



Arlington Economic Development Recovery Task Force Minutes

Date: Tuesday February 15, 2022

Time: 2:00-3:00 PM

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://town-arlington-ma-us.zoom.us/j/96211802074>

Meeting ID: 962 1180 2074

Passcode: 776846

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Present: Jennifer Raitt, Dept. of Planning and Community Development; Marisa Lau, Dept. of Planning and Community Development; Pat Martin, Health Department; Leland Stein, Regent Theater; Bob Bowes, Gibson Sotheby's International Realty; Janet O'Riordan, Old Schwamb Mill; Rachel Zsembery, Arlington Redevelopment Authority; Erik Kondo, Broadway Athletics; Beth Locke, Arlington Chamber of Commerce; Alyssa Clossey, Support Arlington Center; Steve Poltorzycki, Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture; Kathleen Darcy, Cambridge Savings Bank; Tom Formicola, Arlington Center for the Arts; Bootsy Mullan, Town Tavern; Richard Fraiman, Capitol Theater; Emily Shea, Kickstand Café; John Hurd, Select Board.

Guest: Len Diggins

1. Approval of two sets of minutes. Motion made by Bob Bowes, seconded by Rachel Zsembery to approve the October 2021 minutes. Motion by Beth Locke, seconded by Leland Stein to approve the January 2022 minutes. Approved unanimously.
2. Public health update: Pat Martin from the Health and Human Services Department stated the Board of Health would discuss rescinding the mask mandate tomorrow at 1pm at a public meeting and taking comments. Case numbers have dropped and data indicated that the surge has receded. Emily Shea asked about the CDC metric for Middlesex County. Pat stated the County's case level is still in the high to elevated range but local transmissions have decreased dramatically. Len Diggins asked if the Board has taken steps to

stockpile PPE supplies (i.e. masks) and prepare for another wave of a highly contagious variant in the future. Pat replied that members may want to contact the Public Health Director for additional info, and stated that PPE was more readily available now, although KN95 and similar masks that offered better protection were still subject to shortages during the surge. Richard Fraiman asked what approach the Health Department will take regarding masking requirements in schools. Pat stated that Jessie Kerr has taken the lead on studying the requirement and that the Governor's mandate will be lifted February 28th. The Department's role in whether to lift the mask mandate in schools was not known yet. Members described new data on the impact of masking in schools and discussed the need for coordination as mask mandates are lifted for different segments of the population. The outcome of the Board of Health meeting would be shared with Task Force members.

3. ARPA Small Business and Nonprofit Working Capital Program Update

Jenny Raitt stated that notification letters were being finalized and described the application review process. 134 applications were reviewed after being screened for eligibility. About 2/3 of the requests were granted, and the majority of the requests were fully funded. The total amount requested exceeded the amount of funding that had been allocated to the program by about \$100,000. She stated another grant opportunity targeting sustaining solutions for businesses and nonprofits was forthcoming. She also described how the program differed from previous rounds of CARES Act funding for businesses, which had strict location and income eligibility requirements, and how more types of businesses benefited from this round of grants as a result.

There were several questions. Leland Stein asked if ARPA grants would be allocated for arts and culture as previously discussed. Jenny confirmed the forthcoming grant opportunity would have money set aside for this and noted outreach was ongoing. Beth Locke asked when applicants could expect to receive the grants. Jenny briefly reviewed the steps and noted that it would depend on how quickly the applicant responded to requests for information and entered into a grant agreement with the Town. After an applicant has been notified, it could take a few weeks for the grant to be disbursed.

4. Business Updates

Janet O'Riordan announced Arlington Heights Community Association in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and ACAC will hold a spring window painting event on May 7th, and two weeks later will have a spring festival along

Mass Ave that will be similar to the holiday stroll with many activities for families. The festival will have an environmental theme and merchants will be invited to do something special around this theme. Next subcommittee meeting is March 2nd and she welcomed ideas and suggestions from this group.

Several members announced upcoming events. Bob Bowes and John Hurd confirmed there will be Town Day this year and ATED is involved in the planning. Janet also confirmed that Schwamb Mill will likely hold Oktoberfest; the Mill has been open for the past month. Tom Formicola added Porchfest is on Saturday, June 18th.

Members discussed how to cultivate an engaged group of volunteers around event planning in the business districts. Beth commended Janet for her work. The Chamber would be interested in partnering with groups to support districtwide events but does not have the capacity to initiate or take the lead in organizing events. Suggestions included reaching out to residents as well as businesses to help with a community event, and getting the ACAC involved. Cecily Miller, Public Art Curator, has been a great partner for projects in the Heights.

Alyssa Clossey informed the group that the Center has been hard hit by the pandemic and other disruptions like Broadway Plaza construction. She described it as at a low point for vacancies/closures. She provided recent feedback received from Center residents and hoped that the spring would generate more activity in the district. Members discussed similar challenges in other districts and the impact of the utility and MBTA construction schedules on project planning in the Center. Bob Bowes pointed out that the recent DHCD memo on improvements to the public realm had documented a number of priorities to be addressed; the memo will be circulated after the meeting. In response to a request on commercial redevelopment, Jenny gave an update on approved plans for 455 Mass Ave. The building is proposed to be redeveloped with an existing tenant to take over the ground floor retail space where Papa Gino's was formerly located. She also noted the Redevelopment Board had denied the Special Permit application for 645 Mass Ave from Chase Bank, although the applicant may decide to re-apply. She talked about Town efforts to match vacant spaces, particularly restaurants, with new tenants.

Alyssa stated that before the pandemic the fines imposed on vacant storefronts for \$100/day had been an effective tool for getting the attention of property

owners. Jenny confirmed fines for unregistered storefronts vacant longer than 90 days had been restarted after being paused during the pandemic.

Len Diggins stated the ARPA framework included funds that could be used for a community kitchen. He asked whether such a use could be a potential match for one of the vacancies, which Jenny agreed was possible.

5. Next Steps for Recovery Task Force

The restructuring of the Tourism and Economic Development (A-TED) Committee was discussed, and where it was in the approval process. Bob Bowes noted under the new structure, current members would be able to continue serving and there would be a few openings for new members. Jenny asked for the memo containing the adopted structure to be shared with the task force. She stated the group seemed to have an appetite for continuing these discussions on economic recovery and working productively on the issues that have been raised (i.e. commercial vacancies, community events). She asked what the group would like to have on the agenda for the March meeting and beyond. Leland suggested updates on town programs and events that businesses could participate in. He was delighted that Town Day was being planned and asked about the beer garden. Jenny confirmed the Jason Russell House would host a beer garden this year and other talks were starting. Bob Bowes informed the group that while there would not be a Patriots Day parade or road race this year, the arrival of Paul Revere and William Dawes at Town Hall would take place on April 19th. Jenny asked for any agenda items to be forwarded to her, and said she would also circulate the approved plans for 455 Mass Ave with other materials after the meeting.

Next meeting: March 22, 2022 at 2 p.m.