

Acton 2020 Implementation Committee

Meeting Minutes – May 13, 2015

Meeting called to order at 7:30 pm by Andy Brockway

Members present: Andy Brockway, Kat Hudson, Patricia McKnight and Nancy Gerhardt

Liaisons present: Peter Berry (BOS), Ann Corcoran (COA) and Margaret Busse (FinCom)

Other Acton Committee Members Present: Nancy Tavernier (ACHC), Ann Chang (EDC), Larry Kenah (EDC/KCSC), Ron Regan (HDC), Davis Honn (HDC), David Foley (HDC/EDC), Terra Friedrichs (Citizen), Susan Mitchell-Heart (ACT), Debra Simes, (Green Acton), and Peter Darlow (DRB).

Meeting Summary

Purpose of the meeting: The town of Acton is hiring a Land Use and Economic Development Director. The Board of Selectmen and the Town Manager invited other Acton Town Committees to provide written feedback on the draft position description. Acton 2020 called together members of several other town Committees to discuss ideas for the new position, to share our perspectives, and to let the BOS and Town Manager know that the Acton Committees are talking and working together.

Group Discussion on New Land Use and Economic Development Director Position:

- Several committees had already provided written comments to the BOS on the new position or were preparing to do so including, Acton 2020, Open Space, DRB, HDC, and the Green Advisory Board. Written comments are due by May 15th.
- Peter Berry explained that the BOS views this new position as an Assistant Town Manager. It will be a very high-level administrator who will coordinate all land use/conservation, DPW, Panning, Building, and Health (clean water and septic) issues. The BOS feels this need for coordination is especially important due to the impending retirement of Doug Haley who, in addition to his Health Director position, also coordinated many additional issues for the Town Manager. Also due to the impending retirement of the municipal properties director, the Town plans to fold his role into the DPW, further increasing the need for coordination. The BOS originally requested 2 separate positions, Land Use Director and Economic Development Director, but they were combined during the budget process.
- Margaret Busse explained that the Finance Committee was originally in favor of only an EDD. Their concern with the new combined position is that it supports economic development in name only and that it is really another layer of administrative land use

management. The finance Committee is recommending that the current position description be revised to promote proactive economic development and a 50/50 split between land use and economic development responsibilities. The job description should also reflect that this dual role is a unique and exciting opportunity for a charismatic individual.

- Deborah Simes from Green Acton shared her concern that the dual position contains an inherent conflict of interest between land use and EDD. The hiring parameters need to be very clear to ensure the individual playing this dual role will see both sides. Green Acton felt the new hire should promote and respect the goals and principles of the Acton 2020 master plan, preserve resources and have knowledge of clean energy.
- Several attendees commented on how administrative tasks in the current job description were disproportionately mentioned over proactive and strategic planning responsibilities. Others expressed concern over how this new position would integrate into the existing town government and committee structure. They had questions about what authority this new position would have over their committees and were unclear about its relationship to statutory and non-statutory boards.
- Larry Kenah recommended the new hire should be a seasoned professional with Urban Planning and private sector experience. The position should be more specific about the kind of economic development that Acton residents want and he suggested that the position should be considered the CEO of the Town's Master Plan. He agreed it would take a person with charisma and good interpersonal skills to make this dual position a success.
- Members of the FinCom and the HDC suggested that the job description should include objective targets and goals for economic development in order measure the position's success. They proposed that a consultant should be hired to develop these analytics and wondered if savings from folding the municipal buildings manager into the DPW could be used for this purpose. Peter Berry explained that those savings had already been assumed within the new budget.
- The group discussion concluded with Peter Berry reminding the group that written comments were due to the BOS by May 15th and that the BOS were serious about considering the input from the various committees.

Kat Hudson agreed to draft Acton 2020's feedback letter to the BOS.

The meeting adjourned around 9:00 pm.