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Barney S. Heath
Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 8, 2021

TO: Councilor Deborah Crossley, Chair, Zoning & Planning Committee
Members of the Zoning and Planning Committee

FROM: Barney S. Heath, Director of Planning and Development
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director, Department of Planning & Development
Devra Bailin, Director of Economic Development

RE: #485-20 Economic Development Commission requesting City Ordinance amendments
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION requesting an amendment of Sections 4.4.1 (Business, Mixed Use & Manufacturing Districts), 6.4.28 (Research and Development), and 6.5.9 (Laboratory and Research Facility) in order to clarify inconsistencies in the way Research and Development is treated in the use tables and definitions. Providing clarity in where Research and Development uses are allowed is necessary to diversity Newton’s Economy, make Newton competitive with surrounding communities in attracting 21st century industries and jobs, and raise Newton’s commercial tax revenue and implement recommendation from the 2019 Newton Strategic Plan (Camoin study).

MEETING DATE: January 11, 2021

CC: City Council
Planning & Development Board
Economic Development Commission
John Lojek, Commissioner of Inspectional Services
Neil Cronin, Chief of Current Planning
Alissa O. Giuliani, City Solicitor
Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer

In reviewing applications and responding to questions from developers, the Planning Department has experienced technical inconsistencies within the Zoning Ordinance regarding allowed uses for research and development activities. Research and Development is listed in the use table as only being permitted in the Mixed Use 3 zone (Riverside Station), and nowhere else. Research and Development is also undefined in the ordinance. Laboratory and Research Facility is allowed, either by-right or by Special Permit, in all commercial, mixed use and manufacturing zones and the definition includes research and development. This leads to confusion about if and where research and development activities are permitted. The Laboratory and Research Facility definition could also use improvement to better reflect typical research and development activities.

In addition, the Economic Development Commission has indicated its interest in diversifying the commercial tax base by encouraging appropriate development by R&D enterprises. We therefore provide proposed corrective measures to the Zoning Ordinance to clarify and encourage these uses in appropriate locations.

Attached you will find the proposed revisions to Sections 4.4.1 (Business, Mixed Use & Manufacturing Districts), 6.5.9 (Laboratory and Research Facility), 6.5.11 (Manufacturing) and 6.7.4 (Scientific Research and Development Activities). The proposed edits to the existing ordinance will continue to be refined by the Economic Development Commission and Planning Staff in advance of a public hearing.

At the upcoming meeting, we request that the Committee discuss setting a February 8, 2021 Public Hearing date.

Attachment A: Draft ordinance revisions