

EDC Minutes – 5 May 2016

These are the meeting minutes from the Economic Development Committee (EDC) of the Town of Acton, Massachusetts. The meeting took place on 5 May 2016 at the Acton Town Hall in Conference Room 204.

The meeting was called to order at 7:38 by Doug Tindal.

Present: Allan Gulliver, Chingsung Chang, Derrick Chin, Doug Tindal, Larry Kenah, Nancy Dinkel

Not present: Ann Chang, Bharat Shah, David Foley, Dick Calandrella, Josh Fischel

Town Staff M. J. "Selby" Selby
Director of Land Use and Economic Development

Dave Didriksen, a former member of the EDC, is planning to rejoin the committee. He attended the meeting as part of his re-introduction to the committee. (We learned early the following week that the Board of Selectmen approved Dave's (re)appointment to the EDC at their 8 May 2016 meeting.)

Meeting Summary

Member Update

Nancy Dinkel announced that she will be retiring from Northern Bank and Trust. As a result, she will also resign from the Economic Development Committee. EDC members expressed regret at her departure and wished her well. We wish to thank her for her many years of service with the Economic Development Committee, especially the time that she chaired the EDC.

Public Participation (1)

There was no public participation.

Meeting Minutes (2)

Minutes from three EDC meetings were approved.

- 17 December 2015
- 21 January 2016
- 17 March 2016 (with two edits related to meeting start time and location)

Subcommittee Assignments (3)

We heard brief reports from the four subcommittees.

- Marketing – Allan Gulliver
- Signs – Derrick Chin
- Business database – Larry Kenah
- EDIP – Doug Tindal

We also discussed the ongoing ombudsman role that the EDC plays.

Marketing

Allan Gulliver will research recent EDC notes about marketing the town to businesses and report at a later meeting.

Signs

Derrick Chin brought up an interesting wrinkle in sign bylaws. Some regulations restrict power usage in signs. LED technology makes outdoor lights much more efficient with the result that newer lights would be very bright while conforming to regulations. Derrick will look into whether this is an issue with existing sign bylaws.

This topic also served as an invitation to discuss several related issues.

- There have been some complaints with the light at the rear of the CVS located on Massachusetts Avenue.
- Dave Didriksen pointed out that Willow Books has installed LED lighting with no ill effects.
- Doug Tindal asked whether a translation of sign bylaws into language that is easily understood already exists. Derrick Chin indicated that his efforts from a couple of years ago meet this requirement. Is this brochure still available?
- Dave Didriksen pointed out two continuing issues with sign regulations: inconsistent enforcement and conflicts with the Historic District Commission.
- Someone asked whether there are checks on whether signs that are actually deployed comply with sign specifications that appeared in building plans (and presumably conformed to existing sign regulations).

Business database

Larry Kenah presented his current thinking about yet another attempt to build a business database. He proposed two changes that will make this attempt different from earlier attempts.

- The initial database will focus on a subset of all Acton businesses.
 - Many problems can be detected and resolved with a database that contains hundreds rather than thousands of businesses.
 - The proposed initial subset (retail including food, dry goods, and services) is itself a useful subset database.
- Selby will supply some support for the database from town staff.

Everyone thought that the subset approach was a good idea. There was some discussion about what businesses should be in what subsets. Larry raised the question about whether employee count should be included as a data field. Dave Didriksen suggested that putting employee count into one of five or six bins would allow useful data to be collected while not raising concerns about the data gathering effort.

There was an interesting discussion about how data will be gathered. There are several existing but incomplete business databases. Selby offered the opinion that the earlier phases will be walk-around efforts with people visiting each business in each commercial section of town.

Nancy Dinkel reminded us that an important use of the database is to allow the town to communicate with businesses. She again suggested that we use banks as “agents” in gathering information about existing and new businesses.

Larry’s next steps are to create an initial project plan and to meet with Selby to discuss implementation details.

EDIP

Doug briefly mentioned that EDIP has changed again and that he would explore whether EDIP and suitable incentives will help Acton to acquire new businesses. He will also look into what additional support exists, either at the state level or elsewhere.

Ombudsman

Doug Tindal recommended that Dave Didriksen would be excellent in the role of ombudsman, representing the EDC as an advocate for existing businesses.

Buy Local Campaign (4)

Selby indicated that he wants to support a Buy Local campaign in Acton. He distributed a report called “Shop Local Campaign for Small Towns” by Becky McCray. Among other benefits, he pointed out that such a campaign can add to the sense of community among the town, the schools, businesses, and townspeople.

Dave Didriksen brought up the latest example of the “Ain’t Nuthin’ Simple” principle when he pointed out that many (all?) of the Dunkin’ Donuts outlets in Acton are locally owned and that they should be included in any Buy Local effort.

Updates from Members (5)

There were several brief updates from members.

EDC Position on Tax Abatement

Doug Tindal proposed an agenda item for a future meeting. The EDC must adopt and publicize its position on tax abatements. The issue recently surfaced when such an abatement was approved for AES when it purchased the building at Post Office Square.

Kelley's Corner Steering Committee

Larry Kenah delivered what is likely his final report from the Kelley's Corner Steering Committee.

As you all know, I have been the EDC representative to the Kelley's Corner Steering Committee for the past two and a half years. Following the recent town meeting, the KCSC will likely cease to exist after what may be our final meeting on 18 May 2016.

The KCSC proposed two articles at town meeting. The first was a set of zoning changes. The second was a request for approximately \$750k in funding to develop a 100% engineering plan for proposed infrastructure improvements.

As those of you who were at the meeting remember, there was a lively debate that saw quite a few speakers on both sides of the proposed zoning changes.

The final vote on the proposed zoning changes was

- AYE 281
- NAY 168

A two thirds vote (299 votes) was required so the article failed by 18 votes.

Additional discussion preceded the funding article. When the vote was taken, the moderator indicated that the article had achieved the required two thirds vote without any additional counting.

Thanks to all of you for your insights and support over the past two and a half years. This has been an interesting and educational experience for me on many fronts. I look forward to my next challenges.

EDC Connections with Other Committees

Doug Tindal brought up an issue that he has raised before, whether the EDC can meet regularly with other boards and committees with similar interests. Committees include Acton 2020, Design Review Board, and Planning Board. Doug indicated that Selby's arrival provides an opportunity to make progress on this front.

Selby pointed out that Steve Ledoux supports this as well but that such a combined group would need focus and control to get these boards and committees working toward common goals.

Planning Board

Derrick Chin reported that Jeff Clymer will be stepping down from his role of chair of the Planning Board. He will remain a board member.

Membership Issues (6)

As we noted earlier in these minutes, Nancy Dinkel will be leaving the EDC soon. Dick Calandrella has health issues that prevent his attending meetings. Josh Fischel has been away for several months due to a Thursday commitment related to his job.

Doug pointed out that we continue to have trouble reaching quorum and that this problem will get worse if we do not address it. We need to assess the membership list, where we will look for new members, and the split between regular members and associate members that can affect quorum.

In Closing

Upcoming Meetings

The next EDC meeting is scheduled for 19 May 2016.

Adjourn (7)

The meeting adjourned at 9:55 pm.

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