



These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 4/15/21, held remotely at 7 pm

Called to Order: 7:03 pm

Members Present: Mike Majors, Ann Chang, Josh Fischel, Larry Kenah, Catherine Usoff, David Cote, Derrick Chin, Dan Malloy, Jon Benson, David Didriksen

Staff Present: Selby

Members Absent: Peter Daniel, Shirley Ming

Regular Business

1. Review of meeting minutes from previous meetings

Minutes from April 1st are approved, unanimously, 9-0, without abstention.

2. Public participation

Terra called in and said that, although she reacted poorly to the suggestion of Lou Levine, if we were to consult him only about commercial development, it would be okay with her.

II. New/Special Business

3. Drive-up Window Zoning, Planning Board, and All That [Jazz]

Several members of the EDC attended a Planning Board meeting about drive-up windows. Ann points out that the subject has to pass by a two-thirds vote at Town Meeting; it's won a simple majority before, but hasn't crossed that particular threshold. Ann is in favor of special permits instead of by-rights. She would like the controls to be more environmentally sensitive. She wrote a long memo to Robert Hummel and Kristen Guichard about suggested changes, but it went unanswered.

Mike Majors asks for a summary of what was approved. Larry says there was enough feedback and there were enough questions raised, so that the Planning Board wanted to think on it before approving anything; they will take it up again at their next meeting.

Larry points out a few factors that some may not have considered, including the number of stops within a single drive-thru and the volume of the audio exchange with customers.

Derrick Chin said he felt Acton Pharmacy's business would be at risk because of this; he didn't think the audience was particularly sympathetic to their plight.

Larry said he didn't think this would significantly change the business environment—he feels he is part of a small but resolute chorus that thinks there will only be five businesses with drive-thrus five years from now.

Ann thought it felt counterintuitive to design Kelley's Corner for foot traffic while simultaneously adding a drive-thru. (David Didriksen thinks making Acton a walkable community is a lost cause.)

Dan Malloy and Larry debate whether people will adapt to using mobile devices to place orders.

4. Working Group Reports

- Business Inventory (Mike, with David D. and Larry)

The team met over Zoom. They are working towards data collection and establishing goals for how to use it. They plan to meet with Selby to discuss their questions and figure out how to use the inventory to help small and local businesses. David wants to make sure their efforts are not already being duplicated somehow at the state level.

- 50 Nagog (Dan and Shirley)

Dan's update is that they met with Selby. The Massachusetts Biotechnology Council puts out a list that classifies communities according to various criteria. He's curious how to get Acton on this list at any level, and whether businesses pay enough attention to it that we should care about being on it in the first place. The first level (Bronze) includes municipal water and sewer. Not having sewer throughout Acton could be a deal breaker.

Ann says we should use this list towards a broader vision: to sewer Great Road. She says the current federal infrastructure plan includes wastewater treatment, and we should be ready to take advantage of that, should it come to pass.

Selby's question is whether the criteria (regarding sewer) have to apply to the whole town, or if it just has to be applicable to portions of the developable, commercial land.

There was a discussion of the Grace property which is on a sewer line, but is not tied in to Acton water.

- The Ann Chang Project

In Ann's own words: "I was a member of the Powder Mill Corridor meeting. This project is being run by the MAPC. My first objection is that the corridor is 1.5 miles long and if .3 of that length is in Acton, that's not really enough for us to get excited about. So I asked why the corridor plan was stopped at the intersection of High Street and 62 and did not continue along 62 to the Concord line. (The extra distance can't be more than .5 mile.) They did not have a good answer--in fact, they had no answer at all."

"From Acton's point of view, this extension would have included the whole of the Stop and Shop Plaza, plus the turn off for Knox Trail. Stopping at High Street does not make any sort of sense."

"My second question came from the fact that we were told that all the businesses along 62 in Maynard and Acton had been contacted and questioned."

"So I asked about the rather large parcel in Maynard where the Elks Club is/was located. There is a large building which used to house a big restaurant, as well as rooms for private parties for weddings and such. In addition, beyond the parking lot, down a slope, is the Assabet River. One of the supposed goals of this project is to open up river views for passive recreation as well as actual river use."

"The person who should have known did not know anything about this property. In addition, one of the business owners in Maynard said she'd not been contacted.

All of these unanswered questions do not give me much confidence that this is a viable project."

- Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP) (David D. and Derrick):

David does not want to participate because he feels it's a giveaway for consultants, so he's withdrawing from that working group. Larry volunteers to take his place.

- Strategic Plan (David C., Josh, and Catherine)

Catherine reports that she used the template Shirley had developed for her working group, to see if it would work for our project. Her noodling provided a starting point for the working group's work, which we'll use in our next conversation and in sharing out our collective work. She also found that comparative census data is available on the government's census site; she argues that we need to figure out who we are as a town, and how to adapt the strategic plan to accommodate that evolving identity.

David Cote shared that we tried to develop a realistic timeline, to factor in the amount of outreach and listening and data-gathering that's required in developing a useful strategic plan. The timeline takes our working group through the end of the calendar year.

Catherine asks if there are protocols or restrictions to consider as we consider adding members to the working group. Selby suggests that there should be a public forum that the EDC would host as part of the process.

Ann Chang says everyone we talk to doesn't need to be part of the working group; they're just interview resources. Call them up and talk to them!

5. Feedback from Last Meeting

Catherine Usoff suggests that we not toss around names of people who are not members of the EDC in ways that could cause confusion amongst or undue stress to the listening audience.

III. More Regular Business

6. Updates from members

There are none.

7. Update from Director of Economic Development

As Good As It Gets, a new breakfast and lunch place, has opened in the old Bickford's place; Selby has already been in, and encourages the EDC to stop in (individually, not as a quorum, of course).

Underneath True West, near the parking area, a cheese shop is moving in.

Selby also shared that Boxborough nabbed a biomanufacturer that he (and Dan Malloy) felt coulda-shoulda been ours.

8. Next meeting – 6 May 2021

IV. Consent Items

9. None

Meeting is adjourned at 8:17 pm.

Additional materials

- Draft meeting minutes from 1 April 2021

The listed agenda items are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair. Not all items may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.

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we can contact you if we need more information. Please allow advance notice. Send an e-mail to tomanager@actonma.gov or call Town Manager's Office (978)929-6611

For more information about the Economic Development Committee, please send email to
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