so he can update the tracking document.

Mr. DeIonno conveyed that the Town has been approved for MASSDOT technical assistance grant to address traffic related concerns for downtown safety and complete streets. The town will contribute funds to support an expanded scope that examines complete streets needs for the town in general. The scope includes development of a GIS database and public input process on these issues.

The chair reported that he discussed the motion to invite BSU to meet with the Master Plan Committee and relevant town departments. He conveyed that the Town Manager concurred with the intent of the meeting and its objective to develop a set of actions to move downtown redevelopment forward. The chair will revise the draft letter and send the invitation to meet in February. Mr. DeIonno conveyed that discussions regarding projects in the Central Business District are ongoing.

Ordinances that are under consideration include a revised sign ordinance; the draft ordinance can be moved the to the Town Council for action at any time. Improvements to signage is considered one of the activities that can help encourage business operations to locate in Bridgewater. Other important ordinances include the modification of the uses allowed in the Elm Street industrial zone that is under review by the Planning Board and Council's Community and Economic Committee and ordinances that address poorly maintained properties (improvement to the visual presentation of the town can help attract business/industries).



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Mr. DeIonno responded to the committee Chair's s prior inquiry on CED staffing needs indicating that the Town Manager and he were discussing this as under the FY18 budget cycle that is getting underway. His immediate priority is filling the building inspector vacancy.

New Business

The chair suggested concepts for filling vacant commercial properties as provided in the attached article could help motivate building owners to work to fill vacant properties in the downtown area. The chair will forward the article to CED and Town Council.

The chair reported that he attended the presentation to the Town Council by the Claremont Properties concerning current development concepts. The company intends to request zoning changes that would enable construction a 4/5 story commercial office building, residential housing that can count towards the 10% affordable housing goal, and other possible commercial opportunities. He anticipates participating in any hearings to address Master Plan goals relevant to the proposal.

The chair reported he attended the most recent ZBA hearing on the proposed Duxborrow 40B subdivision off Curve Street. Ms. Dobson asked for clarification of the 40B process. Mr. DeIonno and the committee provided information relevant to process and concerns the Town has voiced to the state. Mr. DeIonno agreed to provide copies of our housing production plan, relevant chapters of the 2014 Master Plan, and the letter that describes the Town's concerns regarding the project.

No further discussion or actions being identified the meeting was adjourned at 5:30 PM.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 9, 2017 @ 4PM, Room 201B, Academy Building.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Carlton D. Hunt, Ph.D.", is written over a faint, larger version of the same signature.

Submitted by Carlton D. Hunt, Ph.D.

MPC Chair

Attachments



TOWN OF BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE

DRAFT MINUTES: FEBRUARY 16, 2017

Arlington targets vacant commercial properties downtown

December 29, 2016

Mass Innovations, From The Beacon, January 2017

A number of darkened storefronts in Arlington's downtown have led to a new bylaw that requires commercial property owners to register their vacancies with the town.

The bylaw, passed by Town Meeting last Oct. 19 but still under review by the Attorney General's Office, also requires property owners to state their efforts to fill the vacancy and to maintain the property, such as repairing broken windows and addressing any unsafe conditions.

An annual registration fee will be set each year by the Board of Selectmen. Property owners who do not meet the bylaw's requirements will face a fine of \$100 per day.

Town Manager Adam Chapdelaine said the bylaw arose from concerns expressed by town officials and citizens about the number of storefront vacancies. A survey conducted last June found 17 available properties and 23,000 square feet of available commercial space in Arlington Center.

"Our goal is to get the storefronts filled – it's not to penalize property owners," Chapdelaine said. "The purpose is to maintain the vibrancy of our commercial districts. ... My understanding is that it's the first [bylaw in Massachusetts] that spoke specifically to retail storefront vacancies."

Town Counsel Doug Heim, who drafted the bylaw, said cities such as San Francisco and Everett, Wash., have more complex ordinances that address the same issue of commercial vacancies. While drafting Arlington's bylaw, he looked to those ordinances and similar bylaws in other Massachusetts communities that focus on residential foreclosures and abandoned properties.

What differentiates Arlington's bylaw from similar vacant property bylaws and ordinances in Massachusetts is its focus on commercial properties and economic vitality, Heim said.

"We want to make sure folks have ready access to information that the town can distribute to make sure we don't have lots of vacancies, and to maintain the vitality of our downtown and [help] the other commercial property owners as well as the tenants," he said.

Enforcement of the bylaw will be a cooperative effort between the Planning Department and Inspectional Services, Chapdelaine said.



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The bylaw allows the Planning Department to waive the annual registration fee for property owners who can either demonstrate financial hardship or choose to display public art in their vacant storefront, he said.

"If you're going to display artwork, that doesn't create the same vibrancy vacuum that a vacant storefront does," Chapdelaine said. "We're not trying to be punitive unnecessarily or penalize people who are trying to do the right thing."

Local officials interested in seeing what other communities across the nation are doing can check the website safeguardproperties.com, which tracks vacant property ordinances.

Heim said he expects the Attorney General's Office to sign off on the Arlington bylaw in the coming weeks.

For more information, contact Arlington Town Counsel Doug Heim at (781) 316-3150.

Written by

MMA Associate Editor Daniel DeMaina