



## Economic Development Committee Minutes

4 November 2021

7:00 pm

Room 9, Acton Town Hall  
472 Main Street, Acton, MA

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 11/4/21, held in person at town hall.

Called to Order: 7:10 pm

Members Present: Mike Majors, Ann Chang, Larry Kenah, Derrick Chin (by Zoom), Chris Hardy, Dan Malloy, Shirley Ming, Catherine Usoff

Members Absent: David Cote, Peter Daniel, David Didriksen, Fran Arsenault

### **Preliminaries**

Call the Roll

Chris Hardy (joined by Zoom at first and arrived in person about 7:44)

Welcome and Introductions – occurred when Chris joined the meeting in person.

Chris is a software engineer who has lived in town 7 years. He is interested in understanding what pulls businesses into Acton and how we keep them here, and he wants to help. Members of EDC introduced themselves to Chris.

### I. **Regular Business**

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meetings
  - 7 October 2021 – approved by all members present in the meeting room except for Shirley Ming (not at October 7 meeting) and Chris Hardy (new member)
- Public participation - none

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

- ED Director – Brief update (Larry)

Larry represented the EDC in the hiring process for the new Director of Economic Development. He summarized the process from his perspective. A small group (Larry Kenah, John Mangiaratti (Town Manager), Andrea Becerra (Sustainability Director), Kristen Guichard (Planning Director), and Marianne Fleckner (HR Director)) met with six candidates by Zoom over a period of three days. There were seven questions that were asked of every candidate. John M. also

presented each candidate with the same scenario to which they were asked to respond. After receiving feedback from the interviewers, John M. (in consultation with the HR Director) chose two finalists for the position. Ann Chang indicated that John M. told the ALG (Acton Leadership Group) that he has chosen an individual for the job and that he expects everything to be wrapped up by Thanksgiving. The candidates had varied backgrounds and experience levels with regard to local government experience, business experience, and economic development expertise. The background/expertise of the person will have implications for how the EDC works with the new Director of Economic Development.

- Next steps with working groups (All)

For Chris' benefit, Larry provided some background on the committee's recent history (working with Selby and becoming more involved in economic development). The town is currently replacing Selby, but with a more focused job description (only economic development, rather than ED and Land Use which was Selby's job).

50 Nagog Park – Dan pursued Ann's question about the solar panels, Dan's contact is going to check with the developer to see if they are interested in installing solar panels. Dan stated that the working group does not have an ongoing purpose because the 50 Nagog Park property is being developed and there is not sufficient direction at this time to develop a more general marketing plan.

Dan wants to propose a new working committee, prompted by an article about company called [opengov.com](http://opengov.com). The article was about the town of Newton implementing a new software system, OpenGov, to enable better permitting and licensing workflow. Dan proposes a new working group to investigate enterprise software and evaluate the town activities that would benefit from such a software. Ann thinks this is a good idea, and that the town manager and select board would be interested in it. Dan will do a first pass at writing up what the software is and how it might help the town. Shirley asked if the software would reduce costs associated with the processes as well as increase efficiencies?

Business Inventory working group – Larry thinks the group should wait until the new director is hired.

Ann – nothing has happened with Maple Street project, looking for grant money. Ann wanted them to put in charging stations.

Ann – High Street – they are just doing the 4 way stop sign and not other ideas they had originally entertained.

Larry – Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP) effort. Even at the end, Larry doesn't know what constitutes a good plan or bad plan in the context of this effort. At last minute went from 4 to 10 projects and finally to 11 projects as a result of the public forum. Ann said that the next

stage of the LRRP effort is to get grants money to proceed with the projects identified in the plan.

Chris made a pitch for new working group addressing communication between the town and citizens/businesses.

Strategic planning group – Catherine indicated that the group’s work is on hold until a new director provides input.

### III. More Regular Business

- Updates from members

Ann takes minutes of the ALG (Acton Leadership Group). She brought up an issue from a recent meeting of the group. The group was talking about property taxes and the possibility that taxes will increase as a result of recent major increases in the selling prices of Acton homes. There will not be a general reassessment of property values as that takes place every five years and was done a few years ago. Some property values could be increased as a result of recent home sales near them because of the “neighborhood factor.” If the amount for residential taxes increases significantly, the business share will drop to about 9% of the total tax revenue. This will put more pressure on commercial development as residents see higher property tax bills. Ann will speak to the town manager to recommend that the town inform homeowners ahead of time before new tax bills go out with higher assessments. If the rates stay the same and the valuations go up, it will be a windfall for the town – what will they spend the money on? Is there a way to reduce rates in light of higher valuations to maintain the same overall residential property tax burden?

Ann talked to the owner of the Asian Market – said reason that he has been delayed in opening is that he cannot find employees. He did not mention that he was having any problems with the town.

Derrick thinks that the software platform Dan mentioned is worth pursuing. This is the type of thing the planning department should be focused on as it could support greater economic development. The town is being more proactive in pursuing available grants, but are the grants adequately aligned with the key goals for the town? Ann suggested that since Derrick is on Planning Board and often works closely with Kristen Guichard on Planning Board issues, he has the opportunity to keep the EDC better informed of grants the town is pursuing.

Mike Majors showed the committee a new Caroll Spinney Way street sign. He announced that the town will put the sign on the small road that runs by the entrance to the Roche Bros. parking lot.

- Next meetings
  - 18 November – confirmed that EDC will meet
  - 2 December – confirmed that EDC will meet

- 16 December – confirmed that EDC **will not** meet on this date

IV. **Consent Items**

- None

Adjourn – 8:59 p.m.

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