



Economic Development Committee Minutes
June 14th, 2024

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 6/14/24, held in person at the Town Hall.

Called to Order: 12:05 pm

EDC Members Present: Catherine Usoff, Patty Sutherland, Shirley Ming, David Cote, Dan Malloy, Sharon Tchon Gruet, Ann Chang, Greg Jarboe, James Fuccione, Michael Carpenter

EDC Members Absent: None

Also present: Julie Pierce, Fran Arsenault, KJ Herther, Rose Murphy

Public Participation: Andy Heiniluoma, Megha Patil

Preliminaries

Call the Roll – attendance is noted above.

I. Regular Business

Review of meeting minutes from previous meeting, May 3rd, 2024

- Accepted by all EDC members in attendance.

II. New/Special Business

The meeting opened with the introduction of two public participants (Andy Heiniluoma and Megha Patil) who have expressed interest in joining the EDC. The EDC needs to recruit new members and assign a new chair for the upcoming year.

There was an open discussion about the goals of the EDC with a bit of reflection on what has been accomplished to date. There was an acknowledgement of the progress made by the EDC, particularly under Catherine's leadership and the opportunity to build on that momentum.

Participants shared thoughts on where the committee should focus its attention in the upcoming year and how to continue to support Julie's plans for economic development. The consensus was that the focus should be on supporting and participating in the grant-funded work to develop a comprehensive economic development plan for the town.

It is critically important that the consultants have tangible economic development experience and expertise (with other MA towns) to support the development of the plan and that they actively engage with Julie and the EDC to ensure that a comprehensive view of the town's needs and opportunities is reflected. The development of the comprehensive economic development plan will be an important input to the Town's Master Plan in 2025. Two areas that should be included in this planning effort are to revise the bylaws (particularly around signs) for businesses and to establish more practical collaboration with the historic district commission.

The focus over the last two years has been to get the town to acknowledge the need for proactive planning around economic development and to begin to address obstacles that prevent economic growth. The lack of infrastructure (sewers and wastewater management) remains a major obstacle to supporting existing businesses and attracting new businesses to Acton.

Through the collaboration with other town committees (e.g., Planning Board), The EDC needs to lobby the Select Board to make sure the advancement of infrastructure improvement remains prominent in their goals for the upcoming year. A key component of this is to source and secure state level funding that will enable actual improvements.

Central to advancing the infrastructure priority is to address the current bylaws and funding approach that require the residents to directly fund infrastructure improvements. This has led to widespread resistance from residents to the advancement of wastewater solutions over the years. This has been a major obstacle to the expansion of sewers and has left Acton behind neighboring communities that are better positioned to attract new businesses.

The long-term solution will require both bylaw review and changes and the mechanism to secure state and federal level funding that doesn't require residents to shoulder the financial burden of more effective wastewater management.

III. More Regular Business - Next Steps

Catherine has agreed to summarize the discussion described above and present the EDC recommendations to the Select Board in support of their planning efforts which will establish next year's goals on July 2nd. The focus of this communication will include:

- The need to secure outside funding to advance the economic development plan.
- The need to review and revise the bylaws that support infrastructure improvement
- Develop a strategy to secure funding to enable sewer expansion.
- Comprehensive review of current bylaws that are negatively impacting current and potential businesses (e.g., signage, HDC restrictions). This should occur in parallel with the development of a comprehensive economic plan.

EDC Next Steps and Action Items

Organizational Planning and Structure of the EDC

Julie will work with Fran to propose that local business owners be able to be members of the EDC even if they don't reside in Acton.

Julie and KJ will try to identify a chamber of commerce member to be a representative on the EDC

The next meeting of the EDC will be on Friday 7/19 at noon.

In this meeting the following action items are expected:

- Identify who will chair the EDC going forward
- Who will be the active members of the EDC and their respective role (full vs associate members)
- Define a procedure for how agendas and minutes will be created and submitted to comply with town and state requirements.
- Begin the planning process to establish goals for the EDC

The meeting adjourned at 1:45 pm.

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