



These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 1/7/21, held remotely at 7 pm

Called to Order: 7:03 pm

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

Staff Present: Selby (Economic Development Director)

Members Absent: David Didriksen

“Good evening. **It is 7:03 pm.** 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 for 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.

“We are about to turn 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. After they conclude their remarks, I will then 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 discussion 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 two minutes for their comment or question.
- Finally, each vote taken in this meeting will be conducted by roll call vote. This requirement extends to the vote to adjourn.”

I. Regular Business

1. Review of meeting minutes from 5 November 2020 and 3 December 2020 (?)
2. Public participation

Caller thanks us for a promotional video for town that I'm not aware of our role in creating. She says the courtyard at the development in West Acton is quite useful and active. Finally, she offers thanks to Selby and thoughts on commercial vacancies.

II. New/Special Business

3. Specific Issues

- 3 School St.: Ann Chang reports that the Select Board slowed its decision making on what to do with that property in hopes of finding a commercial option. Habitat has been interested; they offered \$1—the idea is that they would sell the property as a residence for at most two people (it's 864 square feet per floor). Mike Majors sounds an optimistic note. Ann notes that we'll have to work together with the HDC on any development plans. It is a long-term plan. Josh, a South Acton resident, feels more pessimistic, especially given the conversion of Exchange Hall to housing. Selby says it would be great to have a West Acton Village-type development between 3 School Street and School Street Garage. Josh says it would be great to have a good faith conversation about making the Jones Tavern property into a commercial property; Selby notes that it is owned by a non-profit. Mike wonders about the investment of CPC money (?) into Exchange Hall, and Dan Malloy wonders about its zoning. The CPC investment is small, and a zoning change is pending. Larry tables further discussion of this until we can read over the South Acton Village Plan from March '95, and perhaps invite David Hahn to a future meeting.

- Proposed changes to drive-up zoning regulations: Derrick says the only businesses that would afford to have drive-ins would be big chains. He worries about Acton Pharmacy if CVS gets a drive-thru. Larry says it's a textbook example of a drive-up opportunity. Mike says that, especially in the age of Covid, we should be considering how to expand drive-thru. Larry tries to get a sense of the committee's feelings on drive-thrus; there was a range of opinions, from all in (Larry) to agnostic-skeptical (Josh) to special permits (Ann and Derrick). Selby explains that special permits would require approval from the Planning Board; a by-right permit would just allow you to have a drive thru if you meet the given requirements. Once this gets to a public hearing before the Planning Board, followed by Town Meeting, a unified voice from the EDC could be useful. Dan Malloy says a survey showed overwhelming support for drive-thrus. Selby is working with the Planning Department to draft potential zoning changes. David Cote shares that Westford just changed its by-laws in October to accommodate drive-thrus; he is in favor of a general statement of support.

- Commercial vacancies (Selby): Selby is seeking the assistance of the EDC to check the current state of vacancies in town. We eagerly divvy up the town into slices. He brings up an email he and Jon Benson received that sought to add zoning flexibility along Great Road.

Current zoning allows for four housing units per property, plus a business. Mike Majors raises concerns about increased housing; Jon Benson shares them, and says a balance must be achieved. Assabet River Co-op and the Acton-Boxborough Islamic Center are both looking for space.

- CDBG micro enterprise block grant (Selby): Community Development Block Grant! We've received \$1.6 million, together with four other communities, to give out up to \$10,000 micro-enterprise grants for day care assistance, food banks, and other small businesses. They are targeted for lower-income recipients. Other communities refer to these people as unicorns, but Selby thinks he can find more here. More information to come in February.

- Powder Mill Road Corridor—Feedback and Next Steps: Ann Chang's impression was that it was Maynard-centric. Dan says that 90% of the waterfront is private property, which makes it harder to achieve what everyone wanted. He didn't hear anything about land acquisition to reach that vision. The relevant properties in Acton are a planned apartment complex, a medical marijuana facility, and a sewage treatment plant. The recommendation is that zoning is consistent across the town lines, and that we consider 'form-based code' so that the looks of buildings are uniforms. Ann raises a concern about the planned international school, and that Maynard and Acton-Boxborough should get more information about it before it gets further down the road.

4. General EDC Business

- Meeting schedule for next six months: Town Meeting will likely be in late June again instead of April, so Larry suggests that we keep our monthly meeting schedule until April, when we might meet biweekly instead.

- This year's EDC entry in Acton Annual Report: Larry requests email from each of us to remind him of what we did this year.

- Latest EDC Member—David Cote: Jon Benson will move from a full-time member of the EDC to liaison to create space for David on the committee to become an associate member.

5. Proposed EDC Projects for 2021: Larry says to think about this for the next meeting.

III. More Regular Business

7. Updates from members: There are none.

8. Update from Director of Economic Development: In our current climate, there are still two businesses moving in: LaserMD Med Spa is returning to Acton from Westford, into the old Elements Massage place in Brookside Shops (Elements moved across the street). The Bee's Knees British Import business will be moving into West Acton, at the intersection of Mass Ave. and Windsor. By February or so, he'll have progress reports on tax incentives from AES and Insulet.

9. Next meeting—4 February 2021

Move to adjourn passes unanimously at 8:33.

IV. **Consent Items**

9. None

Additional materials

- Draft meeting minutes from 5 November 2020