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**Town of Belmont Joint Meeting of the Economic Development Committee (EDC) and Vision 21
Implementation Committee (VIC)**

DATE: September 8, 2023

TIME: 9:04 AM

Location: Hybrid meeting via Zoom

Wednesday July 26, 2023, 7:00 pm

Economic Development Committee:

In attendance: Paul Joy (remote), Wendy Etkind, Armine Humphrey, Deran Muckjian, Marie Warner, Schuyler Wiggin.

Not in attendance: Erin Brown, Renee Guo, Jack Sy.

Also in attendance: Gabriel Distler

Vision 21 Implementation Committee:

(VIC had a quorum at 7:44pm)

In attendance: Taylor Yates, Christine Arthur (remote), Dan Barry, Michael Klug, Gang Zhao (remote).

Not in attendance: Brian Antonellis, Max Colice, Aaron Pikilingis.

Erin Lubien was also in attendance but has not yet been appointed.

Led by P Joy; at commencement of the joint meeting T Yates co-led the meeting with Paul.

Minutes taken by W Etkind.

1. EDC Call to order at 7:17 pm.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes (June 28 EDC-VIC Joint Meeting)

There were not enough members from either committee present at the June 28 meeting to approve the meeting minutes. Wendy reviewed the general format and how the motions/ details were captured, and the EDC committee + members of the public from VIC agreed that the approach is valid.

3. EDC New Member Welcome

Paul welcomed our new EDC members, Schuyler and Armine, let them know how thrilled he is that they have joined us, and recognized that he was impressed with the background of both applicants. He also complimented the quality and quantity of applicants for the two open positions and thanked all for their interest in our committee. He asked them each to introduce themselves.

Armine Humphrey shared that her background has been in education; she had an Armenian language school here in Belmont, and before COVID she made a career change and opened

Valentina Day Spa at 93 Concord Avenue. While she does not live in Belmont, she has over 20 years of connections and involvement with the town.

Schuyler Wiggins shared that he was born and raised here, and is now raising his 3 sons in Belmont. He owns Quebrada Baking Company, which now has three locations, with his favorite location here. He is happy to have joined our committee, and is eager to get more involved in the town.

Wendy recognized the diversity of businesses and variety of experience of the members of the committee, and the value that these perspectives will bring to our work.

4. Fall Town Meeting Discussion and Next Steps

a. Update on Select Board Feedback

Taylor Yates, as a member of the public, shared a summary of the feedback given by the Select Board about the proposed bylaw recommendations.

The Select Board asked the EDC/VIC committees to whittle the list to the highest priority items, citing the large the agenda planned for town meeting in the fall. They emphasized the importance of getting something passed to build momentum in this area.

Paul and Taylor presented to the committee the areas that they feel are the most impactful and highest priority. They recommend pursuing updates to the following areas:

1. Redefine restaurant categories
2. Allow restaurants by right in all commercial districts
3. Grandfathering of permits
4. Relax parking requirements

A few areas were omitted, and they discussed their reasons:

- Signage – had misread the bylaw, and only standing signs require an exception which reduced the priority of this bylaw.
- Grease traps fall under board of health, so they would amend this directly if they determine it needs to change; it doesn't have to go to town meeting.
- Hotels require more density before we can pursue this. Even if we passed recommendations to allow them, that kind of building is not allowed so a hotel would not be able to operate in the short term.

Armine asked whether there was a hotel applicant in the past; Taylor said yes there was and it was not allowed.

There was discussion to try to come up with an initial definition of chain restaurant which we would recommend require an exception. We discussed number of locations, format, and then called on Mr. Russell Burke to help.

b. Review Current Reforms with Consultant

Russell Burke, consultant who is working with the town and helping to draft language for potential future bylaws, continued the conversation and shared experience about restaurant definitions to help guide our focus. He recommends creating a clear set of criteria that is related to a specific purpose or physical attributes; he has examples of communities that have done that – Dennis, Chatham. If they meet x out of y criteria they can be considered.

He explained the bylaw approval process: anything adopted by Belmont's Town Meeting will then go to the Attorney General's office for approval. All town by-laws need to be approved by the AG's office; cities do not have to follow this process.

Paul asked about guidance for reshaping restaurant definitions; we have three now. There has historically been concern about chain restaurants; how would we propose language around this. Russell said we should first identify what's problematic and for what purpose.

Open joint meeting with VIC at 7:44 pm.

The discussion continued with Paul asking if there is a way to create a simpler description to better define potential restaurants. There was a significant amount of discussion among committee members and Russell about language to define and differentiate restaurant characteristics to make it easier and clearer for the town to understand what they are.

Taylor said that it seems awkward to define some restaurants by characteristics and others by definition.

Russell said that it can be done via definition, and he can share language that has passed in other communities. Paul and Russell reviewed language in the town of Dennis as a reference point for how they frame things. It's framed as formula-based establishments, with simpler language around restaurant definitions. There was discussion about whether or not this is outside of our scope/ ask.

Erin Lubien, from the public (and pending appointment to VIC), commented that we have a number of chains so we should be thoughtful on now we do this (3 Dunkin donuts which are owned by local franchisees, a Starbucks, a Domino's and a Brueggers). Prohibiting drive-throughs may be a way to cover some of the chain concerns.

Other members commented:

- Gang suggested considering trends in other towns and efficiency. When we make the regulation let's be sure not to make Belmont a less attractive place to open a business.

- Deran had feedback on chain restaurants; would we want to say no to somebody like Legal Seafoods? Tatte was bought by Panera, and we are letting them open. We need to be sure we are not creating contradictory standards.
- Taylor asked why do we think we are concerned about chains and whether it was a valid area to focus on.
- Paul asked whether we remove a chain restriction completely from our restaurant bylaw language recommendations? Taylor agreed as did many of the committee members. No vote is needed at this time as it will be approved later with the proposed language to put forward.

The discussion then shifted to “grandfathering” or transference of special permits.

Russell said that special permits can be either tied to a period of time or tied to a use; ours are abundantly tied to time. Some considerations and options are:

- Transference/ grandfathering could include built-in renewal irrespective of the owner.
- A benefit is that it may prevent a bad actor taking over a business. However, there are other protections for this – the landlord would also be responsible, and the Board of Health can address issues.
- Regulations apply to the property not the ownership.

We discussed if there’s a difference in difficulty between a change of ownership vs. a restaurant of the same type opening in the same space? Seems that change of ownership is much easier in our town and less cumbersome – examples Mark and Toni’s, Teddy’s, Ovenbird.

We also discussed when was the last restaurant denied a special permit? They could not recall a special permit being denied. The interpretation of this is that we seem to be fine; let’s focus on putting in rules to organize it and allow them get a permit by right, and not continue to put people through a difficult process. Paul said that it feels worth it even if it is hard to get through because it’s the approach that’s best for most.

With further discussion, the committees summarized our position in a few areas, to focus on when drafting language:

- **Grandfathering** – new owners shouldn’t have to go through the same process. Special permits should be transferrable for a period of time.
- **Clearer restaurant definitions**
- **Parking** - relax restrictions currently at 1 space per 2 seats, to 1 space per 4 seats – this is in line with surrounding towns. Russell said that’s a very reasonable ask, and it will allow our ZBA capacity for other tasks.

Russell summarized the next steps:

- He will work with the town administrator on the process and for the information needed.

- He will review our current bylaws in the three areas above, and give us example formulas to see what resonates with this group.
 - Parking will be fairly quick to do; the other two areas above are both complex to work through.
 - He will share a letter from the Attorney General from 2010, that has a good overview of concerns of formula-based establishments. This may help us clarify some of our concerns/ issues.
- Will get some things to our committees in the next couple of weeks.

The EDC and VIC will review language as separate committees, and meet again jointly if needed.

Russell advised that it does take a lot of public engagement to take something off the table such as removing a protection. He said it's a good idea to give people a chance to check in with changes; it provides comfort for people.

Taylor suggested finding ways to do a weather balloon test for the town's perspective on allowing changes to bylaws that are based on financial decisions. This is a new way of thinking and becomes urgent and necessary with our current crisis.

Russell acknowledged that this is a difficult task and it's possible that despite these efforts it may not have the desired effect on the tax bill. He looks forward to working with us to come up with language that both meets our needs and will be appealing to the decision makers in our town.

5. Approval of Meeting Minutes (June 28 EDC-VIC Joint Meeting)

With the quorum now in attendance, a request was made by VIC to approve the joint meeting minutes from June 28. Not enough members of the EDC were present from that meeting for that committee to approve the minutes.

VIC voted on approval of the meeting minutes from the June 28 EDC-VIC joint meeting.

Motion: approval of meeting minutes from the June 28 EDC-VIC joint meeting. Motion was approved by a vote of 5-0.

6. Communication Lead Update

In Erin's absence, Paul opened up the conversation about whether to propose a public forum to the select board, where residents can weigh in on concerns and ideas for the proposed bylaw reforms to help businesses. He suggested that the timing for a possible public forum be when we have both the language and have context behind it; timing would be mid/end Sept. He stated that there would be a lot of benefit to make people aware of what's coming, and not to wait until there's a warrant meeting to start discussing these potential changes. Russell advised that towns have better success

when committees socialize these kinds of changes to the public in advance. It was suggested that we can use Town Day on Sept 17 to help spread the word.

7. Committee Updates

- **MBTA Committee** – Paul gave an update on MBTA progress, new consultant, and that there will be a follow-up public forum. The first one was vital for their work.
- **Energy** – The EDC will meet with Roger Wrubel who will outline the specialized energy code, which applies to businesses and will go in front of Town Meeting in the Fall.

8. Current State of Business in Belmont

Belmont Center:

- Two businesses closing – Cambridgewear closing end of Aug, a second business who is remaining private will close end of August. The CVS building back up for sale (again).

Other districts:

- Cal Verde had its grand opening with good representation from local people, town politicians and committee members.
- Hanami in Cushing is getting closer to their opening, now targeted for August.

9. Schedule August Meeting

EDC: Tues August 15 7pm

VIC: TBA

Adjourn joint meeting 8:49pm; Accepted motion to close the VIC meeting.

10. Public Comment

Judith Ananian Sarno, TMM Precinct 3, commented that she had been waiting for news of Cal Verde's opening and didn't know until this meeting that it had happened. There is no longer a town newspaper so she asked if the EDC can post notices of new businesses opening to raise public awareness. Paul responded that a new newspaper is coming, and they intend to do announcements; Deran agreed that it will be a good tool to help communicate business news and events.

11. EDC Adjourned at 8:53 pm.