



Economic Development Committee Minutes

3 November 2022

7:00 pm

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

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 11/3/22, held in Room 9 of Acton Town Hall, and also supported by Zoom for remote participants.

Called to Order: 7:19 pm

EDC Members Present: Mike Majors (via Zoom), Catherine Usoff, Shirley Ming, Dan Malloy, Ann Chang (via Zoom), David Cote (via Zoom)

Also present: KJ Herther, Julie Pierce

Members Absent: David Didriksen, Ray Yacoub

Preliminaries

Call the Roll – attendance is noted above

The preamble about the open meeting requirements was read which define rules of participation for in person and Zoom participants. The version of the preamble read was the one developed for Town of Acton Board and Committees, “Script for Remotely Conducted Meetings.”

1. Regular Business

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meetings

6 October 2022, minutes approved by all members in attendance. Dave Cote joined late and didn't vote.

2. New/Special Business

Committee Opening

Catherine notified the committee that Peter Daniel has officially resigned. The committee currently have 3 openings. Julie will e-mail the Volunteer Coordinating Committee (VCC) to let them know that we have multiple openings. NOTE added after the meeting – the webpage of the VCC already indicates that the committee is looking for new members.

Finalize goals and activities for EDC for current year

Proposed goals were included in the repository for the October 6 meeting, <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-15775/Document-83597>]

Ann suggested to improve communication with other departments that relate to business or real estate so that the EDC will know about relevant happenings in the early stages. She suggested that Julie could communicate items more frequently than at the monthly meetings. NOTE: All EDC members should subscribe to Julie's monthly newsletter which is a good way to learn about things between meetings. There could be things, however, that are not in the newsletter that should also be shared with the EDC - like new businesses at very early stages, property/buildings that might be good development opportunities, or town hall activities that are relevant to EDC (e.g. online permitting system, proposed changes to bylaws, etc).

KJ commented that the goal of "elevate the status and visibility of EDC" is consistent with a town goal of breaking down departmental silos.

Dan commented that "improve the tax base" is missing. Not clear whether it is implied under "Support existing and potential business in town." Catherine agrees to consider this as a top level goal. Dan also commented that tasks and long term objectives are mixed together.

Ann mentioned that reviewing proposed warrant articles is something the EDC needs to do yearly when the information is available to prepare for town meeting.

On the topic of the sustainability agenda, which is a priority for groups in town and the town government, KJ commented that the EDC should help business to be effectively sustainable. Dan disagrees that sustainability is a priority for EDC. Catherine commented that town meeting has a strong prejudice for legislating rather than incentivizing business.

Dave C. had not had a chance to read the proposed goals and activities but provided a list of goals from his perspective that included:

1. Ensure efficient and accurate permitting process.
2. Promote Acton for its great assets.
3. Actively recruit and retain business.
4. Sustainability

Mike commented that EDC should advocate for small and medium sized business, identify

growth opportunities with available space and potentially focus on medical and bio sectors.

Catherine mentioned some sustainability goals like the charging station in a strategic location comes from business owners, e.g. Kitchen Outfitters.

Mike mentioned that traffic safety on Great Road needs to be a priority. There were three serious accidents along Great Road in a month. Catherine commented that director of highway Corey York has shared information of a new type of cross light, High intensity Activated crosswalk. The light will turn red with pedestrian activation. Two sites are identified, one near the Brook Street and Great Road intersection, and one on Main Street near the Discovery Museum. Great road is a State road, while Route 27/Main street is a town road. Julie mentioned that state wants the town to demonstrate support from residents for street crossing. Town has secured support from all residents for the Main Street site, and all but one property owner near the Brook Street/Great Road site. The town is working with MassDot to expedite the permitting process for the Great Road site.

Dan commented that car dealerships in Nagog park is not the future of business. Mike commented that the town should bring biotech manufacturing companies like Insulet and find space for such companies.

Ann suggested to have EDC to get together with finance committee to propose a business goal for the Select Board.

Dan commented that Billerica secured a new commercial investment that has a million square feet of Biotech manufacturing. Dan proposed that a warrant article could create a tax incentive aimed at attracting development in specific growth areas.

Julie commented that the starting point is best to have select board to have a business goal.

Catherine commented that the town should have generating the revenue from other sources as a goal.

Shirley commented that getting select board and the town to adopt a business-friendly goal should be top priority. EDC's past attempt to influence the town to be business friendly has been largely unsuccessful. She cautioned against proposing specific warrant articles too soon. Insulet occupied the last empty commercial space that Acton had. EDC should understand potential spaces that can be converted and help remove infrastructure impediments like water and sewer capacity first before proposing anything specific.

Members all agreed that it is important to have the decision makers to recognize the importance

of business and EDC should develop a strategy to get the town to prioritize and attract business. Ann suggested to draft a resolution with finance committee to support business and commercial tax base and make it a select board article at the town meeting.

On the topic of potential sites, she also mentioned that the former WR Grace property is currently a technology district while there were attempts to change the zoning to residential. There is also land for sale between Post Office Square and the town center, which is likely zoned residential. Julie will check on the site to find out how much land is available and what the zoning is.

On the topic of plastics ban and bag charge, team suggested to check on the implementation of plastics ban, which is not in effect until January 1, 2023.

There was a suggestion to Julie to add to her monthly newsletter that businesses should have received communication on the implementation of the plastics ban from the Board of Health. Businesses should be encouraged to reach out to the Economic Development Office if they need help in implementing the ban.

Catherine commented that town website subscription alert does work, but it doesn't have information stating what the alert is for.

Instructions for sign up for alert from Julie:

“Staying up to Date

Want to follow what's going on for residents in Town? Read and sign up for the Town of Acton alerts including Acton Town News and many other alerts [here](#).

Want to see what's going on in the Economic Development Department? Navigate to the Department's page [here](#).”

Both Dan and Catherine said that outreach to small businesses to support Acton Small Business Saturday has been an interesting experience. Several small businesses in Acton are operated out of homes, and have only an online presence, rather than a storefront.

KJ's Caffé is open.

The Salted Soul Cave in Acton Woods Plaza will open by end of year.

Updates from the Economic Development Director **Event reports + Upcoming events for EDC to be aware of:**

- **October 7, 2022 - Acton Youth Manufacturing Day**
 The Economic Development Office held Acton Youth Manufacturing Day. The event consisted of a reverse science fair, career panel and video contest. The students were extremely engaged and the companies were gracious and informative. I want to formally thank our sponsoring company: Associated Environmental Systems as well as the other organizations: Spark Photonics, Haartz Corporation, Insulet and National Aviation Academy. Two of the companies have offered to work with me to help ensure some students are able to have paid internships next summer. Student should use me as their initial point of contact. ActonTV was also on hand to document the event and AB PIP STEM and the Acton Memorial Library helped as well with the event.
- **November 26, 2022 – Small Business Saturday**
 The Economic Development Office is organizing the Town of Acton's first Small Business Saturday. The Chamber has had initiatives related to this in the past for all their member towns; but they aren't doing it this year and this is the first time it's being done as a Town-led Initiative. Thank you to Catherine and Dan for your help in outreach to the business owners. In total there is a team of 6 doing the reach outs. How can the committee help in general? Here are some concrete ideas:
 - Shop local yourselves
 - Share the Shop local graphics on social media
 - Let Julie know if you can help with follow up phone calls next week or with distributing signs to business owners on 11/22
- **December 14, 2022 – Acton Business Leaders Annual Brunch**
- The Economic Development Office is hosting an event to recognize businesses that have reached significant longevity milestones. The Goal is to make this an annual event. Each year might have different themes but for this first year, we will be recognizing these business milestones. This is a RSVP only event. You will receive an email invitation and be sure to respond early if you want to attend. In attendance will be recognized business leaders, other representatives from the businesses and their families as well as elected officials and department and division heads from the Town. I need help with this event. Here is what is needed:
 - Be sure to RSVP early if you want to attend. There will be a link in the email to use to RSVP.
 - If you know of any businesses that have been in Acton 15 or more years, **send me an email by Monday November 7th**.
 - I need someone to sign up to help with registration table and other event help that day

Grant Application Updates

- **MassWorks grant** – I wrote a grant for \$2.3 million to cover the cost of extending the sewer on Main Street over the Route 2 overpass. This was awarded and announced last week. This will support adding additional affordable housing. Housing – both in terms of adequate supply and in terms of affordability – is an important tenant of economic development because it supports the existence of needed workforce.
- **Technical assistance grant** – I wrote a grant for \$30,000 to cover the cost of technical assistance in developing an interactive How to do Business Guide and it was awarded and announced last month.

News/Updates in other departments

- September 20, 2022 – Great Road Complete Streets Survey released. The Town has been working for several months on a Complete Street design concept for Great Road between Main Street and the Concord Town line. Complete Streets means roadways that safely and comfortably accommodate all users – regardless of age, ability or mode of transportation. They held several public engagement sessions – both in person and virtually. The survey is still open. The link was sent out via Town alerts. I’m asking all members of the EDC to complete the survey. It can be found here: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/cff5e69f8cb74a4c944b6cfb47c4b6bf>
- September 28, 2022 – Powder Mill Corridor Initiative - Ann commented that she attempted but was not able to join via zoom.
- November 7, 2022 – Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Forum – happening virtually via Zoom at 7pm. This information I sent to EDC Town emails and it also was sent out as an alert on the Town website on October 26th. Who can attend?
- BFRT Wayfinding signage – the design is complete and now the signs are being fabricated
- E-permitting – the bid period has closed and next week the workgroup will begin evaluating the submissions
- Visual Guide to signage by-laws – the planning department is still working on the images and once they’re done, the EDC will have the opportunity to review the draft and make suggestions before it is finalized.

Update from Members

South Acton Vision and Planning Advisory Group

The advisory group was formed in response to a recent request for zoning changes by the State of Massachusetts around MBTA locations. The survey has been finalized and will be sent to all Acton Residents. Catherine encouraged members to take the survey when it is available.

Adjourn – 8:55 p.m.

Action Items Identified in this Meeting:

- Catherine to incorporate member feedback for the EDC goals, especially around adding “increase the commercial tax base” or similar as a top goal and streamlining the priorities for the committee for the year.
- Members to consider a strategy related to “increase the commercial tax base,” particularly around mobilizing the town to prioritize revenue generation, for discussion in the following meeting.
- Julie to confirm the percentage of taxes collected from commercial vs. residential sources from the finance director.

- Julie to let the VCC know that EDC has 3 openings.
- Ann will provide Julie with historic information of long-time businesses in town for the purpose of the brunch on December 14.
- Julie will see if the document used to obtain the grant funds for the sewer extension is available to the public and if so, will forward it to Dan.

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