



These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 8/6/20, held remotely at 10 am

Called to Order: 10:05 am

Members Present: Mike Majors, Ann Chang, Josh Fischel, Larry Kenah, Shirley Ming, Jon Benson, David Didriksen, Peter Daniel, Dan Malloy, Derrick Chin (joined at 11 am)

Staff Present: Selby (Economic Development Director)

Members Absent: David Foley

Visitors/Guests: John Raguin, Sahana Purohit

“Good morning. It is 10:10 am. This Open Meeting of the Economic Development Committee is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker’s Executive Order of March 12, 2020, due to the current State of Emergency in the Commonwealth, and the Local State of Emergency declared by the Acton Board of Selectmen and Board of Health due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 Virus.

“In order to mitigate the transmission of the COVID-19 Virus, the Board of Selectmen has suspended all public gatherings, and in accordance with the Governor’s Order all members of public bodies are allowed and encouraged to participate remotely. The Governor’s Order, allows public bodies to meet entirely remotely so long as reasonable public access is afforded so that the public can follow along with the deliberations and Committee votes of the meeting.

“Ensuring public access does not ensure public participation unless such participation is required by law. This meeting will feature public comment from invited guests. For this meeting, the Economic Development Committee is convening by video conference via the Zoom application. The meeting agenda posted on the Town’s Website calendar indicates how the public may join.

“Please note that this meeting is being recorded and that some attendees are participating by video conference. Accordingly, please be aware that other folks may be able to see you and anything that you broadcast may be captured by the recording.

“All of the materials for this meeting, except any Executive Session materials, are available in the public DocuShare folder, and we recommend that the members and the public follow the agenda as posted.

“Meeting Business Ground Rules

“We are now turning to the first item on the agenda. Before we do so, permit me to cover some ground rules for effective and clear conduct of our business and to ensure accurate meeting minutes.

- Selby or I will introduce each speaker on the agenda (if applicable). After they conclude their remarks, the Chair will go down the line of Members, inviting each by name to provide any comment, questions, or motions. Please hold until your name is called. Further,

- o Please remember to mute your phone or computer when you are not speaking;
- o Please remember to speak clearly and in a way that helps generate accurate

minutes

- For any response, please wait until the Chair yields the floor to you, and state your name before speaking.

- If members wish to engage in discussion with other members, please do so through the Chair, taking care to identify yourself.

“After members have spoken, the Chair will afford public comment as follows:

o The Chair will first ask members of the public who wish to speak to identify their names and addresses only after first being recognized by the Chair, and will be afforded two minutes for their comment or question.

• Finally, each vote taken in this meeting will be conducted by roll call vote. This requirement extends to the vote to adjourn.”

Chair Larry Kenah begins by recognizing that Dan Malloy is now officially a member of the EDC.

I. Regular Business

1. Review of meeting minutes from 18 June 2020

Two edits: After ‘adjourn,’ everything below that can be deleted.

Emma’s name should be on the minutes as the recorder, at the bottom.

Roll Call Vote: yes: 8 no: 0 abstain: 1

2. Public participation

None at this time.

II. New/Special Business

3. Small Business Grant Program (Jon Benson, All)

At July 20 Selectmen’s meeting, Jon Benson had wanted to bring forth a discussion on Town Meeting-approved funding for this grant program. There was a problem with allowing money from the CARES Act to be applied to this, though it’s unclear why. The Selectmen approached Town Counsel about spending money (\$176,000, dispersed in individual grants of \$4,000) ourselves and getting reimbursed through the CARES Act; no dice—such an action would be subject to an “easy lawsuit” from a taxpayer. We could get it onto a Special Town Meeting warrant on September 8th; this would make things easier. They next went to the Finance Committee, who were lukewarm about the idea. Jon wants to take a sounding from the EDC about whether we think the program is worthwhile.

Mike Majors supports this proposal—it’s the right thing to do; it was government regulations that shut down the business or severely hindered their ability to create a profit. His only issue is with the timing—waiting another month doesn’t convey the required sense of urgency.

John Raguin shared a few thoughts with the Finance Committee. One of the coffee shops he spoke with was down 45% July this year as opposed to July last year. He lists several more businesses that are down at most 55%, all getting walloped. To those who argue that \$176,000 is a lot to spend, he pointed out that a lot of these businesses, taken together, have contributed well over that amount in just the past few years through gift certificates, sponsorships, goods and services, etc. On 2A right now, there are 17 ‘for lease’ signs. He worries that will get a lot worse if we don’t take care of our current businesses.

David Didriksen agrees with John—and agrees with Mike Majors that it might be too little, too late. He’s not sure why the state is acting against small businesses. In 25 years, he says, his business contributed half a million dollars just in real estate taxes alone; he’s arguing that small business is the engine of local economies, and to nickel and dime them is not great.

Ann Chang also speaks in favor of the program; she is also concerned that it won't be enough to get businesses over the hump, given COVID-19's staying power.

Dan Malloy wants to make sure that we're not losing money from the CARES Act if we don't spend it this particular way (Jon Benson says yes); he asks what is our commitment to the 25 people who won the lottery to use the funds we now can't disperse yet.

Jon Benson says that there is some dichotomy between what the federal government thinks the money should be used for and what the state government thinks.

Mike Majors chimes in again to suggest that we ought to consider bumping up the amount to \$5,000; someone else (Dan Malloy?) says that feels like it's asking for additional 'no' votes.

Josh Fischel asks if there's a way to use the September Town Meeting to give Selectmen or FinComm some kind of special dispensation to award funds like this while under quarantine so that small businesses don't have to wait for another Town Meeting for additional help down the road.

David Didriksen and Mike Majors say this is an opportunity to showcase how important small businesses are to the town; the town's coffers are pretty full—our tax base is not hurting. We can afford to do something like this.

Shirley Ming says that even if the money isn't going to help a business that's already going bankrupt, the goodwill is more important than the actual amount.

Ann Chang moves that the EDC support giving 44 small businesses money from town coffers through a Town Meeting vote.

Yes: 9, No: 0, Abstain: 0

Larry says we need to put together a more comprehensive statement on this for Town Meeting.

Ann Chang suggests that part of the presentation should include the impact of those small businesses' contributions. Dan echoes that, and says we should also highlight the distress small businesses are feeling. John says he would plan on speaking at that meeting, too, bringing data along with him. Jon Benson suggests more small business owners coming out to speak to make it more personal.

4. Restaurant Week (Peter Daniel)

Peter says Selby got the ball rolling a few weeks ago; Peter reached out to his restaurant/hospitality friends. The last week of October is the week to do Restaurant Week again; everyone's in, plus a few new places, with the giant caveat that they hope they're still open to participate.

Selby will facilitate marketing again. We will not be getting a lot of help from the Chamber of Commerce, other than renewing the web domain for another year. We will ask restaurants to contribute \$50 to cover costs again. Mike suggested a small, local business week or month as well should be in the offing, too. Larry asks for people to think about whether they want to drive that forward.

5. Drive Through Access (Preliminary Discussion)

There may be a zoning change put on the agenda for spring's Town Meeting. We had an initial discussion about whether businesses other than banks should be allowed to have drive-thrus. David Didriksen said he's been in favor of this for years. Mike Majors read through social media and found a positive response to the possibility of drive thrus. Ann Chang says if we spend millions on making Kelley's Corner more bicycle and pedestrian friendly, drive-thrus would operate in opposition to that. David Didriksen not that many businesses would actually apply for it.

III. More Regular Business

6. Updates from members

Mike Majors provides an update on the town's recognition and celebration of Carroll Spinney. People really like the 'Be Kind' yard signs featuring Big Bird; the cost of them so far has been completely out of Mike's pocket.

He also wanted to congratulate Derrick Chin; they were both honored by the Board of Selectmen this month. Larry extends congratulations to both of them on behalf of the committee.

7. Update from Director of Economic Development

Town Hall started providing window service a few weeks ago, 10-noon, Monday-Thursday. 5-10 people come to the land use counter every day. Finance is doing the same thing. Roland Bartl retired a couple weeks ago after 33 years with the town. Paper Store is filing for bankruptcy, and they're laying off 60-75 people at one of their locations in town. Emma Kearney is working on the Small Business Guide, and she should be done with that sometime this fall.

Mike Majors added that Bickford has closed, and there'll be a new restaurant replacing it. He also noticed that the Pier One space has a pop-up Halloween shop there.

Dan Malloy wanted to pick up on attracting new businesses. He says this is, indeed, a golden opportunity to bring businesses like biotech firms to the suburbs as they flee cities.

Ann Chang says that the area that houses "the Graceland" is zoned for start-ups. She asks what is happening in the former Willow Books. Selby has heard no updates about that property recently.

8. Next meeting – September 3rd at 10 am

Move to adjourn passes unanimously at 11:21 am.

IV. Consent Items

9. None

Additional materials

- Draft meeting minutes from 18 June 2020