



Economic Development Committee Minutes

December 6, 2024

12:05 PM

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 12/6/24, held virtually via Zoom.

Called to Order: 12:05 pm

EDC Members Present: Patty Sutherland, Shirley Ming, Sharon Tchon Gruet, Michael Carpenter

EDC Members Absent: David Cote

Also present: Fran Arsenault – Select Board Liaison, Greg Jarboe - Finance Committee Liaison, James Fuccione – Planning Board Liaison, Catherine Usoff – Former EDC Chair

Town Staff : Maura Haberman - Liaison for EDC, John Mangiaratti – Town Manager,

Preliminaries

Call the Roll – attendance is noted above.

I. Regular Business

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meeting (November 15, 2024)
Approved unanimously
- Public participation
None.

II. New/Special Business

- Economic Development Director
 - EDC Director role is back in transition after recent resignation.
 - Considering modification of job description before re-posting.
 - Maura will continue to help with the transition.
- Economic Development Plan – Status
 - Kristen Guichard will help lead the Economic Development Plan (“EDP”) as town staff and coordinate with consulting team.
 - Catherine volunteered to act as a liaison between Economic Development Committee and the EDP working group. Mentioned that Dave signed up for working group.
 - Catherine discussed the history of the plan.
 - After the town meeting passed a non-binding article for economic development, the EDP strategic planning kicked off in the summer with

- grant funding. The consulting group has a timeline of activity and started gathering community input.
 - The goal is to develop a plan that maintains existing town character, with smart development that fits and alleviates tax burden and build the right business climate and future potential.
 - To-date, the project schedule has limited public participation outside of working group
- Patty commented that we would like to provide EDC input prior to the next working group meeting. Mike suggested the use of Google Sheets to collect feedback.
- Fran mentioned that brainstorming from prior working group meeting included considerations for a 5 to 10 year time horizon, digital first, tax incentives for smaller business, messaging and getting input from residents, transportation, and sewer.
- Planning Department Update – Signage Bylaws & Main St./Kelly’s Corner
 - Signage Bylaws will continue to be a topic going forward.
 - Maura suggested that meeting begin earlier when inviting Staff to meeting as Town Hall is closed at 12 pm on Fridays (due to late Tuesday evenings)
 - There are fewer waving/banner signs as observed around town, which is likely due to recent enforcement.
- Storefront and Office Vacancy
 - Sharon discussed the agenda item on commercial vacancy rates, highlighting that the Powder Mill area has a vacancy rate of 72.8%, while Acton’s is 16.4%. She proposed updating the "Doing Business in Acton" booklet to include information and links to the Mass.gov site, which offers \$10k for extended vacancies. She also suggested adding details on parking, sewer, and septic systems. Furthermore, the booklet should feature any updated feedback regarding the rotary stores for businesses along Routes 2A and 2.
- How to help Business in Town
 - Acton Business guide link
 - www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Acton-Business-Guide-2023.pdf
 - Sharon offered to help with review and providing editing comment.
 - Maura mentioned that a juicing bar business which is interested in opening in town has used website information to get in touch with John.
 - Mike . comment that the guide is more geared toward new business and less useful for existing business under new ownership and/or looking for expansion. The town approval process is punitive for existing business looking for expansion that are trying to conform. For example, Conservation rules were not clear at all. There is a state program to help business, https://business.mass.gov/s/?language=en_US, that has potential for the local town to adopt as well.

III. Old Business

- EDC's goals for FY25
 - Help with Economic Development Plan to ensure it has sufficient feedback.
 - John commented that EDC should help advancing initiatives that amplify business community interest. For example, the EDP, signage and transportation. How find better ways to communicate to help business avoid mis-steps
 - Continued discussion of Signage bylaw and transportation
- Housing Production Plan Survey
 - Survey link is in the repository and solicit feedback by end of Jan.
 - It will be incorporated into Municipal monthly and included in senior report.
 - It will be forward to Acton Exchange.
 - EDC members encouraged to post flyer on social media and on local bulletin boards.
- West Acton Village Parking
 - It is an ongoing issue,
 - Sharon commented that Parking behind fire station is not very safe and suggested that weekend parking be considered around the school.
- Member Updates
 - RH Adhesive- CPC application went through. It will be presented in January to the town.

I V. More Regular Business

- ED events – Shop Small – November 23, 2024 thru January 15, 2025
 - Maura asks for photos while shopping to share at social media sites.
- DEI and other Community events
 - Special movie showing to come next year at Maynard Fine Arts (late February)
- Metro West Chamber of Commerce
 - Maura mentioned that it is likely to merge with Nashoba Valley Chamber after speaking with Board President.
 - Maura suggested that EDC schedule a day to visit new businesses that have not received recognition during MWCOC transition.
- Annual Conference of 495 MetroWest Partnership – December 12, 2024
 - Greg has volunteered to attend.
- Stop & Shop New Location Ribbon Cutting – December 13, 2024
 - Formal ribbon cutting 10 am, event is from 9am to 11am.
 - Citation from state representatives will be provided.
 - Patty, Sharon and Greg will attend.
 - Its former location will be used as warehouse.
- Love for business luncheon
 - It is planned around Valentine Day time. Last year had over 60 businesses attending with preview of concert series.

V. Update from Economic Development Director – Maura, Interim Liaison

- Noted under sections above.

VI. Consent Items

None

Next Steps and Action Items

- Patty will follow up on the EDC meeting time for focused discussion on Economic Development Plan pending the info on the next working group meeting schedule.
- Patty will follow up with Kristen on presenting Signage ByLaw to EDC.
- Maura will continue to review business from Maura last year that did not have ribbon cutting.
- Mike to share the State program for business.

The meeting adjourned at 1:30 pm.

Next meeting – January 3, 2025 (first Friday) to begin at 11:30 am.

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