

EDC Minutes – 18 September 2014

These are the meeting minutes from the Economic Development Committee (EDC) of the Town of Acton, Massachusetts. This meeting took place on 18 September 2014 in Room 204 of the Acton Town Hall.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm by Nancy Dinkel.

Mathias Rosenfeld attended the meeting as an invited guest.

We also had two visitors attend the meeting. One was a student at ABRHS. He is taking a Political Science class at the high school and wanted to get a sense of how different town boards and committees operate. His brother, a student at Middlesex Community College, also attended.

Present: Allan Gulliver, Derrick Chin, Dick Calandrella, Franny Osman, Larry Kenah, Nancy Dinkel

Not Present: Ann Chang, Doug Tindal, Ken Zhou

Chris Pappas resigned from the Economic Development Committee this past summer. We will miss his wise counsel, especially as it relates to the Acton real estate market conditions. Our newest member, Kenneth Zhou, has changed jobs and has moved away from Acton. He has resigned from the EDC effective 1 October 2014. We will also miss him and his insights.

Meeting Minutes (2)

Minutes from the 4 September meeting were not distributed before the meeting. Their approval was postponed until the 2 October 2014 meeting.

Mathias Rosenfeld (3)

Mathias Rosenfeld from New Habitat Partners, responsible for the ongoing development in West Acton, joined the committee and described the history, goals, and current state of the projects in West Acton. The 525 Mass Ave project is described in some detail at the project's Web site.

It happened that a story about the project appeared in the 18 September 2014 issue of *The Beacon*.

Impediments to Development

During his presentation, Mathias listed what he saw as impediments to development in West Acton.

- **No Sewers** – This is usually associated with restaurants but Mathias pointed out that it also imposes constraints on other types of businesses.
- **Limited Parking** – This project is adding 95 additional parking places but even that might not be enough to support potential clients.
- **Sign Regulations** – Prospective tenants must follow the Historic District sign regulations. These regulations are a problem for (at least) two reasons.
 - The current approval process is both inefficient and expensive.
 - It is difficult to create a sign design that meets all of the criteria.

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- **Liquor Licenses** – This item is perhaps a distant fourth on the list but Mathias cited it as a concern for potential restaurants.

Current Construction

Construction of the buildings that make up the 525 Massachusetts Avenue complex has been underway for some time. Two parts of this overall effort were mentioned because they were taking place at the same time as the meeting.

- A stretch of Massachusetts Avenue was transferred from the state to the town to allow on-street parking.
- The serpentine curbing was being added both to slow traffic and to isolate several on-street parking places.

Interactions with the Town

Over the course of this project, Mathias has had occasion to interact with several of the town departments. He had good words for all of them.

- “The Health Department is wonderful.” He and his construction team had to resolve many issues associated with the septic system that was installed to support the site. The Health Department was extremely helpful during the entire exercise.
- Roland Bartl and the Planning Department support the project and have been very helpful.
- Despite some issues over signs, Mathias had praise for the Historic District Commission (HDC). They approved a massive project. He did recommend that the HDC add a builder to its current list of members.

Other Items of Interest

During the conversation, we touched on the following points, listed in no particular order.

- During a typical day, approximately 15,000 cars drive through West Acton. By way of comparison, the number for Route 2A in North Acton is 17,000. This number is significant to prospective tenants because these drivers are potential customers of some of the businesses already located on or planning on relocating to West Acton. The number is also significant to New Habitat Partners because some of these drivers might decide to relocate to West Acton.
- As a result of this traffic, Mass Ave is the “heart and soul” of West Acton.
- Mathias is very positive on the outlook for businesses in the new building. He has done some outreach but many prospective clients have come directly to him. Potential businesses include food (both restaurants and specialty stores), wellness (such as the existing yoga studio), professional, and perhaps other retail.
- The theater will serve as a shared meeting space for the entire complex.
- During one of several conversations related to sewers in West Acton, Mathias described the details associated with building a septic system for a project as large as this one. They include permitting, engineering, and site preparation.

Board of Selectmen Report (4)

Franny Osman presented a brief update from the Board of Selectmen.

- As the EDC continues its effort to define goals and projects for the upcoming year or two, Franny contacted the Maynard EDC. She distributed their single sheet description that included areas of concentration, core strategies, and guiding principles.
- Franny also recommended that we take a look at the Westford EDC.

Remaining Agenda Items (5..10)

There were no updates on agenda items 5 through 10. Work on these projects will be clarified after we go through the detailed discussion of EDC mission, goals, and projects.

In Closing

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 pm.

These minutes were recorded by Lawrence J Kenah, EDC Clerk