



Economic Development Committee Minutes

6 Jan 2023

12 noon

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 1/6/23, held virtually via Zoom.

Called to Order: 12:01 pm

EDC Members Present: Catherine Usoff, Dan Malloy, David Cote, Shirley Ming, David Didriksen (joined 10 mins late), Ann Chang (joined 20 mins late)

Also present: Julie Pierce, Fran Arsenault

Public Participation: Megan Pesce, Yumio Saneyoshi, Patty Sutherland, Joyce Reischutz, Carla Stover

Members Absent: Mike Majors

Preliminaries

Call the Roll – attendance is noted above

Dave Cote is promoted to full member for approving the minutes from Dec 1, 2022.

The preamble about the open meeting requirements was read which define rules of participation for 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

1 Dec 2022, minutes were approved by all members in attendance at the time of voting except Shirley Ming, who abstained since she was not at the previous meeting. Dave Didriksen and Ann Chang joined after the vote was taken.

2. New/Special Business

Change meeting time and additional meetings required

New meeting time is moved to Friday at noon - approved by all members in attendance at the time of voting. Dave Didriksen and Ann Chang joined after the vote was taken.

Guest Introduction:

Carla Stover – VP of Enterprise Bank

John Bleuer – New owner of Squashwest

Megan Pesce – Dunkin Donut's owner for Acton and local surrounding towns with a total of 41 locations.

Yumio Saneyoshi – Owner of Penguin coding, near Starbucks. Moved into the location in May of 2022.

Patty Sutherland – Owner of Sutherland Real Estate, part of Keller Williams Boston MetroWest

Joyce Reischutz – Owner of Pedal Power

Business Owner Comments/Perspective:

Joyce R. was raising awareness of a recent state law that was passed (H5103), which is aimed at improving road safety, and which may have implications for road improvement projects in Acton.

<https://www.boston.com/news/politics/2023/01/03/massachusetts-cyclist-pedestrian-passing-distance-new-law-charlie-baker/>

“The bill, known as [H.5103](#), was signed into law by Baker on Monday, according to the state’s [website](#). The heart of the bill centers on defining what makes a “vulnerable” road user, and setting certain protections for them as they travel alongside motorists.

One of these protections is that drivers are now required to leave at least four feet between their vehicles and vulnerable users, including pedestrians, as they pass.

Pedestrians, including those repairing utility facilities and emergency workers, are included in the definition of vulnerable users. People operating bicycles, skateboards, rollers skates, wheelchairs, and motorized scooters, among other devices, are also considered vulnerable users. This includes those riding horses, driving horse-drawn carriages, and those driving farm vehicles like tractors.”

Projects and initiatives requiring active EDC member engagement

Acton Business Leaders Annual Brunch - December 14, 2022 was a success. EDC members Catherine, Dave C., and Dan attended the event.

Discussion of ways to advocate for economic development

Dan is proposing to freeze all commercial zoning and prevent commercial zoning to be converted into residential.

Catherine gave examples of Hopkinton NH and Somerset, MA – where their EDCs proposed specific parcels for zoning change or commercial use.

Dave D. asked to have an education session from planning department, which Julie agreed to arrange.

Catherine suggested that the EDC should propose that the town provide funding to investigate proactive growth in town. There should be a focus on the most suitable locations and plans for proactively developing them.

Ann commented that an EDC member should get on the long-range planning committee, and that we should get a mapping of Commercial, Office park 1 and 2, and Industrial parcels. She also advocated that the Select Board adopt an economic development goal.

Dave D. commented that it is more reasonable to select certain parcels or areas for commercial areas, e.g., enterprise zones. Having a blanket ban on commercial to residential zoning change is not practical.

Fran A. suggested to go to the Select Board with goals to prioritize economic growth.

Dan M. commented that there was no information on commercial development and EDC should advocate to Select Board to have an economic development goal.

Catherine commented that the town needs to exercise fiscal responsibility by looking for new revenue sources instead of mostly just relying on residential tax.

Dave D. proposed to use financial incentive, i.e. business Tax incentive to attract business to move to town.

Patty posed the question of whether we know why businesses decide to locate in other neighboring towns instead of Acton. She likes the idea of having an “Enterprise zone” for commercial use.

Yumio moved Penguin coding in May of 2022 from Lexington to Acton. The coding school also has other locations, e.g. in Brooklyn NY.

Following are email comments from Yumio:

- 1) One major issue with getting a foothold in Acton as a small business is marketing/awareness.
- 2) Even if there is no physical "town center" in Acton, can the town setup a central digital area/email list to let residents know about the presence of businesses in town.
- 3) Can the town fund a physical paper calendar that highlights local businesses that gets mailed to all residents of Acton.

Carla Stover commented that for companies, there was not enough housing for employees.

Joyce commented that her business has been in town for 45 years. And it is the first time she has seen so many empty store fronts. There has always been constant debate related to affordable housing.

Megan also commented on the lack of infrastructure in West Acton, e.g., not enough parking.

Also, she was disappointed to see that the town didn't show up for the support of drive-up article in past town meetings. She heard from many people that they were in support of the proposal that would allow for drive-up retail, but unfortunately, not enough of those people attended town meeting. She also mentioned that an outdated bylaw is preventing her from opening a general store within their existing Dunkin' location on Great Road.

Dave D. commented that including drug stores in the drive up proposal probably resulted in the article's failure. There was strong resistance from those who anticipated that a CVS drive up would negatively impact the small pharmacy business.

Related to town center discussion, he commented that Acton does not have a town center, and likely won't have in the future either. It has always been a collection of villages and open space.

John B. mentioned that he noticed the Acton industrial park sign near his business and was pleased about it.

Multiple members commented on the town meeting turn out. Less than 2 percent turnout for Acton is typical, with a small minority making decisions that affect all citizens. Requiring in-person voting at town meeting seems outdated.

Potential items to propose to the Select Board, and at town meeting:

- Re-introduce drive-up for restaurants only
- Provide tax incentive to attract new business
- Freeze or limit commercial zoning change to residential

Catherine took an action item to follow up and bring back for further discussion.

Julie also commented that one of the goals for EDC could be to boost attendance for town meeting to support business.

Shirley commented that any economic development goals whether they are general or specific are good. Even with a general goal, once adopted, there can be more specific projects proposed or implemented later with allocated funding.

South Action Village

Fran mentioned that the planning Department is hosting a forum for South Action Village (South: Past, Present, Future. Jan 23rd – 11:30 to 1:30, 24th- 11 to 12:30 & 5-7, 25th 11-1 at the Acton Memorial Library (486 Main Street)). The purpose of the sessions is to talk about the history of South Acton, present day/existing conditions, and share desires for the future of South Acton Village.

Updates from Economic Development Director

1. Employer Resource Workshop 1/26/23

<https://www.massinnov.org/event-details/workforce-solutions-for-employer-needs-a-free-workshop-covering-employer-resources-in-massachusetts>

Catherine & Fran volunteered to help make phone calls

2. Acton Business Guide – Julie received a grant from MAPC to create this guide. As the first phase, in February, Julie is organizing a business tour so that local elected officials

and town administrators can hear from business owners. As the second phase, we will be creating a useful, physical, and digital guide to doing business in Acton

3. Julie led a successful RFI process related to 3 School Street and obtained Select Board approval to move forward and release an RFP for 3 School Street and to ask the voters to declare 13 School Street as surplus. This process will start in the spring.
4. Lighting in West Acton – this will be on the Select Board's agenda on 1/23. There is a proposal currently before the Select Board which is supported by Economic Development Department, Fire Department, Police Department and DPW to add street lights to existing utility poles to keep costs down. Julie is engaging in an intensive outreach effort to business owners in West Acton to receive their input.
5. Julie reviewed the time frames for Town Meeting and the calendar is uploaded in the supporting documents section of the agenda. If the EDC wants the Select Board to take up any particular issues, EDC should be reaching out to the Select Board by 1/17 to ensure that they can be on the agenda for 1/23.

Some key days mentioned by Julie:

Town meeting related dates:

Tuesday Jan 17, 2023, 5:30pm– Budget workshop

Warrant articles will be published on April 11.

Town meeting is May 1.

Adjourned at 1:35pm.

Action Items Identified in this Meeting:

- Catherine will work with Julie and Dan to identify potential EDC items to bring in front of the Select Board.
- Catherine will get more information on how other EDCs such as Hopkinton NH and Somerset, MA worked.
- Julie to invite planning department to present commercial zoning areas and identify potential development opportunities.

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