

EDC Minutes – 16 May 2013

These are the meeting minutes from the Economic Development Committee (EDC) of the Town of Acton, Massachusetts. The meeting took place on 16 May 2013 at the Acton Town Hall.

The meeting was called to order at 7:37 pm by Nancy Dinkel.

Present: Allan Gulliver, Ann Chang, Derrick Chin, Dick Calandrella, Doug Tindal, Larry Kenah, Nancy Dinkel

Missing: Chris Pappas, Dave Clough

Minutes from the meetings of 2 May 2013 were approved.

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Summary

Most of the meeting was spent discussing two items.

- Larry Kenah presented an update on the electronic business directory.
- The committee talked about Article 9, a citizens' petition to establish a one-year building moratorium in the Village Residential District in West Acton.

Electronic Business Directory

Larry Kenah presented an update on the electronic business directory. His handouts are attached to these minutes. Here are some of the points raised during the discussion.

- The EDC itself is a primary audience for the directory. The existence of a directory with up-to-date information about businesses in Acton will provide the committee with a valuable tool as it improves the overall business climate in Acton.
- The directory will facilitate communication from town boards, committees, and departments to Acton businesses.

The Chamber of Commerce was mentioned as a possible owner of such information but people observed that the chamber is trying to separate itself from Acton and adopt a more regional focus.

In an attempt to create a model for the directory, someone suggested that it would be like an "Angie's List for Acton", minus the ratings.

The town itself does not have a complete list of businesses in Acton.

- The town clerk has a list of every business that applies for a DBA but many businesses do not need a DBA.
- The town has information about buildings but not about individual tenants.

Moratorium Article

Article 9 in the Special Town Meeting Warrant is a citizens' petition to establish a one-year moratorium in the portion of West Acton that is zoned for Village Residential.

This form of zoning was created nearly twenty years ago as part of a strategy to create pockets of high density residential housing in so-called village cores.

- One intended effect was to concentrate housing and discourage building in existing open spaces.
- A second intended effect was that the population density would result in increased retail business.

In the ensuing twenty years, retail in West Acton has had only mixed success. Some of the reasons might be specific to West Acton. A few reasons for the current state of retail in West Acton were listed.

- The overall economic climate since the recession that began in late 2007
- An undercurrent of NIMBY
- Lack of sewers that restrict especially restaurants and other food services

Doug Tindal observed that the buildings on Mass Ave being renovated by Michael Rosenfeld's architecture company have shown some success in attracting tenants. Perhaps the EDC should invite someone from this WAVE project to explain its success and the problems that it has faced.

EDC Support for Moratorium

After the general discussion about West Acton and the building moratorium, the committee discussed whether and how it should make a recommendation.

- An initial motion was made that the EDC support the moratorium.
- During the discussion, several members indicated that they had not seen some of the background information on the moratorium.
- A second motion was made to table the initial motion. This second motion passed on a 5 to 2 vote.

The committee then discussed when and where it would meet between 16 May and Town Meeting (3 June) to determine its position on Article 9. The initial meeting proposal was a special EDC meeting with proponents and opponents of the moratorium invited. Derrick Chin then pointed out that the Planning Board had scheduled a public forum on the moratorium at its 30 May meeting and that perhaps the EDC could join the planning board at its meeting.

(After the meeting, the latter option was selected and the EDC met on 30 May, following the conclusion of the Planning Board meeting.)

In Closing

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.

These minutes were recorded by Lawrence J Kenah, EDC Clerk.

Attachments

- EBD Status – 16 May 2013
- EBD Questions – May 2013

EBD Status – 16 May 2013

Goals, etc

- Create an electronic directory of businesses in Acton
- Make this directory available via the town Web site
- On a regular basis, update the directory to reflect new businesses and businesses that are no longer active.

Status

I am pursuing the state of the directory on two fronts: content and making the information available. I have made little progress so far.

- I am in the middle of arranging a meeting with Mark Hald.
- I have lost Dave Clough's previous responses to my queries so I am asking once more how to look at the current state of the EBD.

Some Questions

I sent these questions to Mark Hald but we own some of the answers.

- What is the current state of the EBD? (format, content, etc)
- What additional work is needed before it can be made publicly available?
- What steps (approval, etc) must be taken before we can make this information publicly available?
- Once the initial version of the EBD is "published", what work is needed to keep it up to date?
 - I think that the EBD "owns" changes to the content.
 - How do we actually make the changes?
 - Is this a manual process?
 - Can parts be automated?

Quick Review of Goals and Purpose of EBD

The attached sheet contains additional questions about the purpose of the EBD. I would like to spend a few minutes (now? next meeting?) reviewing what we are trying to accomplish. You folks have had these conversations in the past but I think that it might help all of us to review especially the goals.

EBD Questions – May 2013

Goals, etc

- What problems will be addressed by the EBD?
- Who will use the EBD?
 - Economic Development Committee
 - Members of other town committees
 - Department directors and other town employees
 - Existing businesses
 - Prospective businesses
 - Who else?
- What questions will these users expect the EBD to answer?

Answers to these questions will guide our answers to the rest of the questions.

Data

Content

The EBD currently contains the following information about each business in Acton.

- This information needs to be filled in.
- What additional data about each business might be useful but is currently missing?

Completeness, Accuracy, etc

- What level of completeness is needed?
- What level of timeliness is needed?
 - How soon after a business starts should it appear in the EBD?
 - How soon should an entry be removed (or flagged as inactive) after a business moves away or closes?

Exposure

- How will prospective users learn about the EBD?
- Will the EBD be available via the Town of Acton Web site?
 - How?
 - When?

Logistics

- Who will track information that needs to be added or modified?
 - I think that the EBD collectively owns this work. I will volunteer to be the point person for the time being.
- Who will make the actual changes to the data that is publicly available?
- How will these changes be made?