

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 5/4/2017, held in Room 9 of Acton Town Hall.

Present: Selby, Larry Kenah, Josh Fischel, Dave Didriksen, Chingsung Chang

Absent: Derrick Chin, David Foley, Ann Chang

Called to Order: 7:35 pm

Public Participation

Michelle Brown-Droese is running a Facebook group (located here:

<https://www.facebook.com/BuyLocalActonMaynardMA/>), trying to bring her experience doing similar work in Boston out to Acton. Recent press coverage has raised the profile of this effort.

There's always a new group of people coming to Acton; how do we provide them with support and information about where to find various local businesses and services?

Walkable Business Districts can be listed as a Cultural District; you can get your events listed with the Massachusetts Office of Tourism, etc.

Signage, other efforts to increase economic vitality, helping businesses to increase their skill sets to increase their business.

The Facebook page is trying to highlight one business a week.

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Economic Justice could come out and work with folks out here on payroll, liability, and human resources officials.

Committee members noted that small businesses in large swaths of America have been driven out by chains. State-based personal property tax here keeps small business owners and small artisans down. And yet 90% of business owners in America are small business owners. So what can we do to help SBOs to cope with all that stress?

Minutes

Minutes of the meetings from 3/13 and 3/23 were approved unanimously with minor amendments (Chingsung Chang abstained from voting on the minutes from 3/23 because he wasn't there).

Town Meeting Follow-Up

The meeting went well for EDC's interests. Insulet's work is not done; their site plan review is ongoing, so they're working with the Board of Selectmen. Some neighbors showed up at the most recent Board meeting; Chingsung met with one. Truck traffic to the back loading dock early in the morning could potentially be disruptive. They are adding what sounds like hedges on top of walls, encased in soundproofing material, but there could still be lights shining into someone's third story window. Chingsung also wondered about shifting the shift change times; Dave Didriksen

pointed out that trucks arrive when they arrive. He was skeptical that we should tell a company when to do their shifts. Larry Kenah said, in support of Chingsung's point, that if they're coming in with a clean slate in terms of schedule, we can suggest one to them based on feedback from neighbors.

Selby pointed out that where Avalon is was zoned 'office park,' but housing was allowed to go in because it was 40B housing. Chingsung is okay with a hedge and a wall—maybe even just a hedge.

Good to remember that Insulet wants to be a good corporate partner and a good member of the community.

We looked at the TIF, which looks great with one change: Insulet removed the clawback provision from the most recent draft. The compromise that Selby will share on a conference call tomorrow is that, if the company is de-certified in the first five years, we get 100% of unpaid tax back; if it happens in years 6-10, we get 75% of unpaid tax back; it happens in years 11-15, we get 50% of unpaid tax back; if it happens in years 16-20, we get 25% of unpaid tax back. The clawback could be triggered even if Insulet goes out of business or leaves the area—if they moved their corporate headquarters elsewhere, if they sold to a larger business, or if they went all automated, for instance. Dave and Chingsung advocate for a hard cap instead of a step function. Selby thanks them for their suggestion.

In the future, Selby would want the TIF agreement done and the site plan approved before we bring something to Town Meeting for a vote.

Final note: we felt Katie Green did a dynamite job.

Next Projects for EDC

Selby's Guide to Town Hall for Businesses

There's a new café that's planning to open in the old Acton Coffee House space; they already exist in Groton, and they've never expanded before, so they've run into some trouble: they didn't hire an architect to design their kitchen, for instance. Selby has been looking into other towns' guides to opening a business; Hopkinton has a good one, for instance. A 10-15 page guide is what he's envisioning. Dave wants it to be no more than 10 pages. Michelle says Somerville has a good packet, too.

We spend some time reminding ourselves of which businesses used to be where in West Acton.

According to Michelle, a woman who lives in Acton opened a Vietnamese restaurant in Maynard because it was so much easier to set up shop there. Word on the street is that it's hard to get anywhere with regard to moving a small business to Acton. It would be great to have a concierge to walk someone through the process, but that's not feasible. What if a person could submit their DBA and it would be emailed to every necessary department, which could each sign off on the application or let the

clerk know what needs to be done? This is what used to happen here; it's temporarily reverted to people being sent back and forth to different counters like a pinball.

Larry proposes a special working session to help with this plan. Selby wants a kick in the pants, anyway, so maybe let's do that.

What About Signs?

The first time Dave D. quit the EDC, it was over signage. Chingsung said re-writing our signage requirements should be a priority. Larry says it might be something we can do nothing about. Selby says we should ask for funds at Town Meeting to hire a zoning attorney who could re-write our signage by-laws. Dave D. is opposed to letting a lawyer anywhere near anything like that. Working with businesses instead of putting an attorney's lens over everything with regard to compliance is his strong preference.

Larry's homework assignment to everyone: what are the problems with signs and what can we do to make things better?

Buy Local

Chingsung wants to know if we should do a major event involving businesses in town that would need to involve us going to businesses, advertising, etc. What would that event look like, would it be during holiday season? If we want to try it, we need to start planning; if we don't want to, we should put it aside.

Selby suggests a guide to Small Business Saturday.

Michelle did a holiday business guide for residents in Jamaica Plain: where can you get gift cards, where can you pick up food and spirits? What did businesses want to provide?

A problem for this sort of effort is the lack of an identifiable town center in Acton. Dave feels there's no amount of advertising that will draw local people out to shop here. His preference is to have an Acton Day—some percentage of sales from local businesses go to town and/or school, create some local goodwill, do a little promotion, hand over a novelty check, etc.

Business Census Update

Larry and Marcy Kenah have continued to make steady progress. The good chair will send out an update to committee members in the near future. Probably about 80% of businesses are providing an email address, so we're building up a directory and a way to engage our business community.

Update from Members

It's getting late.

Update from Selby

It's a little later.

Adjourned at 9:16, despite Selby's protestations.