



## Economic Development Committee Minutes

7 October 2021

7:00 pm

Room 9, Acton Town Hall  
472 Main Street, Acton, MA

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 10/7/21, held in person at town hall.

Called to Order: 7:05 pm

Members Present: Mike Majors, David Didriksen, Ann Chang, Larry Kenah, David Cote (by Zoom), Derrick Chin (by Zoom), Dan Malloy, Catherine Ussoff, Fran Arsenault

Members Absent: Peter Daniel, Shirley Ming

### Preliminaries

Call the Roll

### I. Regular Business

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meetings
  - 16 September 2021: Small wording change was made to one of Dave Didriksen's comments. Minutes, with changes, were approved by all members present except for Dave Cote, who was not present at the last meeting, and Derrick Chin who had not been recognized yet through Zoom.
- Public participation - none

### II. New/Special Business

- Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP) - Final Update (Larry)

Larry sent a list to the members prior to the meeting of the projects that were recommended in the final LRRP report. The state, at the last minute, said that the towns should have about 10 projects in their report. The number of projects were expanded from 4 to 10 as a result of the public forum on September 28. Larry will send the updated report to the members of the committee. With regard to complaints about lack of publicity, Fran stated that she did bring fliers to the businesses in the area about the opportunities for businesses to provide input.

Dates related to the LRRP process:

- 28 September - Public Forum

- List of recommended projects grew from 4 to 10
- Public comments mostly from residents, ignoring residents along Great Road, etc
- Complaints about lack of publicity
- Response that LRRP was focused on businesses
- 5 October - LRRP Steering Group
  - Review comments on draft report and from public forum
  - One more project (Pop-up Shops Program) added to the list
- 8 October
  - Deliver final report to Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

#### List of Projects from Public Forum (10)

1. Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Wayfinding Signage
2. Great Road Wayfinding Signage
3. Conduct Feasibility Study to Expand Sewer System
4. Fill Existing Sidewalk Gaps
5. Pole Banners “Great Businesses along Great Road”
6. Public Art Campaign
7. Shared Marketing Campaign
8. Create a Local Search Enabled Multi-Vendor Marketplace
9. Coordinated Communications Program
10. Develop an Education and Certification Program

List of Projects from Public Forum with additional details and item added during the steering group meeting on October 5 (11). Changes from the list above are highlighted.

1. Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Wayfinding Signage **Study and Installation**
2. Great Road Wayfinding Signage **Study and Installation**
3. Conduct a Feasibility Study to Expand the **Municipal** Sewer Expansion
4. Shared Marketing Campaign
5. Fill Existing Sidewalk **and Crosswalk** Gaps
6. Pole Banners “Great Businesses along Great Road”
7. Create a Local Search Enabled Multi-Vendor Marketplace
8. Coordinated Communications Program
9. Develop an Education and Certification Campaign
- 10. Pop-up Shops Program**
11. Public Art Campaign

Discussion of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. During the meeting, the committee members were provided with a list of items that could be supported by ARPA funds, with votes of the select board indicated. Some of the items could be funded by the town in the future through borrowing. The Select Board is trying to focus on things that could be executed in the shorter term. Select Board is also prioritizing COVID related relief (rental assistance and business assistance). Fran indicated that although there are votes attached to the items, this is just the beginning of the discussion. Select Board will be discussing the list of items at their next meeting also.

- ED Director – Update (Larry)

There will be a four-hour session on October 19 related to the interview process for the director's position. Larry will be there. If any EDC members have questions that they want to be asked of the candidates, we should let Larry know.

- Easier to do business with Town of Acton (All)

David Cote asked for this to be on the agenda – how can we make it easier for businesses, moving to, and/or trying to operate in Acton.

Dave Didriksen – he agrees, it is awful dealing with the town as a business. Example: Dave's plumber said it is hard to do things in Acton, there are many different people you have to have sign off on a project. Most towns have one person who coordinates all the sign-offs that are needed. Dave heard a rumor that the Asian Market locating in the old Willow Books space has had problems with the town, getting things they need. A central go-to place for licenses and permits would make things better for the businesses.

Dan – how can we gain more specificity? It has to get more tangible for this to be real. Can we map out what the process is today, and can we reengineer the process?

Mike – simple thing like a calendar system that would help coordinate the steps that need to happen for businesses to get up and running.

Dave C. – where are the pain points? Brainstorm all the pain points, where could we extract all the inconsistencies and gains.

Catherine – what are the root causes of the problems?

There are likely process problems and cultural problems. No one person is responsible for the whole process. Part of the problem may be that the town does not consider business to be a customer of the town. Businesses don't have an advocate for them with the town.

Ann – One of the problems is that we don't have full-time inspectors in the town, only part-time. Our zoning bylaws are also a problem, they are archaic. What can this committee do? We can lobby for these things to be attended to.

Dan – can we apply the 80/20 rule? Where are the areas that we can focus on that will have the greatest impact?

Larry – we need to have someone actually lead the effort within town hall. Then that person can ask for the EDC's help.

Dave C. – What are the most common activities that take time of town employees and where could we apply more resources to improve?

Dave D. – we are approaching this from a business perspective, but the town is a bureaucracy.

Dave C. – what is the purpose of the EDC? We should be helping to get more businesses to come to town and stay.

Dave D. – a new Economic Development director could make a difference.

Ann – start with the Asian Market. Ann said the owner said there were shipment problems and there were hiring problems causing the delay in their opening.

Dave C. – what if someone shadowed the business, collected data about what the business went through.

Dave D. – not all businesses are the same and they all have different needs.

Dan – wants to understand what goes on. How many interactions with different parts of the town, where were the lags, etc? If we knew what the process was, it could be helpful. Could we use a case study logic, follow a business that has started up?

Larry – It would be best to follow the process from the business (customer) side of things. If the town is spending time on activities but that doesn't align with what the businesses need, then it is not helpful.

Dave D. – each department knows what they are doing, but is there one person who knows what all of them are doing?

Fran – will see what she can do to get some of the data we are seeking from the town about their activities. What management information exists about the inputs and outputs of activities in the town? She can reach out to Bees Knees and Eve and Murray's (cheese shop) to see how their processes have gone.

Ann – she will touch base with the owner of the Asian Market to see what has been holding him up and whether issues with the town have resulted in delays.

Dan – can we re-evaluate our sub-group projects? For example, 50 Nagog Park project is no longer valid.

Ann would like to know about solar panels at 50 Nagog Park, are they planning to put them in. Insulet wanted to put solar panels on their parking lot and were not allowed to do so, per the town. Dan can follow up to find out about 50 Nagog Park.

Dave D. – problem in town, we have not been able to make the point to residents strongly enough that it is in their interest to have more businesses in town (tax base). There is a constant re-education process because there is a lot of churn among the town’s population.

Derrick – are we just interested in getting small businesses in town? If so, that will not help much with the tax base. If want to make a dent, should really focus on sewers on Great Road, so we can attract larger businesses.

Dan – if we can’t provide infrastructure for companies, then they won’t come. We should talk to Insulet and see why they are willing to expand in Acton.

- Reports from working groups

Dan – 50 Nagog Park. Confirmed that Insulet is going into that property.

- Membership update (Larry, Fran)

Larry learned from Fran that Chris Hardy has gone through the Volunteer Coordinating Committee (VCC) vetting process and he will be joining the committee soon.

Peter Daniel has not been sworn in yet as a continuing member.

TO DO ITEMS as a result of the foregoing discussion:

- Ann – will speak to the owners of the Asian market to identify issues that have caused delays in their opening to see if it surfaces problems with the town’s processes.
- Fran will try to get information from the town departments about business-related activities to identify inputs, outputs, resources used, and timing of activities.
- Fran will speak to the owners of the Bees Knees and Eve and Murray’s to see what issue they had in getting their businesses up and running.
- Dan will find out what he can about solar panels at 50 Nagog Park.

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

- Updates from members - NONE
- Next meetings
  - 21 October
  - 4 November

### IV. **Consent Items**

- None

Adjourn meeting – 8:45 p.m.

For more information about the Economic Development Committee, please send email to [EDC@actonma.gov](mailto:EDC@actonma.gov)