



Economic Development Committee Minutes
13 October 2023
12:00 PM

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 10/13/23, held virtually via Zoom.

Called to Order: 12:09 pm

EDC Members Present: Catherine Usoff, Michael Carpenter, Patty Sutherland, Ann Chang, David Cote, Dan Malloy

EDC Members Absent: Shirley Ming,

Also present: Julie Pierce, Fran Arsenault, Avantika Nautiyal (Acton Newspaper) & Sharon Tchou Gruet

Preliminaries

Catherine read the preamble regarding state rules for a Zoom meeting and participation.

Call the Roll – attendance is noted above

I. Regular Business

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meeting September 22, 2023.
- Meeting minutes were approved by all members in attendance.

The meeting began with an introduction to the public participants (Avantika and Sharon).

Sharon is a long time Acton resident with a broad background in business including working within the plazas on 2A. She is interested in attending EDC meetings and will discuss with Catherine a role going forward.

Avantika is part of a group creating a new local paper, the Acton Newspaper, and is also a business owner (All Things Spiced).

Catherine opened a discussion about the status of membership in the Economic Development Committee (EDC). The EDC is supposed to have 7 full members and 4 associate members. There has been ambiguity about the process for how members are appointed and nominated to the committee which has resulted in existing members being bypassed for consideration of full membership.

Her recommendation is to make Dave Cote a full member and to assign the planning board and finance committee representatives to the status of associate members. Dave has been a member for several years and deserves acknowledgement for his contributions to the EDC. The existing EDC members agreed that Dave should be nominated to full member status.

The EDC has had difficulty getting a sustained presence and commitment from the Planning Board and Finance committees. The EDC considers their participation important to meeting our objectives. Fran agreed to try and source representation from these respective groups but supported the motion to make them associate members.

There was an acknowledgement that we need a standard protocol for adding members to the EDC and the liaisons with other town committees. The Select Board has begun a process to review committee assignments and to make recommendations on how to improve the process.

II. EDC Goal Setting 2023-2024

Catherine distributed in advance of the meeting a draft of the proposed goals for the EDC for 2023-2024. This builds on the EDC's mission statement and intends to capitalize on the accomplishments from last year. For example:

- EDC business development plan warrant article passed at town meeting.
- The Select Board incorporates Economic Development goals in their 2023-24 plan.
- Increased EDC visibility from town sponsored events (e.g., Small Business Saturday)

Under Julie's leadership and direction, we want to expand support for existing and potential businesses and identify barriers to increasing the commercial footprint and determine strategies to alleviate them.

A key part of the goals includes advancing tangible recommendations for the creation and dissemination of the Town's Economic Development plan. While primary responsibility resides with the Town Manager and Select Board to advance the plan, the EDC should be proactive in helping solidify the strategy and specific actions to be taken. Julie and Catherine will determine how we can engage with the Select Board throughout the year to ensure that progress is made. Fran also offered to provide updates from the Select Board to keep the EDC apprised of progress.

Fran mentioned the "member minutes" – updates that each Select Board (SB) member provides during the SB meeting. Fran said that she and Catherine would coordinate to provide regular updates about the EDC to the SB and meeting attendees.

There was a discussion about how we can more effectively align the EDC goals with other town committees. The Select Board is reviewing how committees engage with the Select Board. While goal setting is not a requirement for all committees, there was an interest for the EDC to proactively advance dialogue (at least across chairs) with key committees to ensure our objectives align.

At a minimum. The EDC should review the previous year's committee accomplishments that are published annually. Ann suggested that we can review previous articles presented by committees to Town Meeting to get a better understanding of what they are working on and how it impacts

businesses (e.g., several of the green initiatives). There are a small number of committees (e.g., Planning, Finance, Green Energy, Historic, Conservation, Sewer commission that matter to businesses, and this is where we should focus our outreach.

There was discussion about having a business directory that would list all the businesses in town with contact information. A few years ago, EDC members contributed to a database of businesses and Julie has been working to create a comprehensive database. There are frequent changes due to businesses closing, new businesses opening, and contact names and other information changing. This is an ongoing project.

There was a brief discussion about communication mechanisms and technology to support cross business engagement. Mike proposed that we create a Facebook page for Acton business owners so they could share information and the town/EDC could make information available to that community. There is an open question about what the Town and EDC's role should be in "promoting" cross business communication. There was concern voiced that we need to be practical about the communication and education commitments made for both the Town and the EDC. Catherine suggested that we should explore how other towns have approached this topic and potentially identify best practices for consideration.

Several of Julie's initiatives contribute directly to increased engagement with businesses by the town (Business Boost newsletter, active promotion of business events, creation of a master list of businesses for outreach) and the EDC wants to build off these accomplishments. These represented real progress last year and want to ensure the continued impact.

Catherine will edit the draft version of the proposed goals and will incorporate some of the edits already suggested and will reflect the results of the discussion. EDC members should review and submit feedback to Catherine only (compliance with Open Meeting rules) prior to the next meeting.

III. Update from Economic Development Director - Julie Pierce

Julie reviewed upcoming events and requested assistance or volunteers to attend or participate as representation from the EDC. Julie suggested that EDC representatives should approach the event organizer and introduce him or herself. The EDC rep should also talk to business attendees, saying that they represent the EDC and that they are there because we care about Acton businesses. The following table summarizes the commitments made by EDC members to this request.

Event	Date	EDC Participant
Professional Women's Networking Event @ Frolic and Detour	10/18/23@ 5:30PM	Catherine Usoff Patty Sutherland
Ribbon Cutting – Bogi Boutique	10/20/23 @ noon	Fran Arsenault
Event Networking – Chamber Event @ X Golf	10/24/23 @ 5:30PM	Dan Malloy
Small Business Saturday/Shop Local Promotion – deliver/pick up signs	Nov/Dec	Catherine Usoff and TBD

Other Economic Development Updates (From Julie's written update):

Small Business Roundtable hosted by MWCOC

New initiative by MWCOC for businesses to help each other in terms of strategy, planning and sharing best practices. Learn more and sign up here:

<https://mwcoc.com/index.php/programs/>

FREE In Control Crash Prevention Grant Training for Business!

Your local business team could be eligible for a FREE Crash Prevention Training course! The Workforce Training Fund Express Program covers 100% of Massachusetts companies with less than 100 employees.

Energy Efficiency Grant Program – The program is now closed but 20 businesses signed up for the service. Acton ended up finishing in the Top 5 in the state and our local businesses will enjoy better efficiency and lower energy costs as a result of their participation.

A B DiwaliFest 2023 – the turn out was good and several impressive young people participated. Overall, the program was a success.

Update on South Acton Village Vision and Action Plan - Catherine Usoff

Catherine provided a written update prior to the meeting. We had limited discussion about the updates but will continue to monitor activity. The full presentation that was used in the public comment session at the library was uploaded to the repository.

Update and Support of RH Adhesives petitions with the town – Michael Carpenter

Mike Carpenter updated the status of his petition. He is scheduled to meet with the Conservation Commission in November. He will meet with the Zoning Board of Appeals at a later date. No EDC support is required for the Conservation committee meeting. The EDC will monitor the schedule of the upcoming hearings and will continue to offer support for a resolution as required.

Next Meeting – November 3rd, 2023

The meeting is scheduled for the first Friday in November at noon.

Although the committee will generally meet the first Friday of every month, we may alter the schedule for holiday weekends as warranted (such as for the October meeting). At the next meeting, the focus will be on finalizing the goals for 2023-2024.

Next Steps and Action Items

Catherine will edit and distribute a revised version of the 2023-2024 EDC goals for discussion at the next meeting on 11/3 @ noon. **The meeting adjourned at 1:28 pm.**

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