



These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 5/21/20, held remotely at 10 am

Called to Order: 10:05 am

Members Present: Mike Majors, Ann Chang, Josh Fischel, Larry Kenah, Peter Daniel, Jon Benson, Dave Didriksen, Derrick Chin

Staff Present: Selby (Economic Development Director)

Members Absent: David Foley, Shirley Ming

Visitors/Guests: Dan Malloy

Introduction to Remote Committee Meeting Protocol by Chair Larry Kenah:

“Good morning. It is 10:03 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 colloquy 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 a few minutes for their comment or question.

- Finally, each vote taken in this meeting will be conducted by roll call vote. As I mentioned in a note that I sent earlier this week, this requirement extends to the vote to adjourn.”

I. **Regular Business**

1. Review of meeting minutes from 14 May 2020

Motion to Approve Minutes: Yes: 8, No: 0, Abstain: 0

2. Public participation

There is none.

II. **New/Special Business**

3. This week's developments

- Governor's announcement about re-opening on Monday

David Didriksen gives us the overwhelming consensus among retail folks is that the Governor's plan was a “stab in the back” to independent retailers, who have no clear path to start back up in some way right away. Why is it safer to go into a big grocery store, a liquor store, or a church than some place small like Kitchen Outfitters or a shoe store? David says this will lead to 70% instead of 50% of small guys to close. “It's more than dire; this is a death knell.”

Ann Chang says there's a by-law that prevents retail from being sold on the sidewalk; she suggests we lift that so that stores that can put some merchandise outside be allowed to. Larry Kenah says that the Governor has only allowed curbside pick-up, not sidewalk pop-ups.

Josh Fischel asks how we can help the few businesses who have been nimble enough to thrive in this situation connect with the businesses that feel like all hope is lost. Jon Benson lists several success stories.

Larry points out that there's not an obvious pivot for several stores. David Didriksen says those are interesting anecdotes and heartwarming stories, but they're not enough. We need to write to the Governor to say that businesses can't just be shuttered; they need to be thoughtfully re-opened.

Peter Daniel agrees with the points and passions of previous speakers. He said, “For the greater good, I would 100% shut down, but if some people are allowed and others aren't, why not us,” local businesses who have to be responsive to our communities? Every restaurant he knows of, local and nationwide, is trying to move outside, which means he needs to hurdle the permitting to allow maximized outdoor seating. Selby has been responsive; Concord has been less so. Best-case scenario for restaurants to re-open with heavy restrictions is June 8th. He's finding it difficult to convince the employees on un-

employment to take shifts now because of the \$600 weekly pandemic bonus, which lasts through the end of July. The local community is keeping him going: big tips, regular customers, people who recognize the value of local businesses. Peter said that going a half-year without retail sales would be pretty crazy; budget hawks on FinCom and citizen enforcers saying you can't be cavalier about the law make him throw up his hands. "You want to tell me I can't accommodate certain customers?"

David Didriksen asks what business could survive if you cut their business in half for a year? He thinks the Governor has piled on here through his current phase-in plan.

An attendee, T., has four comments and a question: if you can have up to 500 people for a Town Meeting at the end of June, you can certainly organize a similar plan for retail. You could organize parking lots so that some of the spaces are devoted to businesses. She encourages us to work together with FinCom instead of being at odds with each other. She's the only person at Board of Health meetings, which would prefer to lockdown further.

Jason Cole, of FinCom, says that, in capitalism, the business owner takes the risk. It's not the taxpayers' responsibility to bail out private enterprise. These are trying times for businesses; there will be failure. It's not the role of state or local government to bail out private enterprise. Returning fees seems fine.

Patient Derrick Chin chimes in now. He watched last night's FinCom in its entirety, and he is concerned. He doesn't think it's responsible to shrug at struggling businesses and say, "That's how life is."

- Report from BoS (Jon Benson)

Jon Benson describes conversations, ideas, and proposals shared between Town Manager John Mangiaratti, John Raguin, and the Board. Can funds from the CARES act provide money for Raguin's landlord rent-sharing proposal? He suspects not. One particularly salient point Jon makes is that, when he hears people ask him what he's going to do about empty storefronts on Route 2A in the face of Amazon, and he tells them, "You have to change how your shop."

- Report from FinCom (Mike Majors)

The committee is not against small business; they just want a specific proposal, with costs. David warns us not to fall into the trap of expecting money to come from on high; in this case, the government is getting in the way of small businesses re-opening in any way and trying to survive. "Do no harm!"

Jason Cole chimes in that there are small businesses have adapted and changed their business model. The government's responsibility is to make the playing field equal. David Didriksen says we'll pay for our non-intervention in other ways, down the road.

- Report from ALG meeting (Ann Chang)

The Town has put on a hiring and buying freeze, and expects to return \$1 million for next year. The schools will have some turn back; they're using their money to do capital projects this year instead of next year to save money.

There is crosstalk about different subjects between Ann Chang and Jon Benson, and your humble clerk is a little lost in the weeds here. Jon Benson describes triggers that will be tripped if revenue goes down X% or Y% for next fiscal year.

4. Next steps for EDC

Dan Malloy says the \$2.1 million from the CARES Act is the most intriguing to him. Can some of that can be given to real expenditures that are not operating costs but that would make small businesses more viable more quickly. In other words, money for the new, required signage and barriers and all of that. People have to spend more money to make their businesses safer; Jon Benson says he will check with John Mangiaratti with that question.

Derrick Chin provided an update on Legend Cafe: more upbeat news! They'd received a PPP loan, and he thinks that'll move him out of the woods. It'll move him closer to staying open through mid-July.

Josh Fischel chimes in with a question about child care; is there anything we can do at the local level to help with that, since that may also be one of the factors besides the pandemic bonus keeping employees from returning to work, to help small businesses like Peter's. Selby says there is not really.

David will write a letter to the Governor and the Board of Selectmen and our state senator and representative, which Mike Majors would like presented at the next FinCom meeting, which he'd send on the EDC's behalf.

III. More Regular Business

5. Updates from members

6. Update from Director of Economic Development

Selby has created a proposal for expanded outdoor seating, as well as a plan for how to spend CARES Act funds, though he's waiting to see how much flexibility he has with regard to how to spend that.

7. Next meeting – Thursday, June 4th, at 10 am.

IV. Consent Items

8. None

Meeting is adjourned at 11:52 am.

Additional materials

- Draft meeting minutes from 14 May 2020

The listed agenda items are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair. Not all items may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law. Reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities are available upon request. Include a description of the accommodation you will need, including as much detail as you can and include a way we can contact you if we need more information. Please allow advance notice. Send an e-mail to manager@actonma.gov or call Town Manager's Office (978)929-6611

For more information about the Economic Development Committee, please send email to EDC@actonma.gov