

EDC Minutes – 15 January 2015

These are the meeting minutes from the Economic Development Committee (EDC) of the Town of Acton, Massachusetts. This meeting took place on 15 January 2015 in Room 126 of the Acton Town Hall.

The meeting was called to order at 7:37 pm by Nancy Dinkel.

Present: Allan Gulliver, Ann Chang, Derrick Chin, Doug Tindal, Larry Kenah, Nancy Dinkel

Not Present: Bharat Shah, David Foley, Dick Calandrella, Franny Osman

Josh Fischel joined our meeting for the second time. He is looking to join one of the town committees and is visiting several as an observer.

Meeting Minutes (2)

Minutes from the EDC meeting held on 4 December were approved.

Board of Selectmen Report (3)

We had a brief discussion about budgets and the upcoming town meeting.

Budget and Finances

- As of the middle of January, there are problems with the school budget.
- More than two thirds of the budget consists of people costs.

Meals Tax

There is a proposal that Acton implement a meals tax to pay for two additional positions on town staff: economic development and land use. Several towns adjacent to Acton have implemented meals taxes. We discussed this proposal from several perspectives.

- Is the meals tax a good idea solely on its merits?
- Should a tax be implemented with the funds targeted to a specific objective, in this case funding two additional town staff positions?
- Should the EDC adopt and formally present a position on the proposed meals tax?

The general sentiment of EDC members is that they are not in favor of the tax, but some members have argued in the past that the revenue generated by the tax can be put to good use. There was also a question about the amount of additional revenue that would be generated from the tax.

Sewers in West Acton

There is a line item in the budget for \$22k to pay for the next set of studies for bringing sewers to West Acton. Although the committee expressed disappointment over the small amount, everyone is in favor of this budget item and anything else that will move this project forward.

Acton 2020 Report (4)

Larry Kenah gave a brief report on the December meeting of the Kelley's Corner Steering Committee. Here is a summary of that report.

General Presentation

After the most recent public meeting in September, an online survey was conducted asking the same questions that were discussed at the meeting. The survey results reached similar conclusions but yielded several pages of comments. Here is a link to the memo.

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-6531>

The document to look at is called

2014-11-19 MEMO Online Alternatives and Choices Results.pdf

Ken Buckland and Steve Cecil presented a set of slides that reflect progress to date. It contains draft design and zoning concepts. Here is a link to the location where these slides are posted.

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-49126/December%20Steering%20Committee%20Meeting%2012%2010%2014.pdf>

Here are some points from that presentation.

- The results from the right-of-way survey will be available in mid-January
- There will be a public meeting at Exchange Hall next Wednesday, 21 January 2015.
- We will focus on April for completion of this project.

More on Zoning

We spent some time talking about the use of zoning compared with other tools as part of the next steps for Kelley's Corner. We also examined the current Kelley's Corner rules. The slides contain most of the information. Here are some points that I wanted to call out.

- Existing KC zoning is an impediment to economic growth.
- Steve and Ken pointed out that existing FAR restrictions penalize businesses.
- Design standards should not be formalized into zoning.
- There are other tools at the town's disposal besides zoning.

In the slide presentation, the existing zoning regulations start with Slide 19. The recommended changes appear on Slide 26.

Mission and Goals and Objectives (5)

The remainder of the meeting was spent discussing reports from two of the three subcommittees.

Third Goal – Promote Acton ...

Introduction

The third goal currently reads

Promote Acton to the outside world by providing relevant information to prospective businesses

The subcommittee members are

- Allan Gulliver (chair)
- Bharat Shah
- Franny Osman

Objectives

The subcommittee is currently working with three objectives to further this goal.

- Raise the profile of the Town of Acton as a great place to locate and conduct business. Position Acton as a business-friendly town
- Promote tourism
- Advocate for infrastructure improvement projects

Action Items

Here are a few of the many examples that the committee described for each objective. At this stage of the exercise, we have not evaluated the value or feasibility of any of these projects.

Raise the profile of the Town of Acton ...

- Create a brochure about Acton on the Web that is kept current
 - The days of glossy brochures are over.
- Produce a TV segment featuring one or more local Acton businesses on Acton TV
- Write business articles for the Beacon

Promote tourism

- Promote the many attractions of Acton and its surroundings
 - Two Discovery Museums, Acton Arboretum, NARA Park, nearby Stow Airfield, nearby apple orchards, nearby Nashoba Ski Area, historic homes to visit, soccer fields, Miracle Field at Nara Park, Morrison Farm State Park, ice rinks, rail trails, many conservation land trails
- Trips by train and shuttle, with box lunch from local business, to some of the above
- Green space for lunch spots
- List Acton and rate Acton on social media such as TripAdvisor, Expedia, Travelocity, and Facebook

Infrastructure improvements

The following infrastructure initiatives will be a benefit to businesses.

- Sewer for West Acton, transportation, RR station improvement, parking

We can also take action in the following ways.

- Work with Boxborough and Littleton to promote Acton's access to Littleton train hub
- Advertise present and future shuttles to Alewife and last mile from train that CrossTown Connect is developing

- Advertise Crosstown Connect’s existence

First Goal – Take Care of Existing Businesses

Introduction

The first goal currently reads

Take care of existing businesses

The subcommittee members are

- Ann Chang
- Larry Kenah (chair)
- Nancy Dinkel

Objectives

- Act as ombudsman for individual businesses or groups of businesses with common problems
- Remove obstacles
- Simplify and improve business practices
- Improve infrastructure that will support businesses
 - Sewers in West Acton
 - Transportation improvements
 - Parking
- Reach out to business community (complement to ombudsman role)

Action Items

Here are some examples of projects or action items that further each objective. Once again, these examples are preliminary.

Ombudsman

This is more a role that the EDC plays for the business community. We need to ensure that both businesses and town staff know about and support this role for the EDC.

Remove obstacles

- Support proposed zoning changes for Brookside Shops (Staples, Trader Joe’s, Talbots, etc)

Business practices

- Create information along the lines of “A Business Guide to Town Hall” or a similar title that explains how businesses can work their way through the various permitting processes simply and effectively.
- Improve the business practices that new and existing businesses must negotiate when working with the various town departments

Improve infrastructure

Note that this objective is shared with the subcommittee working on the third goal. This overlap strengthens the importance of infrastructure in improving the overall business climate in the Town of Acton. We will focus on these three areas.

- Sewers in West Acton
- Transportation improvements
- Parking

The EDC will provide active support for all of these efforts with a focus on their benefits to existing and new businesses.

Reach out to business community

- Build database of town businesses so that EDC and town (at least) have the ability to contact businesses with information that might affect them such as upcoming zoning changes
- Ensure that businesses are aware of proposed zoning changes early enough in the zoning process so that they can voice their support for or concern with proposed zoning changes
- Ensure that business owners are aware of and are invited to participate in boards and committees that might be helpful to them.
 - Because business people might not have lots of time for this participation, their role might be as members of special purpose subcommittees.

Remaining Agenda Items (6..9)

There were no updates on agenda items 6 through 9. Work on these projects will be clarified after we go through the detailed discussion of EDC mission, goals, and projects.

In Closing

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 pm.

These minutes were recorded by Lawrence J Kenah, EDC Clerk