



Economic Development Committee Minutes

16 September 2021

7:00 pm

Room 9, Acton Town Hall
472 Main Street, Acton, MA

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 9/16/21, held in person at town hall.

Called to Order: 7:15 pm

Members Present: Mike Majors, David Didriksen, Ann Chang, Larry Kenah, Derrick Chin (by Zoom), Shirley Ming, Dan Malloy, Catherine Usoff

Guest: Maura Haberman (town hall representative)

Members Absent: Peter Daniel, David Cote, Fran Arsenault

Preliminaries

Call the Roll

I. Regular Business

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meetings
 - 2 September 2021, Approved by all members present, except for D. Didriksen, who abstained because he was not at the September 2 meeting.
- Public participation
 - Terra Friedrichs from West Acton, with regard to the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), she would like the town to consider supporting the West Acton businesses since almost all the businesses in West Acton are small and are struggling.

II. New/Special Business

- Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP)
 - Review draft plan
 - <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-14110>

The town, through the consulting group, is submitting the plan to the Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) on October 8.

John Mangiaratti – one funding source has already been identified, Metrowest 495 Compact. He suggested that we pick one of the projects from the LRRP report that can be funded through this. He expects the award available will be between \$10,000 and \$100,000. He is looking to submit an application next week.

Dave D. – improvements to Great Road discussed in the LRRP report are mainly cosmetic, and won't significantly help the businesses. The only thing that will really help are the sewers. The demographics are trending toward older people. Rather than create more smaller housing for the seniors, Dave suggests that making the town more attractive for younger people and families would be beneficial for businesses (more attractive demographic).

The taxes are already so high, if someone is going to downsize, they will likely move to a less expensive town. The town has an aging retail community too. Other towns have more attractive retail and business options and better configurations than Acton. The report tells us what we already know and is telling us to do more of what we already do. We should be thinking more outside of the box.

Dan - The average household income is fairly high in Acton and there is a lot of disposable income. We are not likely to be able to change the demographics soon. If we had a sewer infrastructure, there would be a more robust business landscape on Great Road.

What project (from those proposed in the LRRP report) should be submitted for funding through the Metrowest 495 Compact?

- Sewers are important and we should propose a feasibility study. But the funding will likely be too small to be significant enough.
- Is there a need to do some type of survey along Great Road to determine the needs/benefits of sewers on Great Road?
- Wayfinding on the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail?

Dave D. – it is very difficult to get a consensus among the businesses about what they need. They tried to do a Great Road business consortium but they could not agree on what was needed because the businesses are so different.

Ann – town has already received a huge amount of money from the state for Kelley's Corner. Will that negatively impact our chances for getting additional money?

Dan – if the marketing project became an opportunity for the businesses to expand their online presence and capability, that would be a good investment.

Dave D. – wants us to make a statement, if we want Great Road to survive and thrive, we need sewers.

Catherine – could we use the Compact money to do a study/survey/marketing plan to provide evidence to the town's residents that sewers are a critical need for Great Road and worth the investment? The LRRP report indicates an estimated budget of \$50,000 for this type of study.

Ann – We really need to do a feasibility study of sewers on Great Road. We should push the select board to include the \$400,000 for Sewer Great Rd feasibility study.

Shirley – for the Metrowest 495 Compact, pick one of the smaller projects from the LRRP report.

Question – Is there state funding that will be awarded as a result of the LRRP proposals? It is not clear because the appendix to the report lists all the various potential sources of funding.

Dan – the group seems to believe that sewers are a high priority so we want the town to include the \$400,000 feasibility study (included in list of projects for ARPA funds) and the \$50,000 from the LRRP report. The EDC should recommend to John M. that the request for funding from the Metrowest 495 Compact be for a survey/study to determine need and benefit for sewers on Great Road. The request should be based on an expansion of the project description from the LRRP report – evaluate why sewers would be helpful for the businesses and a marketing component to help sell sewers to the town.

Mike commented that wayfinding is a smaller expense and could be covered from other sources.

Wayfinding along Great Road and making signs more useful for plazas along Great Road would require a change to the sign bylaws. Perhaps, we should tackle the sign bylaws as practice for trying to change other bylaws to help support businesses.

Dan and Catherine will work on some wording to reflect the EDC position that we propose the sewer study for \$50K from the LRRP report (for the Metrowest 495 Compact money) AND the \$400K feasibility study from ARPA fund list.

Mike informed the committee that the list of 43 priority items for the ARPA funds is not a prioritized list.

Everyone on the EDC should go to the town website and look at the ARPA fund list and also take the survey to register our preferences for the items.

III. More Regular Business

- Updates from members

Ann - New report on High Street, they have done a report on the whole road, want to put calming features, have to take down some trees to complete the sidewalks. Want to take the center line out of the road to make more room for bikes.

Maura – John M. wanted to share the restaurant list, encourage them to participate in the regional restaurant week, rather than have a separate Acton only restaurant week. Maura can get us some information and we can help get the information to the Acton restaurants. John M. also wanted to share a list of upcoming events that Maura distributed to the committee.

- Next meetings
 - 7 October
 - 21 October

IV. **Consent Items**

- None

Adjourn meeting – 8:55 p.m.

For more information about the Economic Development Committee, please send email to
EDC@actonma.gov