

EDC Minutes – 5 November 2015

These are the meeting minutes from the Economic Development Committee (EDC) of the Town of Acton, Massachusetts. The meeting took place on 5 November 2015 at the Acton Town Hall in Conference Room 9.

The meeting was called to order at 7:38 by David Foley.

Present: Allan Gulliver, Bharat Shah, David Foley, Derrick Chin, Doug Tindal, Josh Fischel, Larry Kenah, Nancy Dinkel

Not present: Ann Chang, Chingsung Chang, Dick Calandrella

Summary

We spent most of the meeting listening to an update on the West Acton WAVE Project by Mathias Rosenfeld.

We spent the remaining meeting time preparing for Fall Town Meeting.

Public Participation (1)

There was no public participation.

Presentation – Mathias Rosenfeld, West Acton WAVE Project (2)

The background to Mathias’s visit is that he presented to the EDC about a year ago. We then visited the site in West Acton in its then current state of construction (temporary roof, no walls, etc). We wanted to get an update on the project now that the first tenants are preparing to open.

These minutes do not reflect the chronology of the conversation but rather organize the key points by topic.

Overall Project

There is no grand opening planned. Rather, there will be a “soft opening” over the next several months as each business opens its doors.

The building received its certificate of opening in the past few weeks.

A key benefit to the property is that it faces Route 111 (Massachusetts Avenue). The businesses are visible to the 15,000 cars that go through West Acton each day.

The current parking model is shared parking. Most spaces are behind and underneath the building but on-street parking supplies additional spaces.

Mathias is hoping that the project reaches stabilized occupancy by the spring.

When asked about the reaction of other businesses in West Acton, Mathias pointed out that the new businesses are helping the overall village to reach critical mass. The new businesses are an integral part of the village.

Tenants

The building is already more than 50% occupied. Several of the business owners are local.

- The brew pub and restaurant is the first craft brewer in Acton in a very long time. The restaurant will have 80 total seats. Other tenants hope to feed off the presence of the brew pub as it attracts visitors to the building.
- Acton Real Estate will make use of new technologies to display its listings.
 - HDC presented several restrictions but also made some concessions so that listings are visible outside the building.

Other businesses include

- Acton Coffee House
- Danny's Place
- A wellness center

The wellness center is best described as a co-working location for therapists. The overall space contains nine suites, eight of which are occupied.

Town of Acton

We asked Mathias what we could do to help. His two recommendations were what we expected: sewers and parking.

Mathias believes that West Acton Village is the best place for the town to expand its sewer coverage. If sewers are built elsewhere, they will likely lead to more residential developments. In West Acton Village, they will foster additional business growth.

He described his solution to parking but noted that no other property can apply the same solution because of limited availability of land in the rest of the village. He recommended that the town create a comprehensive parking plan.

Mathias also described the challenges that a project like his faces when dealing with the permitting process that has overlaps and competing requirements. His solution was to call a meeting with all of the permitting boards and departments so that the issues could get sorted out in a much more timely fashion.

Mathias tempered his advice by adding that the town should “tread carefully” so that it doesn't damage West Acton.

Meeting Minutes (3)

The minutes from the EDC meeting on 15 October 2015 were not available so no meeting minutes were approved.

Board of Selectmen Report (4)

Chingsung Chang was not at the meeting so there was no update from the BoS.

Land Use/Economic Development Director (8)

Doug Tindal reported that the current hiring process has been halted.

Revised Agenda

At this point in the meeting, the committee voted to postpone the remainder of the agenda and to use the rest of the meeting to discuss those articles in the Fall Town Meeting warrant that have implications for economic development.

- **Article 2** - Increase Liquor License Quota
- **Article 6** - Special Tax Assessment for AES
- **Article 8** - Fund South Acton Train Station Landscaping

Article 2 - Increase Liquor License Quota

There was a brief discussion about this article. Members agreed that additional liquor licenses would attract additional restaurants to Acton, a key component of increased economic activity.

Motion: That the EDC support Article 2 as described in the warrant.

Vote: Unanimous

Article 6 - Special Tax Assessment

AES made a presentation to the EDC a few weeks ago. The EDC supported the company's plans to move to Acton. The challenge associated with AES is that it is asking the town to provide tax relief to AES as described in a table in the town meeting warrant. Because the town only receives revenue from property taxes, the tax relief eliminates one of the key benefits of the AES purchase of the building and property.

Doug Tindal shared a late breaking development where AES will provide free parking for the town's school buses for the length of the tax abatement agreement. The projected savings (\$22.5 k per year) to the school system mostly offsets the revenue lost to the tax abatement. At this point, the intangible benefits to the town weigh in.

Motion: That the EDC support Article 6 with the stipulation that the town provide tax relief to AES in return for five years of free parking for school buses.

Vote: Unanimous

Article 8 - Fund South Acton Train Station Landscaping

This article generated considerable discussion both in support of and in opposition to the article. Supporters cited the importance of making the train station, one of the key entry points into the town, much more attractive than if only the basic MBTA landscaping efforts were employed. Opponents cited the lack of details and the estimated price tag (\$180k). An initial motion to oppose the article was modified to a recommendation that the article be deferred to Spring Town Meeting.

Motion: That the EDC oppose Article 8. The EDC recommends that a modified form of this article, with additional details, be presented to Spring 2016 Town Meeting.

Vote: Unanimous

In Closing

Upcoming Meetings (13)

The next EDC meeting is scheduled for 19 November 2015.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:39 pm.

These minutes were recorded by Lawrence J Kenah, EDC Clerk.