

EDC Minutes - 20 November 2014

These are the meeting minutes from the Economic Development Committee (EDC) of the Town of Acton, Massachusetts. This meeting took place on 20 November 2014 in Room 204 of the Acton Town Hall.

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by Nancy Dinkel.

Present: Allan Gulliver, Ann Chang, Bharat Shah, David Foley, Derrick Chin, Doug Tindal, Franny Osman, Larry Kenah, Nancy Dinkel

Not Present: Dick Calandrella

We officially welcome David Foley and Bharat Shah as the newest members of the EDC. Both David and Bharat have completed the approval process and have been sworn in.

Meeting Minutes (2)

Minutes from the EDC meeting held on 2 October were approved.

Board of Selectmen Report (3)

Franny Osman had nothing special to report. She recommended that we should discuss the issue with drive-through access at a future meeting.

Nancy Dinkel asked about meeting with

Rob Anderson
Metro West Regional Director
Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD)

Janet Adachi, a member of the Board of Selectmen (BoS) sent Nancy and the rest of the EDC a note indicating earlier contacts between Mr Anderson and the town. Nancy recommended that it would be useful for the EDC to invite him to a future meeting. The committee agreed.

Nancy will contact Mr Anderson for his availability. Once we settle on a date, Nancy will invite members from other boards and committees in town.

Town Meeting - Article 9

Derrick Chin described this article and its fate at Town Meeting to the rest of the committee.

The article dealt with zoning of “the site of Brookside Shops, currently the location of Staples, Trader Joe’s, Talbots, and others”. As described in the Summary of Article 9 in the Special Town Meeting Warrant, the zoning change is intended to acknowledge the commercial nature of the property. The summary also describes the history of recent zoning changes.

The site was originally zoned for General Business. In 1990, the zoning was changed to Family Residential (R-8). The then owners took the town to court and prevailed, changing the zoning back to General Business but only under temporary freeze protections. It was under the temporary General Business that the shopping center was built.

The temporary designation has expired and a General Business District no longer exists in Acton. Under R-8 regulations, it is difficult for either the property owners or the tenants to make even the smallest changes unless the appellant receives a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Derrick mentioned that one approach to enforcing one way traffic flow on the service road was to install so-called tire destroyers often found at airport rental car locations. Franny Osman expressed concern about this proposed solution. Doug Tidal indicated that the use of such a device would block access for emergency vehicles.

Town Meeting and Article 9

At town meeting, the Planning Board recommended that town meeting “take no action” on this article. Town Meeting agreed and voted to take no action.

As part of his explanation of the last minute recommendation on the part of the Planning Board, Derrick described how the history of this site went beyond zoning into areas such as delivery truck access outside agreed upon hours, violations of one-way traffic designations, and inadequate “visual barriers” between the commercial buildings and nearby residential properties.

Derrick pointed out that recent discussions with residents may have lessened the tension and reduced the opposition at a future town meeting. If this article had proceeded to a vote and failed at this Special Town Meeting 2014, this article could not be resubmitted for another two years.

EDC and Article 9

The discussion moved from background and information to what role the EDC should play.

- We agreed that the EDC should support this zoning change. The Brookside Shops is one of the most successful commercial areas in Acton.
- Doug Tindal argued that EDC should be vehement in its support for the current (and future) tenants.
- Franny Osman moved that the EDC voice its support for this zoning change.
- Franny also recommended that additional history and context be included in a future article summary so that residents understand the implications to themselves should this article fail when it is next proposed.

Aside on Planning Board

Derrick pointed out that the Planning Board is currently missing three members. This made it difficult for the PB to formally pull this article in the three hours before Town Meeting started.

Acton 2020 Update

Larry Kenah provided summaries of two recent meetings of the Kelley's Corner Steering Committee. His notes are attached to the end of these minutes. Several points were raised by members.

- When the various KCSC recommendations are presented to the town, the KCSC need to make sure that much attention is paid to the people who vote at town meeting.

- A question was raised about the proposed traffic signals at either end of Community Way (aka Noname Road). Are there MassDOT regulations about minimum separation between consecutive traffic signals?
- What is the impact of NextGen (proposed child care facility just north of Route 2 on Route 27) on Kelley's Corner traffic?

Mission and Goals (6)

It was getting late but the committee needed to get back to the business of completing its “reboot” effort. We have previously agreed on a mission statement and three goals for the EDC. The next step will require that we list the projects (or objectives or activities) that support the EDC mission and goals.

David Foley recommended that before we get into these details, we create a brief project plan for the reboot effort itself. This plan will not address content but only process (list of deliverables, people responsible, approximate schedule, etc) for completing the reboot effort.

David volunteered to participate in drafting this plan. Larry Kenah volunteered to help David. David and Larry will present their plan at the next EDC meeting scheduled for 4 December 2014.

Remaining Agenda Items (7..10)

There were no updates on agenda items 7 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

Appendix -Kelley's Corner Steering Committee Recent Meetings

These notes were discussed at the 20 November 2014 EDC meeting as part of agenda item %, Acton 2020 Update.

The Kelley's Corner Steering Committee met on 8 October and 17 November 2014. These notes provide brief updates (not official minutes) from those meetings.

October KCSC Meeting

Feedback from September Public Meeting

The most recent public meeting took place on 16 September 2014. People estimated that approximately fifty people attended the meeting and actively participated in small group discussions. (I myself was away and did not attend the public meeting.) The posted minutes from the October KCSC meeting contain links to two documents on the town Web site.

- The slide set that describes progress to date and explores alternatives for circulation and roadways and for streetscape and landscape.

- A letter from the Cecil Group consultants to the committee summarizing their impressions from the public meeting.

Introduction to Zoning

Ken Buckland from the Cecil Group presented an introduction to both the principles and the mechanics of zoning to help the committee assess proposed zoning recommendations, one of three deliverables from the Kelley's Corner Improvement Process.

- Zoning cannot force redevelopment.
- It can only guide development that actually takes place.

Process for Traffic Improvements

Jason DeGray described next steps for transportation improvements.

- Advanced design and civil engineering survey
- Engagement between town and MassDOT to stress the importance that the town (and not just KCSC) places on these improvements

The first step in this engagement will take the form of a letter drafted by KCSC but sent either by BoS or the town manager. Andy Brockway delivered the draft letter to BoS at its 20 October 2014 meeting.

Town Meeting and Proposed Zoning Bylaw Changes

The committee discussed the proposed zoning bylaw change that would allow pharmacies (as well as banks) to include a drive-through window. The committee felt that making a specific zoning change for Kelley's Corner while it was preparing a comprehensive set of zoning recommendations was premature.

Some committee members were opposed to the change. Others took no position on the article itself but felt that the timing of the article was at odds with the committee's plans to present a set of zoning recommendations in the first half of next year.

Perhaps based on this sentiment, the Planning Board revised the proposed bylaw change to explicitly exclude Kelley's Corner. At town meeting, an amendment to remove the exclusion failed. The change itself then failed to pass town meeting.

November KCSC Meeting

This meeting took place on Monday of this week. The minutes from this meeting have not yet been written let alone approved. The slides presented by the Cecil group have not yet been posted. These notes are a quick summary of Monday's meeting.

Traffic Improvements

- It is important to put Community Way (also known as Noname Road) under town control.
- The current proposal includes traffic signals at both ends of Community Way. These lights would be coordinated with the light at the intersection of Route 27 and Route 111.
- CVS is also interested in a traffic signal at the intersection between Route 111 and Community Way.
- There are no plans to add signals to either ramp between Route 2 and Route 27.

- There were earlier studies (2000 and 2008) to include a signal at the eastbound ramp but nothing happened with either study. MassDOT is not interested in adding either signal at the current time.
- The civil engineering study will take place between now and the end of the year.

Streetscape and Landscape

The remainder of the meeting (and most of the slides) looked at lots of details (trees, street furniture, street lights, pavement, roadway markings, and overall landscape character) to get a sense of how the committee is leaning. Two general threads emerged.

- Committee members favor traditional designs rather than contemporary designs for street lights, benches, and similar furnishings.
- All of these details can be used to give Kelley's Corner its own identity.

In response to a question, Steve Cecil indicated that there are no plans to put the various utilities (electric, telephone, cable, etc) underground. The primary reason is cost.