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EDC Minutes – 17 March 2016

These are the meeting minutes from the Economic Development Committee (EDC) of the Town of Acton, Massachusetts. The meeting took place on 17 March 2016 at the Acton Town Hall in Conference Room 204.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 by Doug Tindal.

Present: Bharat Shah, Chingsung Chang, Derrick Chin, Doug Tindal, Larry Kenah, Nancy Dinkel

Not present: Ann Chang, David Foley, Dick Calandrella, Josh Fischel

Town Staff M. J. "Selby" Selby
Director of Land Use and Economic Development

Meeting Summary

Public Participation (1)

There was no public participation.

EDC Background and Discussion

We spent the first part of the meeting briefing Selby on the history and current role of the EDC. Someone reiterated that the fundamental purpose of the EDC is to increase the commercial tax base of the Town of Acton. Selby for his part described one of his roles as COO of Acton 2020.

Associate Members

With some members unable to attend meetings on a regular basis, we will take another look at the member status and determine which members, if any, should be associate members.

AES

Doug related some of the recent history of AES and the building located at the end of Post Office Square. The town provided tax benefits to AES. It is not clear what the town will receive in return. The possibility of using the parking lot for school buses is in a state of flux. There are some concerns from the Acton Water District about parking school buses so close to one of the Acton water wells.

Senior Center

The conversation easily moved to using part of the AES building as a possible site for the Senior Center. The site has many benefits not available at the current location on Audubon Drive. Discussion about a specific location is a bit premature. A warrant article, if supported at town meeting, will authorize the town manager to begin the public process of soliciting proposals for possible locations of the senior center. Presumably the location at Post Office Square will be one such proposal.

Doug Tindal indicated that there is some pressure on building a kitchen in the senior center that can handle the most ambitious meal plans. Doug used the metaphor “building a church for Easter Sunday” to describe the dilemma. This is a common problem for highway design and for capacity planning in computer data centers.

EDIP

“The Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) is a tax incentive program designed to foster job creation and stimulate business growth throughout the Commonwealth. Participating companies may receive state and local tax incentives in exchange for job creation, manufacturing job retention and private investment commitments.”

<http://www.mass.gov/hed/economic/eohed/bd/econ-development/>

Doug Tindal discussed EDIP in the context of EDC history but observed that the program has recently changed and might be once again applicable as a tool to be used by the EDC. (See Project Assignments in the next section of these minutes.)

EDC and Related Committees

Doug Tindal mentioned trying to get related committees together on a regular basis. With Selby playing some role with each of these boards or committees, perhaps this effort will be more successful than it has in the past. Related committees might include

- Planning Board
- Design Review Board
- Economic Development committee
- Acton 2020

Someone made the observation that the current emphasis on Kelley’s Corner was occupying all of the cycles of the Planning Department and Acton 2020, with the result that other parts of town were being neglected.

Project Assignments (related to 6)

The general discussion about the EDC led into a more focused conversation about specific projects. We talked one more time about compiling a business database. We also mentioned a marketing survey to learn more about what businesses are in town and what Acton could do to attract businesses.

This turned into a more practical conversation about assigning committee members to lead each project.

At a future meeting, we will put together a schedule on reviewing each of these and other not-yet assigned projects on a regular basis.

Business Database

Larry Kenah volunteered to lead the business database project.

EDIP and EDC

Doug Tindal had asked some questions about EDIP?

- What are the rules?
- Can we take advantage?

Someone (your humble scribe?) suggested that Doug lead this effort.

Sign Regulations

In our conversation with Selby about EDC history, sign regulations and sign enforcement were both mentioned as sensitive topics for all Acton businesses. On the one hand, excessive enforcement sometimes penalized businesses. On the other hand, lax enforcement fostered feelings of lack of fairness.

Because of his past work associated with sign regulations, Derrick Chin volunteered to start with answers to these questions.

- Where do we stand with existing sign regulations?
- What is happening with illegal signs?
- What is the current state of sign regulations in Historic Districts?

Marketing

Allan Gulliver graciously volunteered to head the effort called Marketing. Allan's first task will be to define exactly what this means and, perhaps more importantly, what it does not mean.

Meeting Minutes (2)

The minutes from the 4 February 2016 meeting were approved with three minor edits.

BoS Report (3)

Chingsung had nothing to report from recent meetings of the Board of Selectmen

Feedback on Kelley's Corner (4)

Doug Tindal reported on a meeting that he had with Roland Bartl about the upcoming town meeting warrant articles related to Kelley's Corner.

Doug indicated that he supports the infrastructure plans and the zoning principle that encourages aggregation of smaller plots into a single larger plot. He also liked that Stop & Shop (owners of the Kmart site) had reached out to Verizon and Baker Oil, the other property owners of the southwest quadrant of Kelley's Corner.

Doug indicated that he does not like adding a residential component to Kelley's Corner development. His interpretation is that the weak retail and office markets in Acton lead developers to justify their costs by adding residential into the mix. Doug's take is that these will not be high-end apartments. "Who will live there?" he asks.

Doug said that Roland was generous with his time in explaining both the zoning article and the infrastructure article. During this conversation, we also learned that the current annual cost per pupil in the Acton Boxborough Regional School District is \$14k.

Site Plan Authority (5)

These words describe the so-called Peter Berry Committee to determine who will oversee master plan review. The unofficial consensus is that the Planning Board will own authority for Master Plan review but that the Board of Selectmen (BoS) will retain all other review authority. We were reminded that the sticking point in this conversation was that the Acton Planning Board is not elected. The BoS will review this at some future date,

Updates from Members (7)

There were no additional reports from members beyond what had already been discussed under specific agenda items.

In Closing

Upcoming Meetings

The next EDC meeting is scheduled for 7 April 2016. This is two days after the expected end of Spring Town Meeting

Adjourn (8)

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 pm.

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