



These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 2/6/20, held in Room 9 of Acton Town Hall at 7 pm

Called to Order: 7:04 pm

Members Present: Mike Majors, Derrick Chin, Josh Fischel, Larry Kenah, Shirley Ming, Dave Didriksen, Jon Benson

Staff Present: Selby

Members Absent: David Foley, Ann Chang, Peter Daniel

Visitors/Guests: Dan Malloy, Mike Graffeo

## **I. Regular Business**

**1. Minutes:** The minutes from January 6, 2020, are unanimously approved, with a few typographical clarifications.

**2. Public Participation:** Terra Friedrichs requests to speak later on in the agenda; her wish is granted.

## **II. New/Special Business:**

### **3. Town Meeting Articles of Interest to EDC:**

—Kelley’s Corner land acquisitions, including Community Lane, will be voted on at the next Town Meeting (it will require a two-thirds vote). There will be a traffic signal at the base of that lane, but not at the top; there will be no left turn at the top of the street onto Route 27. Roads will be widened along the refurbishing project; none of these strip parcels will impact the private property. Charter Road will be moved west to align with the K-Mart entrance across the street, and there will be a signal there, too. We were also put on the DoT’s list to improve the on-ramp situation near Acton Medical on 27.

—3 School Street: This property has been deemed surplus by the Board of Selectmen. There’s a request for proposals “out on the street now.” One person attended the site visit, and a local realtor has an idea for commercial use for that property. The building is protected by the Historic District Commission, so it cannot be torn down. Elsewhere in South Acton, there was an application to tear down buildings behind the (former) School Street Garage. There was interest in tearing the building down and rebuilding a “like” structure with 12 housing units and a 100-seat restaurant, but the HDC nixed that. David Didriksen and Josh Fischel voice disappointment with that choice, as the building has sat vacant for years, and there seems to be little point to preserving it. Shirley Ming asks if there is any historic significance to the parcel. David replies, “It’s just old, and for some people, that’s enough.”

—Board of Selectmen → Select Board: 85 of the 311 towns in the Commonwealth already call their leadership a ‘select board.’ Seems like a simple change, but it is a charter change, so it would require a two-thirds majority at Town Meeting. Selby asks about the order of operations, by which elections should happen after Town Meeting. No one knows why we do it this way, other than, as Tevye might say, “tradition.”

—Citizens’ Petition With Regard to Zoning Change on Weatherbee Street: This property contains both a residence and a “laboratory.” Selby spoke to the owner’s daughter’s husband, who approached the town about a zoning change. It has been purchased, contingent on a zoning change approval at Town Meeting, for a business. It is unusual for the town to re-zone something from residential to commercial.

#### 4. Letter to EDC from ABRHS student about improving current business status

We got mail! It is a three-page, handwritten letter from a student at ABRHS. Larry Kenah is excited about its presentation and voice. In addition to Caroline Caruso's, the Board received letters from fellow juniors Bobby Sweet, Conor Roy, Alex Hoitt, and Maddy Jaroch. There was excitement around inviting the students to our meeting; better yet, members of the committee wanted to invite ourselves in and/or expose students to entrepreneurship. David pointed out that, when he closed his business, there was no one to buy it, and this seems to him like a place to start. Dan Malloy offers that storefront vacancies is a macro problem. Josh will reach out to these students via email to learn more information and invite them to future meetings.

#### 5. Parking in West Acton

Larry received two emails about this subject. A salon owner inquires about a two-hour parking proposal in West Acton; Selby does not know about this. Terra tells the origin story of how this came to be; a two-hour limit might as well be three or four hours. There is a broader issue in West Acton, raised last week by Andy Richardt, that there is a bit of a parking crunch for businesses like his in the summer. Selby proposes an informal parking study of businesses in that area, as well as signage directing people to abundant parking across the train tracks. There are three potential locations for adding more parking if there proves to be a need: on Main Street, on the eastbound side until the state highway picks up again; transferring a parcel to parking which previously failed at Town Meeting; and adding additional parking to Gardner Playground. Mike suggests that we could improve signage, which would cost considerably less money than creating any of these new spaces.

### **III. More Regular Business**

#### Updates From Members

Mike Majors says that there is an informal citizens' committee under the guidance of Dean Charter to somehow acknowledge the contributions to arts and society of former Acton resident Carroll Spinney. One of those suggestions was to rename Community Lane after him, put forth a proclamation read by Sen. Eldridge, add a historic marker near the site of the former high school, and perhaps place a bench or two featuring Big Bird or Oscar the Grouch in the small park near the Verizon building. There could be activities at the local libraries to coincide with a significant celebration of this man, plus displays of memorabilia. More broadly, Mike wants to acknowledge other people who grew up here and have gone on to achieve great things, like *America's Got Talent* winner Shin Lim, for instance.

Josh asks about the feasibility of an article on the Town Warrant to propose that a developer who wanted to commit to a small amount of residential with the agreement that a great deal of it would remain commercial, or add a public use space like a YMCA or community center or public market. Jon Benson has said that he's been in conversation with Stop & Shop's real estate development guy, who basically told him, "Well, it has to work for us, too." The real estate investment division put the property on the market from here—many developers inquired with questions about zoning. Selby has said that people he's spoken with have asked for 200 housing units. Mike Majors suggests a lease-back option.

#### Updates from Director of Economic Development

The KMart parcel is under agreement, but without a specific plan. The potential buyer said that whatever happens there should be a collaborative effort between the town and the property owner.

West Acton's Merchants Association has put together an application to become a cultural district. Selby strongly suggested that they work with the town.

Selby has done more business interviews, with Silver Unicorn Books and Marx Running.

50 Nagog Park, an 11-acre lot with a building on it, assessed at \$12 million, has sold for \$600,000. Selby has sat down with the new owners, who will tear it down, rebuild and use as flex space with loading docks in the back. From a land use standpoint, it's difficult to know what the septic and parking needs will be without knowing their specific plans.

The former Willow Books has been bought or leased by Po, of Ginger Court. He is putting in an Asian grocery store and a small restaurant.

The Acton Convenience strip will become an antiques store and a tutoring center. In general, what we're finding is that retail is hurting, and the septic systems were based on retail square footage, so converting to gyms with showers and restaurants with dishes is difficult.

Selby is finishing an MPA and is taking a research and analytics class; he'd like to study the link between housing and economic development, as Judi Barrett was supposed to have done. If there is a link, then the more affordable housing you have, the higher your industrial/commercial tax base should be.

Mike Graffeo points out that the recent spike in discussion about diversity and inclusion, if there's a role for the committee to play here, to make sure that businesses feel welcome here. A spirited discussion followed. Larry says it would be inappropriate to respond to this particular incident; Mike and others said that the broader view and the longer game are the more important perspectives here.

## **IX. Adjourn @ 9:20 pm.**

\*\*\*The EDC will next meet on February 20, 2019\*\*\*

### **Materials Reviewed During Meeting:**

- Draft EDC Minutes from January 16, 2020
- EDC Agenda for February 6, 2020