



Town of Walpole
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Office of Community & Economic Development

JAMES A. JOHNSON
Town Administrator

Patrick Deschenes
*Community & Economic
Development Director*

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
8/15/23

Members in Attendance: Marc Romeo (Chair), Brian Connor (via phone/not eligible to vote), Kevin Spendley, Donnell Murphy, John Shalbey, Harry Brousaides (Liaison/Non-voting Member), Patrick Deschenes (Community and Economic Development)

Members Absent: Beth Pelick (Vice Chair)

Meeting called to order at 4:33 PM.

Minutes

Motion by Mr. Spendley to approve the minutes from March 21, 2023, seconded by Mr. Murphy. Motion carried 4-0-0.

Multi-family requirement for MBTA communities

- a. Overview of law, history, guidelines, and where Walpole stands.**
- b. Discussion of general concerns and impact as it could relate to economic development**

Mr. Deschenes provided an overview of the proposed MBTA zoning and guidelines. He explained the goal was to offer multifamily zoning by right, with additional parameters, ½ mile from an MBTA station. As home and rent prices have increased tremendously, these new zoning requirements would create a variety of housing types in close proximity to transit stations to allow for easier commutes. There were several consequences for Town's that did not adhere to the new law. These impacts included ineligibility for grants and housing choice funding.

Mr. Deschenes explained this was not a housing mandate, rather a zoning mandate. He discussed the general principles of compliance. His recommendation was to create an overlay district over the existing Central Business District which would allow for easy expansion of the district while keeping the underlying zoning the same.

Mr. Spendley asked if the existing units would be accounted for in the calculations. Mr. Deschenes noted those units were separate from this initiative and explained the zoning theory. Mixed use was allowed in the downtown, however multifamily was not. He explained the current calculations for density within mixed-use developments in the Central Business District were unusual, and would often allow for higher density than would be needed under the MBTA zoning guidelines.

Mr. Romeo confirmed the process and that this use needed to be allowed by right. He felt that not many parcels would be available to achieve high density and used the Leo's Pizza location as an example.

Mr. Murphy asked if first floor commercial could be removed in the new overlay district where it would be prohibited within the underlying zoning. Mr. Deschenes said the new zoning would allow for multi-family

by right, but that details of the zoning itself within Walpole would need to be figured out within the writing process.

Mr. Shalbey was concerned with unintended consequences. Mr. Deschenes explained the zoning could be written in such a way that avoided problems.

Mr. Murphy asked about parking requirements. Mr. Deschenes said they would need to address parking regulations.

Mr. Romeo asked if the construction done within the new overlay district would need to comply with the underlying zoning. Mr. Deschenes said it depended on how the zoning was written. There was the option to impose further regulations.

Mr. Deschenes explained there were three stations in Walpole that could be used in this model. 75% of the zoning needed to be within a ½ mile of the MBTA station and 25% could be a sub district in another location of the Town's choosing. He stressed the importance of finding areas in Town with the same characteristics. He wanted to focus on the downtown area and noted that the future development would not necessarily be large apartment buildings. There could be a variety of housing types that would be allowed.

Mr. Deschenes said there needed to be public outreach.

Mr. Romeo asked what that status was of the MBTA land. Mr. Deschenes said that area could not be included in the numbers. Mr. Broussides asked about Patriot's Place MBTA Station. Mr. Deschenes said that area was not included within the Town's boundary.

Mr. Deschenes explained the technical assistance grant he was awarded. The Barrett Planning Group was assigned as the Town's consultant. He added that the use of sub-districts could incentivize others areas in Town that were in need of revitalization.

Mr. Broussides thought the prison could be a good location.

Mr. Deschenes said the deadline to comply with the zoning changes was December 31, 2024. Ideally, he wanted this to be ready to go before Town meeting in the spring of 2024. This would allow two chances for it to pass at Town meeting, the other being the Fall of 2024.

There was an allowance of 10% affordable for these proposed units. In order for the Town to exceed that number, an independent economic feasibility study needed to be conducted at the Town's expense. The other option would be if the Town had a 40R district.

Mr. Romeo asked if this would result in more 40B projects. Mr. Deschenes explained that was separate matter. Mr. Romeo asked about height requirements. Mr. Deschenes said the character of the areas needed to be considered.

Sarah Khatib, Destination Downtown, said the Central Business District (CBD) zoning was nearing completion to the State guidelines. She noted that the CBD was more than just Route 27 and Main Street. The idea of mixed use hampers development and she wanted the Board to keep that in mind. Ms. Khatib suggested a sub district in East Walpole or the Walpole Mall. She noted there need to be a robust community outreach component.

Mr. Murphy said there needs to be consideration to the growth of the downtown. The addition of multifamily within the downtown could prohibit growth. Ms. Khatib agreed and said residential needed to be added where it made sense.

Mr. Romeo said these changes could have drastic effects over the next 50-60 years and that needed to be handled carefully.

Mr. Shalbey leaves meeting at 5:30PM.

Mr. Murphy said there needed to be more commercial in the downtown area with better public amenities. He suggested a supermarket. There were many single family homes along 1A which could be included as well as the area of Maple and Hanson.

Mr. Spendley noted there was a common conception that downtown was turning into high rises. He felt this should be conditioned to ease people's minds. Mr. Romeo noted water and sewer had challenges in certain parts along 1A.

Mr. Murphy asked who was in charge of this initiative. Mr. Deschenes said he hoped to meet with the Planning Board in September or October. Mr. Murphy asked if there would be a subcommittee. Mr. Deschenes could not speak for a Board but his goal was to have it ready for spring town meeting.

Discussion and evaluation of current zoning amendment proposals for Fall Town Meeting

Mr. Deschenes said there were two citizen petitions and one by the Select Board. The two citizen petitions were a change to the table of use to allow for RV storage on residential properties and the other was for marijuana establishments. The article by the Select Board was regarding ADU's.

Mr. Spendley provided insight into the history of Marijuana establishments in Town. Mr. Deschenes explained that when the law originally passed, Towns were required to zone for medical establishments and at that time had the opportunity to allow for recreational establishments under a vote. The Board felt this needed to go through Town Meeting rather than they provide comments to determine if it was right or wrong.

Mr. Romeo said this was allowed in many surrounding Towns and it produced significant revenue.

Mr. Murphy asked if there was an opportunity to make changes to the article as it was not proposed by the Town. Mr. Deschenes confirmed that the proponent could propose changes through a substitute motion.

Fall Business Forum

a. Interest in a fall forum

b. Partnership with Chamber of Commerce and Destination Downtown

Mr. Brousaides said he received a lot of positive feedback from the last business forum. There was an interest in having another forum in the Fall.

Mr. Murphy asked if Mr. Brousaides and Ms. Khatib could get speakers. They agreed to be responsible.

Ms. Khatib wanted to partner for the forum and suggested there be more Town involvement. She said there have been many new department heads within the last year and even thought the Town Administrator could speak briefly.

Thursday, November 2 was decided to be the next business forum. It would be held at the Country Club and staff would begin working on revering the room.

Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Spendley to adjourn at 6:08 PM, seconded by Mr. Murphy. Motion carried 3-0.