



Economic Development Committee Minutes
17 March 2022

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 3/17/22, held remotely, supported by Zoom.

Called to Order: 7:10 pm

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

Select Board Member Present: Fran Arsenault

Town Employee present: Julie Pierce Onos

Members Absent: Peter Daniel, Larry Kenah, Dan Malloy

Preliminaries

Call the Roll – attendance is noted above

Preamble

New Preamble (Town of Acton Board and Committees, script for remotely conducted meetings), read by Julie Pierce Onos due to absence of 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.

I. **Regular Business**

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meetings
 - 3 March 2022 Approved as amended by members in attendance at the beginning of the meeting.
- Public participation – three attendees appeared in the meeting after the beginning of the meeting. Peter Berry – Doesn't have anything to add, but knows that the proposed bylaws are on the agenda for tonight. They will be getting a new version of the bylaws to us with cleaned up items. He is on the agenda for the next meeting. Call-in user – Terra, no comments at beginning. Alissa – not planning to speak.

II. **New/Special Business**

1. Developing a plan for EDC Work to support Director
 - Conversation among Catherine, David C, and Julie

Plan for EDC work – Julie likes the word, “proactive” and she likes that we are taking the time to be thoughtful about how the committee can support her. Catherine provided some background and context. Working groups were established last year to support the priorities of the former director. The meeting of Julie with Dave Cote and Catherine is the start of this process with the new director. Dave C. characterized the effort as determining what are the top 2-3 things that Julie wants to accomplish and what are the tasks that need to be done to support her priorities.

Ann mentioned that one of the things looming close is making sure the businesses in Kelley’s Corner get their day in the sun and the town does the work they need to plan the bypasses so that people traveling through town are able to avoid Kelley’s Corner while those who want to do business in the area are able to do so without everyone getting stuck in unnecessary traffic. Julie said that businesses in the area have been asking about this. Dave D. said that one of the things that always happens with construction is their goal is to get the job done. They don’t really pay attention to how they are impacting the businesses. It takes someone (probably Julie in this case) to remind the construction companies that the businesses need to have access to stay in business.

Mike asked if, in some cases, depending on the store/location, is it possible to relocate some businesses during the construction? Dave D. responded that you can put in alternative accesses, or have people park in a different area and walk to the business.

Ann said that Bueno y Sano is opening a store in Maynard. Hopefully, they are not relocating from Acton, but adding another location.

2. Informal survey of businesses about plastics and grocery bags (Larry et al)
 - Businesses to talk with RE town meeting articles
 - Work assignments

Catherine stated that we need to decide what it is we want to do about this as an EDC.

Julie said that this is what Larry wanted to achieve. If folks want to visit businesses and get input, we should be on the same page. If there is going to be an action, what is it, who is going to do it.

Dave C. - didn’t we say last time, we would want a set of questions we could ask uniformly to businesses.

Catherine – Yes, and Larry provided some possible questions that we could ask.

Mike – Styrofoam seems to be a focus of the proposed restrictions. If 93% of businesses contacted have already eliminated Styrofoam so what is the point of the legislation?

Fran said that everything that is packaged outside of Acton would be excluded.

Dave D. – then what is the point? Why are businesses in Acton being singled out and why are they being punished? Even though he agrees with the ideas behind the legislation, he doesn't want to punish the businesses. The committee should have provided the information about the impacts to business rather than require that the EDC provide the information. He thinks the proposal needs more time for thinking everything through and they should not be rammed through for this year's town meeting.

Shirley doesn't think there is much we can do except advocacy. We can only say that we agree or don't agree.

Chris asked if there will be anything sent to businesses to let them know that these changes are being proposed?

Peter Berry responded that in terms of outreach, they are not a town committee, they are private individuals. They visited 56 businesses in town and informed them of the articles. Sheryl Ball (Health Director) sent the slides to every business in town and she did not receive any comments from businesses.

Julie asked if EDC members have already committed to go out and talk to businesses about the proposed bylaws.

Ann said that there are many questions about the bylaws. She suggests that we gather all the questions we have and present them to Peter on April 7. She wants to know: Who did they talk to, and what did they say to the businesses. Just because the Health Director sent out the slides and no one responded doesn't mean anything. We do have a chance to say something. The Select Board still has to vote whether they will support the articles.

Dave D. - can we ask Peter to present the information at our next meeting?

Dave C. had a question for Julie. When town meeting happens, can she assure us, that all small businesses in Acton will be invited to the meeting, and that they will have the opportunity to voice their opinion?

Dave D. said it will not matter, because the businesses will be intimidated and will not show up at town meeting.

Julie suggested that this is why Catherine and Larry and others would like to gather feedback from businesses now because at town meeting, there will not be time or opportunity for everyone to speak.

Dave C. – aside from that, what effort can we make to make sure they are informed (Julie's newsletter, for example)?

Fran asked about inviting business owners to the next EDC meeting when Peter Berry speaks about the articles. Members think that would be fine but Dave D. doesn't think we will get businesses to show up. Fran is happy to hand deliver whatever we would like. Dave D. said that businesses are reticent to alienate any groups in town so they will not speak out.

Mike – businesses are not going to protest this because it is bad form on their part. He talked to some businesses about the proposal individually.

Catherine – what we can do to be more proactive and reduce the likelihood that the articles will pass as written at town meeting? Can we work with the sponsoring group to come up with revised articles that are more palatable for business, or propose alternative proposals?

Shirley asked, “what can we do?” If the articles are going to be on the warrant as written, then we can divide and conquer and get input from businesses to counter the pro arguments at town meeting. We can come back as a committee and formulate our response.

Julie sees 2 paths: One that Ann suggested: waiting until presentation on April 7 and then decide what we are going to do. OR, go forward and talk to businesses now with a summary and standard questions to ask them.

Ann said that the Select Board has agreed to put the articles on the warrant but EDC and businesses can go to the Select Board meeting and try to influence their vote. On the warrant itself, people can write a counter proposal to the articles.

Dave D. suggested that we should wait until next meeting because Peter has a proposal to make, but he would like Peter's group to forward us information ahead of the meeting.

Peter Berry said that he heard what we said: that we would like to see information before his presentation at the next meeting. He said that if we want information about the town's ability to absorb the new packaging solutions, we should talk to Corey York (Director of Public Works).

At the end of the discussion, it seemed that there was general agreement that the EDC would wait to seek further input until after the April 7 meeting.

III. **More Regular Business**

3. Updates from members

ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN PREVIOUS 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 sent the memo to John and EDC on March 6.**

Larry will confirm Peter Barry's attendance at the March 17 meeting to present the two warrant articles discussed at this meeting. **Peter will attend the April 7 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 sent some proposed questions to the committee prior to tonight's meeting.**

Larry will obtain list of supportive businesses from Terra Friedrichs. **Don't know if this was done since Larry was not in attendance at this meeting. Terra sent an email to EDC this evening to say that she has "asked the proponents for the list and been told that they will get it to you." After this meeting (March 17), Larry indicated that he had not received any list from Terra.**

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. **Don't know if this was done since Larry was not in attendance at this meeting. Will carry item forward. After the meeting of March 17, Larry indicated that he has not done this.**

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. **Julie shared grant information with the EDC in this meeting. She provided a link to a list of successful grants. She does not think she can share detailed information about grant applications in progress.**

Item carried over from previous meeting's list: Fran will set up a tour of the new fire station for the EDC members. **Fran suggested that the EDC attend the ribbon cutting ceremony in May as an alternative to a dedicated tour for the group.**

Item carried over from previous 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. **Don't know if this was done since Larry was not in attendance at this meeting. Will carry item forward.**

Fran volunteered to print out flyers and get them to businesses, alerting them to the warrant articles and letting them know about the next EDC meeting.

Dave C. – if no one speaks up, then we have no support for our position against the articles.

Dave D. – his concern is that this committee is supposed to be doing economic development, and anytime you regulate businesses, it is counter to fostering development. Logic makes the case to defeat the proposed requirements, if you are punishing the merchants, they have options, they can relocate to other towns. If you have a choice and one place makes your business hard, you will choose not to locate there.

Mike suggested that we could segment businesses and try to get input that is representative of the various types of businesses.

Dave D. asked if we could do an anonymous survey?

4. Update from Economic Development Director

Julie organized two sessions of a transportation forum, meant to solicit input from town businesses. Attendees included business owners and community members. There were not many business participants at either morning or evening session. Some businesses that couldn't attend, sent some feedback with someone who did attend. Julie heard other feedback from businesses that they were glad she had the forum even though they couldn't attend, and shared some feedback with her about how their employees use the current transportation options.

Julie has started a newsletter for businesses, and has about 30 subscribers. The first issue went out in February. The next issue will be going out on Friday, March 18. Anyone interested in receiving it should sign up here:

<https://link.edgepilot.com/s/41a3a43d/spKYYPYw6-kSVQbLZZVaVmg?u=https://actonma.us14.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=0e992eae15e02d21783b3b006%26id=cc5fa05a7a>

Online permitting process and system – there was a kickoff meeting and Julie made sure that EDC is included as a stakeholder in the process. She will keep the committee updated on the process.

Grants –Near the end of FY19, the Town created a webpage so that everyone could see the Grants applied for and amounts awarded. The ones that are listed as \$1 are technical assistance grants. **It is kept up to date. Here is the link:**

<https://link.edgepilot.com/s/8d10908c/YEW2u61aVEyIBwHTc9hd7Q?u=https://datastudio.google.com/reporting/3f4d4ba2-6a4c-469a-ad8c-9870761b8ada/page/3681B>

Ann – those are the grants that have been accepted. We would like to also know the grants that are in progress. Julie thinks that might be harder to get information about since some of the grants include other towns. She doesn't think there is information about grants that are not awarded. Ann thinks there is information about grants in progress that can be shared – what the town is looking for money for.

Previously Julie had committed to reporting each month on the number of DBAs. She shared links that allow EDC members to go on the Town website and view:

- The most recent month of approved DBA licenses: <https://link.edgepilot.com/s/49b979b9/hWn0-GJnV0OChF6piIptHw?u=https://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5568/New-Businesses-Previous-Month?bidId=>
- All currently active DBA licenses: <https://link.edgepilot.com/s/439dc048/67nqBWdLUkOFaNKgzA4jNA?u=htt>

[ps://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5564/Active-Businesses-to-Date?bidId=](https://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5564/Active-Businesses-to-Date?bidId=)

- Both of these can be found from the Business Certificate page maintained by the Town Clerk: <https://link.edgepilot.com/s/e5cceb9/yWHXeAEMbkm0gicmssnTDA?u=https://www.acton-ma.gov/393/Business-Certificate>

Conversations with different business owners, with regard to meeting formats, if we do move to in-person meetings, should still offer options for people to participate in hybrid manner or to call in.

Julie was able to go on a tour of Haartz. She offered to organize a tour for any EDC members who are interested.

Upcoming manufacturing forum on March 30, collaboration between town and MassHire, to be held at Minuteman Tech high school. The main topic is the labor shortage and how to attract more workers. Julie shared the following information with Catherine prior to the meeting to include in the minutes:

MIDDLESEX REGIONAL MANUFACTURING TASKFORCE INVITATION

The Middlesex Regional Manufacturing Taskforce will hold its second quarterly meeting on March, 30, 2022 at 9am. It will be co-hosted by MassHire and the Town of Acton. This will be a themed roundtable discussion focused around issues facing all aspects of the manufacturing industry in our region. In attendance will be manufacturing employers, MassHire, educational institutions, municipal representatives, community agencies and elected officials including State Representative Danillo Sena. *Local Manufacturers and Suppliers*- are you interested in discussing issues such as the labor shortage, hiring practices, pending legislation and more? Join the discussion and shape the economy for the future! RSVP

here: <https://link.edgepilot.com/s/ba280a87/zfhxWzFp9kqcVhnm2ogZ9Q?u=https://www.masshiremsw.com/2022-spring-manufacturing-summit/>

Westford Business Association town managers' meeting – have town managers come and share what is going on with their towns. Next Wednesday at 9:00 a.m. The benefit to EDC is that we can learn what other towns are doing with regard to ED. Link: <https://link.edgepilot.com/s/9949415c/8G8xDOPa906sF-ltL83qQA?u=http://westfordbusinessassociation.com/event/8th-annual-town-managers-meeting/>

Julie attended the ribbon cutting at Frolic & Detour, a new restaurant that took over the space where the Red Raven Restaurant was located. Julie created a certificate that a member of the Select Board can present it to the business at the ribbon cutting.

Kelley's Corner – construction set to begin in the fall. She has been collaborating with the Planning Department, particularly related to concerns about the construction and its potential impact on businesses in the area. She would like to be able to give a packet to the contractors involved that includes the businesses and their contact information. Businesses are interested in

a joint marketing effort when the construction is going on to encourage people to still frequent their businesses.

With regard to the current permitting process, there is a form that lists all the possible things that might need to be addressed depending on the nature of the project. Most of what is inspected is driven by the state. Julie talked to the building department about how nuanced each situation is. It might be good for someone from the building department to come to the EDC meeting to let us know more about the process. Where are the roadblocks? Dave D. commented that the answer the building department gave her is really only part of the answer. He had a situation in the past where there seemed to be an abuse of the system by an inspector that created undue problems for him as a business owner. Catherine thinks it would be helpful for the building department to come to a meeting and inform the EDC of the process. Ann said that in the past, the building department held sessions to better inform the residents about the permitting process. Fran suggested that there could be a video done by Acton TV about the permitting process for reference.

Julie asked if, with Derrick's departure, Dave Cote would be elevated to full member? Should check with Larry on this. Ann reminded the group that Derrick was the member of the committee from the Planning Board so we should get another rep. from that board.

Dave C. – commended Julie on all the things she is working on, as reported on in her update. He wondered if we can have this list ahead of time? Julie suggested that this is something we can include in our discussion of how the EDC works with her. She had e-mailed the EDC members about the ribbon cutting and the transportation forums prior to their taking place.

Dave D. suggested that it would be helpful to send reminders closer to the events.

5. Next meetings

- Thursday, 7 April 2022
 - Peter Berry et al
- Thursday, 21 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 – 8:50 p.m.

ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE MEETING:

Item carried over from previous meeting's list: 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. **After the meeting of March 17, Larry indicated that he has not done this.**

Item carried over from a prior 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.

Julie will ask someone from the building department to come to a future EDC meeting to educate committee members about the permitting and inspection processes.

Julie will reach out to EDC members to see who is interested in touring the Haartz facility and if there is interest, will set up a visit for interested members.

Fran will create and distribute a flyer to town businesses that informs them about the proposed warrant articles and invites business owners/managers to the next EDC meeting.

Julie will follow up with Larry about adding a Planning Board representative to the EDC to take Derrick Chin's place. **After the meeting, Larry indicated that he has been in touch with the Planning Department and is awaiting word from them about a replacement for Derrick.**

Larry or Catherine will communicate with Peter Berry to forward additional questions and request materials ahead of Peter's visit to the EDC meeting on April 7.

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