

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 9/6/18, held in Room 9 of Acton Town Hall.  
Present: Selby, Larry Kenah, Mike Majors, Dave Didriksen, Jon Benson, Derrick Chin, Josh Fischel, Ann Chang, Peter Daniel, Shirley Ming

Absent: David Foley

The meeting was called to order just after 7:30 pm.

I. Public participation: There is none.

II. Approve meeting minutes from previous meetings: We approved minutes from 8/16, 6/21, 5/14, and 5/3, edited mostly for language.

III. John Mangiaratti, Town Manager, visits: Larry asks John to give his background that led him to this moment; he's been Acton's Town Manager since July. He explains that there are three ways to manage a town: you can raise taxes, reduce services to make room for other services, or you can foster a strong economic development program. We go around the table and introduce ourselves, waxing more or less poetic.

Setting conflicts over signs aside, John says, what is the most common complaint from the business community interacting with the town? Dave Didriksen answers that he thinks it's inconsistency. We don't have a single ombudsman who can deal consistently with problems that arise—if the building department says one thing and the planning department says another, who's to say where to go? Ann acknowledges that it's improved with the compiling of departments into the same physical space in Town Hall.

Jon Benson asks for examples of what Dave means. Dave mentions a tea company in South Acton that began putting tea in bags instead of distributing loose tea in a tin. Larry continues the story; we've become so close as a committee that we finish each other's sentences now. The company was allowed to store the tea, but it could not distribute the tea in bags. The town came down hard on this company. There was a need to enforce rigid rules instead of stepping back and first searching for a solution.

IV. EDSAT: Larry Kenah provides context about the EDC's abrupt and contentiously urgent introduction to EDSAT back in May, but then hands off the agenda item to John, with two questions: 1) what is it? 2) why is it important?

EDSAT = Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool

John gives a background of how EDSAT was developed (by Barry Bluestone at the Dukakis Center), and analyzes the strengths and challenges of a community in the context of other similar communities. What was different is that Judy Barrett's team tried to achieve something similar to EDSAT on a smaller scale, and it felt a little rocky, especially in terms of bringing the EDC on board. John has met with Judy in the past few months, and she wants to work with the town and the EDC to make sure we all benefit from the process and the product, so she's eager to re-engage. This tool could help inform our own efforts to influence Acton's next master plan.

Peter Daniel talks about feeling hurried into this. He asks Selby how it all started.

EDSAT is part of a housing and economic development program, and we were successful in applying for a grant through that program in 2017 after failing in the past.

Dave, building on Peter's frustrations, says that the process was flawed. It didn't feel like the data collected from a forum with five businesses could possibly have been scientific. He uses an example from a few years ago where businesses were gathered and a government official asked

them, “What can we do to help you?” And the general consensus was, “Nothing. Don’t do anything. Please.”

John says that’s the goal of EDSAT: streamline the interventions that a town often feels compelled to do, and make interactions less complicated. Data collection also has value. John acknowledges that there was a perception that the EDSAT was being used to justify more housing development.

We re-hash the very real frustrations of parking at Rapscallion’s and a few neighbors’ concerns about 2A traffic. We are all aggrieved on Peter’s behalf. Peter has made some peace with the situation. Selby has attempted to solicit solutions by working with other town departments and employees (fire, police, the town counsel, etc).

Ann Chang asks, now that the June 30th deadline has passed, how do we get back in? John says he’ll look into potential next steps. Dave is opposed to getting back in; he skimmed through the EDSAT website and he found, to his ear, a lot of jargon and vague conclusions. Ann thinks we owe it to our new town manager to give it a look. John is not pushing it. Larry thinks we should have Judy come back and talk with us with a framework of specific questions. John says it’s not a silver bullet; it’s just another tool to further strategic goals, if those are aligned with analysis. Ann brings us back to this committee’s mission statement.

V. Manufacturer Workforce Summit (Selby): 40-odd people attended. It was a very successful first meeting—so much so that there is a second meeting scheduled for September 18th (3-5 pm in Room 204), to further the conversations that began initially. In order to deem this successful, we need to find one education provider to facilitate the development of skills for specific employers; Insulet and Minuteman Tech seemed like strong potential partners. With full employment, it’s been tough for companies like AES and Haartz to retain new employees.

It has a name: Acton Area Manufacturing Consortium (AAMC).

There is, in fact, something called National Manufacturing Day, held October 5th this year, for which several manufacturers in Massachusetts are holding events like tours.

\$1 million goes into Minuteman from local taxes; 35 A-B students currently attend, according to Mike Majors.

VI. Request from VCC RE EDC and Acton TV (email from 28 August 2018): Larry has volunteered as tribute.

VII. Updates from members and Selby: Saturday at 4:00, the Holy Grail Pub is having its grand opening in the old Tailgaters’ location on Great Road.

At 30 Sudbury Rd., the town is having an open house (there will be cake *and* a tax relief workshop!) and a meet-and-greet with the fire and police chiefs—it’s September 20th, from 1-4.

Mike compliments Selby on the “haircut” the Walker Property has received; it looks better now. But could it look *even better*, with flowers, like Meetinghouse Hill has?!

Selby is collecting stories of Acton’s place in colonial history to justify the town’s inclusion on regional tourism maps.

VIII. Adjourned at 9:33.

The EDC will next meet on Thursday, 20 September 2018.

