



Economic Development Committee Minutes
3 March 2022

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 3/3/22, held remotely, supported by Zoom.

Called to Order: 7:10 pm

Members Present: Mike Majors, Ann Chang, David Didriksen, Larry Kenah, Dan Malloy, Shirley Ming, Catherine Usoff, Chris Hardy, David Cote

Select Board Member Present: None present

Town Employee present: None present

Members Absent: Peter Daniel, Derrick Chin

Preliminaries

Call the Roll – attendance is noted above

Preamble

New Preamble (Town of Acton Board and Committees, script for remotely conducted meetings), read by Committee Chair Larry Kenah. For text of the preamble, please see January 6, 2022 meeting which was the first time it was read at the beginning of the meeting.

Larry announced that Derrick Chin is resigning from the EDC, effective immediately. Larry will ask Kristen G. to find another planning board member to sit on the EDC in Derrick's place.

I. **Regular Business**

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meetings
 - 17 February 2022, accepted by all present with slight changes.
- Public participation – one call-in user (Terra Friedrichs) would like to talk about the quick survey of businesses when that item comes up in the meeting.

II. **New/Special Business**

Before discussing the two articles that were approved by the Select Board (unanimously) to be included in the annual town meeting warrant, the committee members expressed concern that the EDC was not informed about the articles prior to their inclusion in the warrant.

Ann suggested that EDC members regularly look at the upcoming Select Board meeting agenda to see if there are issues that are relevant to the EDC.

Mike (who is also on the Finance Committee) said that the Select Board did not communicate with the Finance Committee or the EDC, or have any public forum about these items. Peter Barry is going to talk to the Finance Committee and the EDC, but it is after the Select Board has already approved putting the article on the town warrant.

Ann – a committee of 3-5 people brought the items to the Select Board and asked them to make them Select Board articles rather than being put on the warrant by citizens' petition which requires collecting signatures from voters. Although the Select Board has not voted on the articles, the fact that they accepted them for the warrant as their own gives them more weight.

Larry – should we write a letter about the process? We will not talk about the content of the articles in the letter but focus on the process.

Dave D. – we should send a strongly worded protest. We are not getting the information we should be getting that is relevant to the committee. We should be part of the process.

Terra expressed surprise that town staff did not tell the EDC about the articles. The Sustainability Director has been working on the proposed article for 6 months so it is surprising that the EDC staff liaison did not tell the committee. The vote was for the items to be Select Board articles, but not whether the Select Board will endorse the articles.

Catherine asked a question about the process. Can the Select Board get input and potentially change the language of the article before it goes on the warrant? One or more committee members indicated that, yes, the language could be amended before the town meeting.

Mike – thinks we need to discuss the process. There is also a list of questions that need to be asked about the implications of the proposed articles.

1. Town meeting article about Grocery Bags

Plastic bags are already banned in town, this article is about adding a charge for paper bags.

Dave D. – things are put out there because they sound good, but the people proposing them don't really think through the implications. The logistics of implementing the bag charge is likely to be a burden for the small businesses, in particular.

Terra urged EDC members to get the presentation that was given at the Select Board meeting.

Catherine indicated that the EDC members did have access to the presentation and some of the members reviewed it along with accompanying pages. She raised a potential issue related to obtaining feedback from businesses. The people who are proposing the article said that they talked to businesses and that they were supportive. We need to have the Director of Economic Development or EDC members talk to businesses to see how the articles would affect them.

Dave D. – it is likely that businesses will not speak out in front of their customers because they do not want to look bad. This is a problem when articles like these are debated at town meeting, business owners do not generally like to speak out and potentially offend their customers. The health agent sent out a questionnaire and did not receive any responses so they concluded that that businesses were supportive of the proposed articles.

Mike – another issue is with the timeline for implementing the new requirements. The timeline may be onerous for many smaller businesses.

Terra said that she thought businesses would be supportive because this is something that customers (like her) want. Some businesses say that they are already taking steps to be more environmentally responsible, and they want the rest of the businesses to do it. Before the EDC makes its recommendation, she urges the committee to be fact-based, and to hear from businesses. Dave D. suggested that Terra invite supporting businesses to the EDC meeting.

Dan said that another process related issue is that “green” proposals should include explicit consideration of the negative impacts on businesses.

Mike – we are all stewards of the earth. If the goals make sense, the businesses will adhere to them. If local businesses see that the containers are harmful to the environment, they will make the desired changes because it is the right thing to do.

Dave D. said that there are positive things the town can do itself, and not just put the burden on the small businesses, like handing out reusable bags. Terra commented that reusable bags are available from the town upon request.

Dan said that large businesses (e.g., McDonalds) are making changes because they can afford it. The town shouldn't be policing packaging.

Ann – the goal is to get the state to act. With the weight of several towns enacting these provisions, they hope the state will act.

Larry – everything in town works very slowly. These two articles, however, were processed very quickly through the Select Board.

Ann – the select board can change the wording of the bylaw. Two problems – process problem and the other is the wording problem (content of the article).

Larry – we had talked about meeting only once a month, but he assumes we do want to meet on March 17 so we can have Peter Berry present to the committee.

Dave D. – does not want to drop the other part of it. He thinks it is a fundamentally bad idea to impose new business requirements from the top down. He has nothing against people who don't take bags but it is not the same as charging for bags and having bag police to enforce the requirements. There are also many questions about this, such as will the retailer have to pay sales tax on the bag charge?

Larry – are they charging for little bags as well.

Terra – can't commit to getting the businesses to an EDC meeting, but she will do her best. She asked if it would be sufficient to have supportive businesses sign a petition in favor of the new requirements. Ann asked if we could just get the names of the businesses that are supportive, Terra replied that she could do that.

Catherine commented that there is an underlying issue that has come up with these two articles and others in the recent past. She wishes the town leadership would start by addressing issues with motivation, incentives, communication, and education rather than legislation and punitive enforcement.

2. Town meeting article about Plastics

Mike talked to one small business and he said that he would have to get different sizes of the approved containers and there are shortages of these materials now that will make it difficult to obtain them. Approved items are also more expensive than the current items.

Chris suggested that members go to the last page of the document supporting the article as it is very eye-opening. Buying the required materials would result in a minimum average cost increase of 94% over the current items being used.

3. Quick survey of businesses

Larry asked if the EDC members should talk to businesses to see what they think about these proposed articles. Larry will send out a few questions that we may ask. He will carve the town into a reasonable number of business areas and ask members to take different areas.

Dan asked if some businesses be more affected than others? He suggested that we should talk to businesses in a way that is representative of the various types of businesses and how they will be affected (groceries, restaurants, other retailers?)

Catherine suggested that we need to plan for any solicitation of input from businesses, 1) make sure we know the facts, what is in the articles 2) use the same set of questions/script 3) ask the businesses if there are other questions/issues we haven't thought of.

Ann – Larry needs to get the letter in right away about the process. We need to talk to Peter Barry, and learn more if we want to make recommendations for changes to the articles.

Dan said there are three intervention points: 1) learning about the articles and collecting input from businesses, 2) making suggestions to modify the language of the articles if we determine it is warranted, and 3) if the suggestions are not taken, then we can speak against the article(s) at town meeting.

Larry said that he doesn't think we need to wait to talk to Peter Barry before we go out to talk to businesses.

Ann thinks we need to talk to Peter to better understand the content of the articles.

Ann asserted that climate change is a real problem and we need to act, but she suggested that the current version of these articles do not represent the best approach.

4. Meeting frequency

We have already decided that we will meet on March 17 and we will meet at the beginning of April. We will continue to meet twice a month to prepare for town meeting.

III. More Regular Business

5. Updates from members

Mike had a question for Ann – is the library open for public meetings? No, but it may have changed since the town mask mandate has been lifted.

Dave Cote suggested that we ask Peter Barry to give us an executive summary/talking points before we go out to speak to businesses.

Shirley said that it would be good to get businesses who are in support of the proposal so that we can get both sides of the issue.

ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN PREVIOUS MEETING:

Dan will draft a memo to the town manager and Select Board to communicate the thoughts of the EDC relative to the town's business process analysis and potential IT solutions, informed by Dan's research into the OpenGov enterprise platform. Catherine and Dave D. will work with Dan on this. **Dan reported that he, Catherine and Dave D. produced a document that Larry will forward to all EDC members, the Select Board, and John Mangiaratti.**

Julie will create a list of grants to regularly share with the EDC to include their status (applied, granted) and related information. **Carried forward since Julie was not at this meeting.**

Fran will set up a tour of the new fire station for the EDC members. **Carried forward since Fran was not at this meeting.**

Julie will invite EDC members to the business forum regarding local transportation needs. **Julie did this.**

Julie will send information to EDC members about the manufacturing meeting to take place at Minuteman high school on March 30. **Julie did this.**

Item carried over from an earlier meeting's list: Larry will send the latest business inventory (data collected by EDC members last year and collated in an Excel spreadsheet) to Julie and will let EDC members know what he has sent to her. **No indication that this has been done, will be carried forward.**

6. Update from Economic Development Director – none since Julie was not able to attend the meeting.

7. Next meetings

- Thursday, 17 March 2022
- Thursday, 7 April 2022

IV. **Consent Items**

None

Additional materials provide for this meeting included:

“Ban the Bag and More Proposed Bylaw and Home Rule Petition”

- Go to <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-14660>

Adjourn – 8:38 p.m.

ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE MEETING:

Larry will forward to the EDC members, the Select Board, and to John Mangiaratti, the memo that Dan, Catherine, and Dave D. prepared about process review and an enterprise system.

Larry will confirm Peter Barry's attendance at the March 17 meeting to present the two warrant articles discussed at this meeting.

Larry will send materials to EDC members to support outreach to local businesses about the proposed articles (suggested questions to ask business owners and suggested areas of town for members to cover).

Larry will obtain list of supportive businesses from Terra Friedrichs.

Larry will draft a letter to the Select Board to express the EDC's dissatisfaction with the process that led to the two warrant articles being approved for inclusion in the town meeting warrant.

Item carried over from previous meeting's list: Julie will create a list of grants to regularly share with the EDC to include their status (applied, granted) and related information.

Item carried over from previous meeting's list: Fran will set up a tour of the new fire station for the EDC members.

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