



Economic Development Committee Minutes

April 19, 2024

12:00 PM

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 4/19/24, held virtually via Zoom.

Called to Order: 12:07 pm

EDC Members Present: Catherine Usoff, Patty Sutherland, Shirley Ming, Sharon Tchon Gruet (functioning as a full voting member for this meeting), Ann Chang, Dan Malloy, James Fuccione

EDC Members Absent: David Cote, Michael Carpenter, Greg Jarboe

Also present: Julie Pierce

Public Participation: Terra Friedrichs

Preliminaries

Call the Roll – attendance is noted above.

I. Regular Business

Review of meeting minutes from previous meeting, March 1, 2024

- Accepted with all EDC members in attendance. Dan Malloy abstained because he was not present at the last meeting.

II. Old Business - EDC Membership

It was noted that David Cote had been approved as a full member of the EDC by the Select Board. He still needs to be sworn in. The planning board and finance representatives were also approved as associate members.

Catherine announced that she would be stepping down as chair of the EDC at the end of her current term (which ends June 30th). The committee acknowledged the significant contribution and leadership Catherine has provided over the last couple of years. We will celebrate her accomplishments at the final in person meeting of the EDC on June 14th.

Ann Chang and Dan Malloy also announced that they would be resigning from their positions on the EDC committee in June. These changes point to the need to recruit new members who can carry on the charter of the EDC. Catherine will reach out to Fran to facilitate the recruitment of new members. Julie should also play a role in shaping the committee membership to ensure it aligns with her charter.

New/Special Business

Catherine identified the warrant articles for the town meeting that were relevant for the charter of the EDC. Articles 13, 14, 15, and 16 were determined to warrant a direct endorsement or response from the EDC.

Several EDC members agreed to represent the committee's perspective at the Town Meeting. The assignments are as follows:

Article 13: Amend Zoning Bylaw and Map – South Acton Village Districts – Patty Sutherland

The zoning changes are intended to spur commercial investment in South Acton Village by incentivizing commercial activity on the ground floor of new and existing buildings. This proposal represents the recommendation of the South Acton task force that has been working on how to revitalize the area over the last 2 years.

Fran Arsenault will introduce the warrant at the Town Meeting and Catherine will make a presentation about the article as a member of the task force. Patty will speak at a “pro” mike to express the EDC’s support for this warrant. This warrant has already been endorsed by the Select and Planning boards.

The lone public participant voiced concern about the proposed changes in zoning for both tenants and small businesses in the area. Several members of the EDC pointed out that after 2 years of study and planning which involved residents and businesses, there was overwhelming support to move this plan forward. The theoretical negative impacts were not agreed to or accepted by the EDC.

Article 14: Authorize Long-Term Lease – 19 and 21 Maple Street - Sharon Tchon Gruet

The warrant will enable the town to enter into a long-term lease which will align with the need of a potential tenant to make meaningful investments in the parcel and create the opportunity for a vibrant community asset in South Acton. A positive vote will enable a major renovation and positive re-purposing of the space that is likely to lead to additional development in the village.

Sharon will reflect the EDC’s full support for this warrant at the Town Meeting.

Article 15 Tax Increment Financing – Natural Stonewall Solutions – possibly Greg Jarboe

This warrant would extend a local Tax Incentive Financing (TIF) agreement with Natural Stonewall Solutions to leverage the availability of further state tax relief. The company is making a significant investment of 2 million dollars in a new manufacturing facility that will increase the tax base. They also plan to increase the number of local jobs by at least 20 over the next 5 years. Providing the company with some relief of the local tax on the incremental investment will demonstrate local financial support that is necessary for the company to qualify for even greater state level support.

The Select and Planning boards, and the Finance Committee have already endorsed this proposal. Fran will introduce the warrant article. Either Catherine, Fran, or Greg will make the presentation at town meeting. Greg could communicate the unanimous support of the EDC for this proposal. Note: Greg was not in attendance at the EDC meeting so his commitment to doing this was not confirmed.

Article 16 Citizen's petition – Gas powered leaf blower Phase Out – Dan Malloy

The EDC believes we should be incenting and supporting the transition to battery powered leaf blowers and should not be creating a punitive and regulated approach to this desirable transition that will cost the town time and money. Dan Malloy will reflect the EDC opposition to this warrant.

Final Preparation for The Town Meeting.

The EDC will review the wording for our response to each of these warrants at the meeting on May 3rd prior to The Town Meeting.

There was a brief discussion about the pending MBTA Zoning warrant to be presented at the Town Meeting. Each EDC member should plan to voice their opinion of the article given the significant impact this will have on access to state level grant funding which has been vital to the progress Julie has made in facilitating economic development.

While the EDC is not going to comment on this article directly, we should have our voice heard and should reject the scare tactics being promoted about unwarranted negative impacts on residents and businesses. This warrant is critical to addressing the housing crisis and we should be aligning with the state on this important initiative.

IV. Update from Economic Development Director - Julie Pierce

Julie has solicited support for upcoming economic development events. Please see her prior email regarding the schedule of events she is hoping to get EDC coverage.

She is particularly focused on the event at the Silver Unicorn which will attract visitors from around the region. The town is already coordinating transportation to the event to alleviate traffic congestion in West Acton.

The committee acknowledged Julie's recent award from the State of Massachusetts on her success in advancing economic development in the region. We are very proud of her accomplishments.

Other Economic Development – EDC Member Updates:

None.

Next Steps and Action Items

- EDC members will prepare their comment for warrant articles for Town Meeting.
- Catherine will discuss with Fran the recruitment of new EDC members
- **The next EDC meeting will be on May 3rd at noon via ZOOM.**
- **The final EDC for the year will be in person at Town Hall on June 14th.**
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The meeting adjourned at 1:14 pm.

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