



These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 5/14/20, held remotely at 10 am (link:

Called to Order: 10:05 am

Members Present: Mike Majors, Ann Chang, Josh Fischel, Larry Kenah, Peter Daniel, Jon Benson, Dave Didriksen, Derrick Chin

Staff Present: Selby (Economic Development Director)

Members Absent: David Foley, Shirley Ming

Visitors/Guests: John Raguin, Dan Malloy

**Introduction to Remote Committee Meeting Protocol by Chair Larry Kenah:**

“Good morning. It is 10:05 am. This Open Meeting of the Economic Development Committee is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker’s Executive Order of March 12, 2020, due to the current State of Emergency in the Commonwealth, and the Local State of Emergency declared by the Acton Board of Selectmen and Board of Health due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 Virus.

“In order to mitigate the transmission of the COVID-19 Virus, the Board of Selectmen has suspended all public gatherings, and in accordance with the Governor’s Order all members of public bodies are allowed and encouraged to participate remotely. The Governor’s Order, allows public bodies to meet entirely remotely so long as reasonable public access is afforded so that the public can follow along with the deliberations and Committee votes of the meeting.

“Ensuring public access does not ensure public participation unless such participation is required by law. This meeting will feature public comment from invited guests. For this meeting, the Economic Development Committee is convening by video conference via the Zoom application. The meeting agenda posted on the Town’s Website calendar indicates how the public may join.

“Please note that this meeting is being recorded and that some attendees are participating by video conference. Accordingly, please be aware that other folks may be able to see you and anything that you broadcast may be captured by the recording.

“All of the materials for this meeting, except any Executive Session materials, are available in the public DocuShare folder, and we recommend that the members and the public follow the agenda as posted.

“Meeting Business Ground Rules

“We are now turning to the first item on the agenda. Before we do so, permit me to cover some ground rules for effective and clear conduct of our business and to ensure accurate meeting minutes.

- Selby or I will introduce each speaker on the agenda (if applicable). After they conclude their remarks, the Chair will go down the line of Members, inviting each by name to provide any comment, questions, or motions. Please hold until your name is called. Further,

- o Please remember to mute your phone or computer when you are not speaking;

o Please remember to speak clearly and in a way that helps generate accurate minutes

- For any response, please wait until the Chair yields the floor to you, and state your name before speaking.

- If members wish to engage in colloquy with other members, please do so through the Chair, taking care to identify yourself.

“After members have spoken, the Chair will afford public comment as follows:

- o The Chair will first ask members of the public who wish to speak to identify their names and addresses only after first being recognized by the Chair, and will be afforded a few minutes for their comment or question.

- Finally, each vote taken in this meeting will be conducted by roll call vote. As I mentioned in a note that I sent earlier this week, this requirement extends to the vote to adjourn.”

## **I. Regular Business**

1. Review of meeting minutes from 5 March 2020: Yes: 4, No: 0, Abstain: 6

2. Public Participation: John Raguin is here; we'll address his proposal later in the meeting.

## **II. New/Special Business:**

3. Support for businesses in Acton

There is discussion of “The Selby Proposal,” ideas he aggregated and created to help the small business community, which he sent to the Town Manager. The proposals contained within the document are not listed in any particular order. Selby highlights the use of the local meals tax for small business assistance, and waiving signage rules. 4th of July has been cancelled to save the town and commercial donors thousands of dollars. He also mentions residential development along Route 2A, as one large landowner has suggested to fill vacant storefronts, along with most of the other ideas mentioned in the document.

We respond, each in turn. Ann Chang is in favor of much of the document, minus zoning amendments and property tax abatements.

David Didriksen also agrees with almost all of these, except Sen. Eldridge’s proposal, as he is strongly against putting relief on the shoulders of any aspect of the private sector.

Derrick Chin brings up Legend Cafe, which he said is now dipping into their personal savings—within the month, they’ll probably have to close. He was worried that the Finance Committee’s budget hawks would not approve liquor license fee reimbursements. He agrees with all parts of the proposal.

Josh Fischel has the same concerns as Ann Chang; he suggests that small business appreciation week focus on encouraging people to buy things ‘out of season’ to help businesses reduce their backlogged inventory, and adds that Selby and/or other experts at Town Hall ought to host a periodic Zoom with small business owners to hear their concerns and avail them of resources. (Selby says he’s been posting those resources as he finds them on the town’s website, though he shares concern that people might not know to find it there.)

Mike Majors says, from a FinComm point of view, it really has minimal financial impact on the town. He provides some insight into the thinking behind the aforementioned budget hawks, but disagrees with them. He walks through and approves of each item except, like David Didriksen, Sen. Eldridge’s proposed legislation. He encourages us to have a sense of urgency and act today, if we can.

Peter Daniel says, on behalf of Rapsallion and other small businesses, that Selby and the board have been a huge help. A lot of the proposals, he says, are not just finan-

cially helpful but symbolically helpful. If they don't go through, we really need to change our mindset in terms of how we support small, local businesses. He wants to know where these are in terms of getting passed by the Board of Selectmen.

Jon Benson replies that there is enormous pressure on our town and school budgets; a late June Town Meeting would be dealing with that pressure, and trying to figure out how to handle anticipated drops in revenue. There are tough but fair demands on the resources the town has; no one did anything wrong, and we're in the business of providing services. So, no, he says, we haven't taken up a discussion of Selby's proposal. We're certainly looking at small things we could do, he continues, like the liquor and victualler license fees, signage and small business appreciation, etc. The meals tax would be a heavier lift, as would zoning changes, and property tax abatements. All of this aside, he brings up the polls—people across the Commonwealth don't feel safe yet that they can patronize a variety of businesses.

Larry Kenah says that the climate for drive-thru is very different than it was when it failed a few years ago at Town Meeting; if we carefully expand it a little, it should pass.

David Didriksen says he'd like to see the state expand who counts as an essential business. We should also consider a sales tax holiday.

John Raguin of Hit the Net Sports talks. There has never been a crisis like this for small businesses, ever, he says, so this is not the time for budget hawks. Speed is of the essence. He's on the board of a restaurant software company; the aggregate data across the US shows that, if a restaurant is open, their transactions are down 45%. His own business is down 98%. He thinks the Selby Proposal is excellent. The point he's making with his own proposal is that there are several businesses that are left out of any way the town can provide relief. Rent is fixed, immovable, and a tremendous cost, so he proposes tax relief for the landlord that would have to be passed on to the business renting the property. Larry asks how many zeros are in the answer to the question he's asking. John hasn't asked the town for that data. Larry estimates that 10% of the town's tax revenue is from commercial properties. John excluded several of the businesses from his proposal that haven't been as affected: grocery, gas, hardware, liquor, etc. Selby can get the information; our total revenue is 88 million.

Response to John's proposal: Ann Chang says the total dollar amount of the Selby Proposal is small. Even John's proposal is modest, she says, because their value in being there is more than 10%.

Dave Didriksen's conservative estimate is that half the businesses in town will go out of business as a result of this. He reiterates that the situation is dire, and we have to step up to support the small business community to keep them here, now and in the long-term.

Derrick Chin likes what David and John said about the urgency of the situation.

Jon Benson yields to Dan Malloy, who says he wants the town to figure out how to collectively get all these businesses up and running faster. Is the town doing anything to enable businesses to adjust their infrastructure to comply with new rules? There are a lot of potential hurdles for these small businesses: can we purchase PPE for them, for instance? What can we do to be pro-active?

Jon says we can't print money like the federal government. On the Select Board, you're balancing trade-offs and constituents. There are tough decisions to make, and we're all here with different and urgent needs.

Josh Fischel expresses concern about what businesses would be excluded from John Raguin's proposal—whither the Paper Store, for instance? And he wonders about what the town looks like *without* several million dollars from property-related revenue.

Mike Majors reiterates that there needs to be a sense of urgency. The bureaucracy at every level moves too slowly. He proposes a 'super committee' that can act more nimbly.

Peter Daniel says there are three things that are most realistic on the Selby Proposal, and he thinks John's proposal would also be really impactful.

Larry Kenah thanks Dan Malloy for joining us, and for the work that John Raguin put into his proposal. He likes the idea of a more-frequently-meeting 'super committee' that would focus on what we *can* do. He proposes that we meet again in two weeks; Derrick pushes for next week, when Governor Baker will have released more information about re-opening. Derrick wins.

**IX. Adjourn @ 11:54**

\*\*\*Members of the EDC may next meet on Thursday, May 21st, at 10 am.\*\*\*

**Materials Reviewed During Meeting:**

- Draft EDC Minutes from March 5th, 2020
- EDC Agenda for May 14th, 2020