



Economic Development Committee Minutes

6 October 2022

7:00 pm

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

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 10/6/22, held in Room 9 of Acton Town Hall, and also supported by Zoom for remote participants.

Called to Order: 7:10 pm

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

Also present: Julie Pierce Onos and guest Peter Berry

Members Absent: Peter Daniel, David Cote, Ray Yacouby

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. For text of the preamble, please see January 6, 2022 meeting which was the first time it was read at the beginning of the meeting.

1. Regular Business

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meetings

8 September 2022, minutes approved by all members in attendance, except for Ann Chang, Dan Malloy who were not at the September 8th meeting

- Public participation – Terra Friedrichs – Terra voiced her opposition to the EDC's support of the expansion of sewers and more modern waste water management. She believes the costs will make it prohibitive. The EDC does not support her position.

2. New/Special Business

Visit from Peter Berry (Ban the Bag & more group)

Peter set the stage for the discussion by reviewing the highlights and rationale of the bylaw to ban the use of Polystyrene products that passed at the Acton Town Meeting in June 2022.

He continued to emphasize that other local communities (e.g., Concord, Wayland, Westford, etc.) are also implementing a ban of Polystyrene products and that a bill is pending with the state legislature to implement it on a statewide basis.

It was pointed out in the discussion that there are significant loop holes in the current bylaw because packaging that is done outside of Acton is exempt. For example, large meat processing plants that deliver to local markets are not subject to the ban

The Board of Health is responsible for the communication and implementation of the new bylaw. He described the distribution of a “Frequently Asked Questions” document (available in repository, <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-15775/Document-83597>) to all local businesses affected by the bylaw by the Board of Health.

The goal of the communication is not to be punitive but to educate them about the requirements of the bylaw. There are websites referenced in the frequently asked questions document that point businesses to places to purchase acceptable alternative products.

There is no required reporting on compliance from the Board of Health and the enforcement will most likely be integrated into their annual inspection of businesses.

Dave D. wanted re-assurance that an alternative product is available that can be used for a lid on hot beverages. Peter believes there are already alternatives but could not definitively point to one. He also pointed out that only polystyrene is banned and no other plastics which are used for lids (those with “1” and “5” symbols) are affected.

Peter reported that the Ban the Bag group has no planned activity for future initiatives and that the bylaw and other initiatives will be taken over by the plastics committee of Green Acton (Jim Snyder-Grant, clerk and Debra Simes, president). Green Acton is a private group with an environmental agenda. He differentiated this group from the “Green Advisory Board,” a town committee of which Peter is a member, and which seeks public funding to support green initiatives.

Mike Majors asked that the EDC be informed of future initiatives from either group that have a direct effect on local businesses. There was frustration with the process used to advance the Polystyrene ban because there was no public forum for discussion and it was imposed on businesses with no input for how to do it most effectively. Anne recommended that Julie be included in all communications from the various “Green Initiatives,” so that we can anticipate the effects on businesses.

Catherine raised the issue that the ban of Polystyrene products represents only half of the equation and that ensuring that the replacement products are composted and not just added to the trash should be a priority as well. The transfer station does not seem to actively promote the re-

cycling/composting of these replacement products. There is confusion over which products can be composted and how to do it.

Goals for the EDC and Alignment with Town Initiatives

Catherine began the discussion by referencing her September 6th planning document (available in the repository at <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-15608>) which described the objectives of town staff and departments and sought to align the EDC's 2022 - 2023 objectives with the broader town planning agenda.

Some of the highlights of town initiatives that the EDC needs to align with include:

- Online permitting system
- Kelly Corner Infrastructure project
- Powder Mill Corridor Revitalization
- Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) project
- South Acton Area Plan
- Multiple sustainability objectives – e.g., increase Mass Save Audits, charging stations, increase solar capacity, Climate Action Plan, etc.

With the backdrop of planned town level activities, Catherine tried to get the group to align around an action plan for the EDC in 2022-2023, with the help of a streamlined document that was made available in the repository with the agenda prior to the meeting (<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-15775/Document-83597>). She outlined the following list of proposed areas of focus:

- Kelly Corner construction related
- Implementation of Bylaws (plastics ban)
- Great Road Complete Streets plan
- South Acton Village Vision and Planning and MBTA requirements
- Powder Mill Corridor Revitalization plan
- Review Bylaws
- Review Julie's "How to do Business" guide
- Support/Advocate for sewers on Great Road

Beyond supporting existing activities, the EDC can propose new initiatives with the goal of promoting local businesses. For example, the creation of a marketing and communication framework that promotes businesses across different channels (e.g., Town website, Town meeting; EDC newsletter etc.). Examples of the types of business activities that could be highlighted include:

- Celebrate "new" businesses that come to Acton
- Highlight how businesses support the community (nonprofits and schools)
- Business that reaches certain milestones (e.g., Hartz 100 year anniversary; achieve green initiatives; etc.)

Catherine used the following to characterize the spirit of this initiative:

"Acton Supporting Businesses that Support Acton"

As an organizing principle, Catherine is proposing we evaluate potential EDC activities

in the context of two primary goals:

- Supporting existing and potential businesses
- Elevating the status and visibility of the EDC

EDC Member Participation and Recruitment

It became apparent in the meeting that a limited number of EDC members had reviewed the planning document that was distributed prior to the meeting and there appeared to be apprehension to reach consensus around the goals for the group for next year and to provide a commitment of the time to advance some of these objectives.

Catherine articulated that without more active participation of individual members of the EDC, we will not be able to advance the initiatives outlined above. This has been an ongoing problem with the EDC and we need to agree on the priorities and to have individuals step up and accept responsibility for driving specific initiatives.

The goal for the next meeting is to have all members come to the meeting with an opinion and commitment on what initiative they would be willing to lead and track. We discussed a few options in the meeting (e.g., Ann to review bylaws) but we need to agree on ownership and get the entire team involved.

One potential solution is to fill the vacancies on the EDC and attract members (and business owners) who can commit time to advance the agreed upon agenda. Catherine has the name of a North Acton resident (former entrepreneur, consultant, policy analyst) who may be interested in getting involved, she will reach out to him. She will reach out to Peter Daniels to discuss his ability to be an active member.

It was also discussed about introducing some daytime EDC meetings with the goal of attracting more businesses owners to engage with the EDC.

Updates Select Board Meeting – 10/3

Catherine had sent a request for EDC members to submit input in writing to the Select Board regarding decisions about how to allocate outstanding federal funding available to the Town of Acton.

Dan and Catherine did submit briefs advocating for funding to support the study and design of Wastewater Infrastructure in the Great Road Commercial district AND for funding to improve the Nagog Wastewater Treatment System.

The Select Board did agree to expand funding to increase capacity for the Nagog Wastewater Treatment System but did not commit additional money to the Great Road Wastewater Infrastructure at this time. The town manager wanted to complete the existing Great Road study before additional funding was provided.

Updates from the Economic Development Director

Julie was advocating that the EDC take more responsibility for helping to shift the “Town’s culture toward businesses” and thought the marketing/communication plan described above could be a good way to start that process.

She also encouraged more outreach to businesses and to plan events that educate and support businesses. She also suggested we use existing forums (e.g., “Java with John”) as a venue for organizing outreach. Catherine suggested that we could attend a meeting of WAVMA (West Acton Village Merchants Association) since they are an existing and active group of town business people.

Immediate Action Item: We discussed organizing a breakfast meeting that would focus on the requirements for the Polystyrene ban that goes into effect 1/1/23. We would engage the Board of Health to come prepared with all the details required for businesses to comply with the new bylaw. This forum would give the EDC a chance to sponsor something that actual helps businesses with the new requirements.

Julie also updated the group on an activity within the planning department to create visuals to facilitate understanding of the sign bylaws (not to re-write the bylaws) and it was requested that the EDC get to review an early version of the document before it becomes finalized.

The Kelly Corner block party was a success with most of the businesses in that area participating and over 40 community groups attended. There was lots of foot traffic and overall, it was well received by the merchants.

Julie has secured a \$30K grant to support the development of the “How to Do Business guide”

Julie continues to organize events that promote manufacturing and educate students about career opportunities. Events are schedule at Assabet and in Acton over the next week.

Online Permitting – Vendors are being interviewed with the goal of narrowing the selection

Finally, the town is working on placing a HAWK (High Intensity Activated cross Walk) system (<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/10045/>) and crosswalk at Brook Street to enable safe transport across 2A. This will help Rapsallions’ business and their parking problem.

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 state is attempting to facilitate more multi-use development and housing around the train station. The zoning changes to support this will only require a 50% majority at town meeting (this was a key Governor Baker priority, part of an Act Enabling Partnerships for Growth, explained on a law firm’s website <https://www.nutter.com/trending-newsroom-publications-massachusetts-enacts-zoning-changes>).

Beyond compliance with the new state request, there is a desire to map out a vision for commerce in the South Acton area. The group is going to be issuing a survey to solicit input into what should be done in this area. There are a host of obstacles (traffic patterns, lack of parking) and issues to be addressed (how the civil defense building fits into long range planning).

Adjourn – 8:55 p.m.

Reference materials for this meeting can be found at <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-15775/Document-83597>

Action Items Identified in this Meeting:

- ALL members read planning documents and be prepared to commit to agreed-upon activities for the year at the next meeting.
- Catherine to connect with Peter Daniel.
- Catherine, Julie and Fran to discuss potential new members.

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