

EDC Meeting Minutes 8/9/24

- **Preliminaries**
- **Call the Roll**
 - A quorum was established at 12:05 and the meeting formally began
 - In attendance were Shirley Ming, Mike Carpenter, Dave Cote, Greg Jarboe, James Fuccione, and Sharon Gruet
 - Also present were Julie Pierce, Economic Development Director, KJ Herther, May Hong, Ian Dawn, Jeff Brown, Trish Zarola, Mona Chandra, Ed Mullen, and Andrew Heiniluoma
 - Not Present were Patty Sutherland, Megha Patil, and Fran Arsenault
- **Preamble**
- **Regular Business**
- **Review of Meeting Minutes from the previous meeting (July 19, 2024)**
 - Sharon Gruet requested a motion to submit them as written
 - Mike Carpenter seconded this motion
 - The motion was unanimously accepted
 - No discussion took place of meeting minutes
- **Public Participation**
 - Andrew Heinilumoa
 - What is the status of the master plan for the Economic Strategic Plan for the Town?
 - Julie Pierce
 - We had a kickoff meeting with a consultant concerning the future of EDC and are currently in the future info-gathering phase
 - Mr. Heinilumoa
 - Requested to know the status of the WR Grace property
 - Questioned whether it could be included in future planning
- At the last meeting, Ms. Gruet was confirmed as a full member
- This prompted the committee to discuss whether in the future people who own businesses in Acton but are not residents should be permitted to join the committee
- **New/Special Business**
- **Building Commissioner, Ed Mullen, Role of Building Department - 12:21**
 - Mr. Mullen described his experience as the building commissioner

- Mr. Mullen described how he approaches projects from a different perspective
- He then explained staffing and logistics in his office
- A recent milestone they hit is that their online permitting software is officially in use for 1 year
- Their new data interfaces have been effective in many areas
- The floor was then opened up for questions
 - Q: Question from Greg Jarboe about the future of housing development in Acton
 - A: Mr. Mullen replied there were many home improvements during COVID, however, there is not a lot of available land for a large number of homes to be constructed. For that reason, there are not many building projects underway
 - Additionally, many people are installing new solar panels and installation
 - Q: Mr. Jarboe asked how housing is shifting in a way that prevents regular people from moving to Acton since starter homes have started to be discouraged
 - A: Mr. Mullen answered that the planning department is trying to solve these issues, however, the price of land is just so high right now that there's not a lot to be done and he hopes that there may be an uptick in supply
 - He added there is a new bylaw for creating opportunities for people to build more housing, however, construction is still cost-prohibitive
 - Q: Have we seen a lot of new construction in Acton, specifically detached?
 - A: We saw one addition toward west Acton, and are hoping that there is more in the future
 - Q: Mona Chandra asked, is there a centralized database with the age of construction readily available? She was interested because old houses are so much harder to renovate
 - A: The Historic Commission has most of that information, however, a uniform database does not currently exist, although he will look into that
 - Furthermore, the current building and energy codes prevent many people from adding a home extension.
 - Q: Ms. Chandra asked, are we seeing a lot of heat pumps installed?
 - A: Mr. Mullen replied, yes, heat pumps are currently the third most popular permit. He added that Acton has invested much in climate

resilience, however, historic houses (such as those located in historic districts) are a barrier to some permits (e.g., permits for rooftop solar)

- Q: KJ Herther asked, are there two different processes for commercial and business owners (rather than residential) to get permits?
- A: Mr. Mullen answered, yes, there are two different processes with residential permits being easier to acquire than commercial
- He added that the process for change-of-use permitting and regulation is very difficult
- Q: Ms. Gruet asked: have there been changes in permit rates recently? Also, how had the permit fee situation evolved?
- A: He was answering that, 100 dollars an hour for a person to go out and do permits when his wife cut momentarily. His response transitioned to say that they are working on getting septic permits to run more smoothly
- No Further Questions were fielded at 12:39
- Economic Development Intern, May Hong, Review of Intern Experience and Projects - 12:40
 - Mr. Hong started by discussing his experience as an intern, stating he began as an unpaid volunteer for Ms. Pierce following a cold email
 - One event Mr. Hong helped organize through outreach was the Kelley's Corner Block Party
 - Mr. Hong assisted with many meetings and forums hosted by the Economic & Community Development Office.
 - Mr. Hong then got an Economic Development Office internship for the summer of 2023
 - Two of his main projects were the business directory and assisting pop-up shops
 - Mr Hong. returned as an intern in 2024
 - He assisted Ms. Pierce with many different tasks and in addition worked on policy concerning the Acton shuttles
 - This is currently a draft and when finalized will be presented to the select board
 - Mr. Hong had a suggestion for creating a new description for the interning positions to try and draw interest from local students
 - The description would include that interns would assist the Economic Development Director with day-to-day tasks including creating guides, designing presentations, and more

- Creating a role for high school students may also be helpful to draw interest. Stating the needed proficiencies like the ability to use office tools or take strong notes may have a positive impact
 - This summer Mr. Hong has worked on the rental shuttle policy and a guide to Acton Town Meeting citizens' petitions
 - Mr. Hong stated the internship has been really valuable for him. He has learned a lot about how town government works and the processes within it
 - He has also learned from the small businesses and improved his skills in graphic design, communication, and more
 - Members of the Zoom followed up the presentation with questions
 - Q: Mr. Carpenter asked to hear more about Mr. Hong's background
 - A: Mr. Hong responded that he is an AB graduate now studying math and computer science at UCSD
 - Mr. Jarboe added a comment saying he was impressed by Mr. Hong's communication skills and at the usefulness of the projects Mr. Hong worked on
 - Q: Shirley Ming asked if Mr. Hong had any advice for future volunteers
 - A: Mr. Hong responded that anyone can do it with the proper motivation and work ethic. With a good mindset, anyone can do anything
 - Ms. Chandra said thank you for sharing what you have done and that it would be great if you could give a presentation to Acton Boxborough students to encourage them to engage with the opportunity
 - Ms. Herther worked with Mr. Hong in the past and liked the initiatives Mr. Hong has worked on. Ms. Herther then asked if Mr. Hong could give examples of possible petitions
 - A: Mr. Hong replied that he had no ideas off the top of his head but that the freedom to create any type of petition is now in the hands of small business owners
 - Ms. Herther followed up by saying this resource (for town meeting petitions) will be helpful for commercial and small business owners (for example updates to Acton signage bylaws).
 - Mr. Heinilumoa and Mr. Hong had an exchange where Mr. Hong told him the resources would be available from Ms. Pierce when made publicly available
 - Mr. Jarboe gave kudos to Mr. Hong for the Silver Unicorn event he worked on.
 - No further questions or comments were said
- **OLD Business (12:53)**
- **Organizational Structure of the EDC**

- A discussion on the organizational structure of the EDC was started. The discussion stemmed from the last meeting when Patty Sutherland and Ms. Ming were promoted to co-chairs and Ms. Gruet was established as a full member. Discussion continued until 1:01
- EDC's goals for FY25
 - Discussion of the fiscal year 2025 goals was pushed to the next meeting as Ms. Sutherland was not present
- Vertical Flags on Great Road and other business corridors
 - Discussion took place of the violations of the no vertical flag policy in Acton at 1:02 pm
 - Discussion was centered around what the EDC can and cannot do.
 - It was clear that an understanding of local business' needs for advertising is necessary when dealing with the issue
 - It was discussed whether changing bylaws could be a part of the solution, or whether sharing online resources Mr. Hong and Ms. Pierce have created (e.g., on how to claim and update Google profiles for businesses) could be more effective
- RH Adhesives update
 - Mr. Carpenter discussed the renovations that he has completed at his factory for RH Adhesives
 - There was much discussion about permits, obstacles, and the technicalities necessary for the renovations to take place
 - Thanked Ms. Pierce for her assistance with the process and finished by confirming he would give future updates on the process
 - RH updates finished at 1:07 pm
- EDC FY 25 Goal setting discussion was briefly brought up but it was again decided it will be continued next meeting
- **More Regular Business**
- Updates From Economic Development Director and requested involvement of members
 - Ms. Pierce took time to visit many small businesses located in the different districts around Acton
 - Going forward she will continue this work in an attempt to help small business owners
 - Ms. Pierce highlighted that the Town of Acton received a grant to create an Economic Development Plan (the launch was Tuesday, August 6)
 - She also entertained a focus group to get feedback on current topics of interest
 - Ms. Pierce continued her creative placemaking work and is bringing back restaurant week October 20-27
 - She is additionally beginning work on the 3rd annual Shop Local Holiday promotion

- A How to Grow Your Business with Public Contracting event will take place at Acton Town Hall on 9/10
 - Ms. Pierce finished her updates at 1:33
- Updates from members/groups
 - No member updates were brought up
- Next Meeting - TBD
 - The next Meeting was scheduled for September 13th at noon
 - The final roll was taken
 - The move to adjourn the meeting by Ms. Ming was at 1:35 and seconded by Ms. Gruet
- **Meeting was adjourned**