



Economic Development Committee Minutes
17 February 2022

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 2/17/22, held remotely, supported by Zoom.

Called to Order: 7:06 pm

Members Present: Mike Majors, Ann Chang, David Didriksen, Larry Kenah, Dan Malloy, Shirley Ming, Catherine Usoff, Chris Hardy

Select Board Member Present: Fran Arsenault (joined after roll call)

Town Employee present: Julie Pierce Onos

Members Absent: Peter Daniel, Derrick Chin, David Cote

Preliminaries

Call the Roll

Preamble

New Preamble (Town of Acton Board and Committees, script for remotely conducted meetings), read by Committee Chair Larry Kenah. For text of the preamble, please see January 6, 2022 meeting which was the first time it was read at the beginning of the meeting.

Introductions – none needed

I. **Regular Business**

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meetings
 - 3 February 2022 – minutes approved unanimously with small addition of name of Executive Director of Greater Merrimack Valley Convention & Visitors Bureau (to be provided by Julie)
- Public participation

Terra Friedrichs expressed a concern that a business on Route 2A was approached by someone from the town asking if they want sewers but didn't say anything about the costs associated with sewers.

EDC members concurred that the costs need to be included in a discussion but no one was aware of specific town employees asking businesses about sewers at this time.

II. New/Special Business

1. Online permitting systems, business processes, and all that (Dan Malloy)

Dan Malloy put together a summary document and sent it to EDC members ahead of the meeting that includes a brief description of available options for permitting/licensing and the value proposition for implementing an e-permitting system that is cloud based (like OpenGov.com). He included two case studies in the summary document (Cranberry Township, PA with population of 31,000 and Salem, MA with a population of about 44,000).

Dan asked, “how does Acton currently do permitting and licensing now?” Julie said that some parts of the system are electronic. Staff are transcribing and maintaining some of the documents manually now.

Dan – implementing an enterprise system will require the town to document the flow of the processes they want to have supported by the system. Cranberry Township was able to reduce the time needed for the processes and was able to decrease the number of inspectors needed. The benefit to Salem was that they could increase the type of permits they could do and they could collect more permit fees with the new system. Another benefit was automated billing. Both towns had an implementation period of about 6 months.

Julie – the concerns raised by the EDC have also been raised internally by town employees. The town just hired a consultant, The [Collins Center for Public Management](#) at UMass Boston, to start at the beginning and map out the relevant processes. The consultant is going through all of the systems/processes that could be automated and looking at the various systems available to support the processes.

Dan – what can the EDC do to help facilitate the project?

Ann – one of the features the EDC should be interested in is the renewal of licenses for businesses.

Julie – doesn’t think there is anything the EDC needs to do right now.

Dave D. – if they have hired a consultant, could they talk to Dan who has already done some of the research.

Dave D. – sometimes it is good to look at processes in a different way and not just how it is done now. It can be helpful to look at how other towns do the processes. Example – common victualler license. Process has been that the business person has to remember to call and renew the license each year. The town doesn’t send an invoice. Only the Select Board can give a victualler license.

Larry – if someone is coming in from the outside, they will have worked with many other towns and will be able to apply that knowledge to getting information about the processes.

Julie – In the past, what kinds of things have the EDC done to support these kinds of projects?

Dan – not looking for work, but is interested in the town obtaining technology to improve the processes in town.

Catherine – we should send a letter of support and advocate for including the “voice of the customer,” meaning the businesses that interact with the town. Ann agreed.

Julie – when they do settle on a system, it will be to support citizens and town employees as well as businesses.

Dan- with enterprise software, should be looking for a platform that will support the continuum of services that can be automated (financials, etc.).

Larry – If going to select an enterprise platform, in order to be successful, have to focus on a certain area and EDC should support focusing on the areas that affect businesses (including contractors that support residents of the town). Once they have success in the first area, then they can expand to other areas. It is all about the implementation.

Dan – In Salem, they picked a core process to start. They picked building permits because it involves several departments.

Larry – does the town have a working group for this yet?

Julie – not yet. The current system is Munis.

Larry – got the impression that it was not one implementation of Munis, that there was not coordination between the different departments using Munis.

Julie – her impression – Munis has different applications within it so that different departments are using it for different things.

Ann – Munis was put in for payroll and for the finance department to deal with taxes.

Larry – if there is a committee put together to look at the new system, should EDC ask for a representative to be put on the committee – general agreement that Dan or Catherine could represent the EDC in this capacity.

Dan – will take a stab at a first draft of a memo to the town manager and Select Board to convey EDC input about the process project on which the consultant will be working. He will work with Dave and Catherine to get it in shape before the next meeting.

NOTE: There was an item removed from the agenda about the role of a Tenant Advocate. The item was in the draft agenda but removed from the final agenda that was posted to the town website. In the future, Larry will try to remember, if there are changes, to send the final agenda to the committee as well as posting the updated agenda to the website. There was a very brief discussion of what the agenda item was, but it was determined that the topic of a tenant advocate is not within the purview of the EDC.

2. Economic Development in the Town of Acton

- Continuing the conversation between the committee and Julie Pierce Onos, Director of Economic Development

Larry asked if there are larger topics to which we want to devote a future agenda item. He suggested looking at, for example, the amount of land that Acton has for commercial development compared to our nearby neighbors.

Ann would like Julie to regularly update us on all the grants that have been received related to business. Larry suggested that Julie could put together a list of grants applications with their status that she maintains and shares with the EDC.

III. More Regular Business

3. Updates from members

Fran has been to the Asian Market (around 6:30 one evening) and bought some items. There were a few people there.

Shirley said that the owners of the Market seem to be responsive to concerns of customers, responding to a relevant Facebook message which a customer relayed from WeChat (a social media app that many Chinese Americans use).

Mike asked for an EDC tour of new fire station and for Julie to give an update on new businesses coming in to town.

Fran can set up a fire station tour for EDC members who are interested.

Ann commented on the topic of preparing for the 250th anniversary of April 19, 1775. There are some people already working on the celebration in other towns, but it doesn't look like Acton is doing much yet.

Mike suggests that the planning committee for the event should consist of a group of former Select Board members.

Dan brought up that the state has put out their plan for dealing with fossil fuel. He asked if the Select Board is looking at how the state's position compares to Acton's stance. Fran indicated that there has been no mention of this yet.

Larry sent the completed annual EDC report to the town. He expressed his thanks to Catherine for making a list of activities over the last year, and helping with the report.

ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE PREVIOUS MEETING:

Julie will create a Google form to collect data from businesses in Acton and will ask for EDC input at the next meeting. STATUS: She wants to wait until she sees what information we have.

Larry will send the latest business inventory (data collected by EDC members last year and collated in an Excel spreadsheet) to Julie and will let EDC members know what he has sent to her. STATUS: Larry will get a list to Julie

Fran will bring up the need for planning work to begin for the April 19, 2025 celebration at the next Select Board meeting. STATUS: Fran did this and thinks she will continue doing this.

Dan will put together a document for Julie's benefit that summarizes the enterprise software (OpenGov) and the case for documenting (and improving) processes that support businesses. STATUS: Dan did this and discussion occurred earlier in this meeting.

4. Update from Economic Development Director

There have been many grant applications completed, but Julie doesn't know about any new grants that have been awarded. With regard to sewers, the town got a grant to do a sewer feasibility study. The town has put together a request for proposal to have the study done.

With regard to Mike's question about what is going on with new businesses, Julie said that there were 8 new DBA applications filed and 9 renewals. Two car dealerships in town are being replaced by new dealerships.

Julie will meet with Catherine and Dave Cote about strategic planning. One of the things that will flow out of that will be the database update.

The fixed route CAT bus has been resurrected since COVID, with a slightly changed the route to reflect most requested stops – they took out West Acton stop and added a stop at Trader Joes Plaza.

Julie announced that there will be a forum for business owners to ask them about transportation (for staff and customers). Information about the sessions (sent by Julie to Catherine after the meeting) is included here. Any member who would like to attend should register online.

AREA COLLABORATION: TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is important as businesses look to hire new workers and how new customers reach the major business corridors in Town. Acton collaborates regionally to provide transportation and paratransit for senior citizens, people with disabilities and the public. Cross Town Connect provides local transit from North Acton along the Great Road Corridor, through Town Center to the Library and Town Hall, and to the South Acton MBTA station. Read more about it [here](#) to see if it would benefit your staff or your shoppers.

The Town is hosting a forum for business owners regarding transportation. We want to hear about the transportation needs of your staff and of your potential customers. This is a great time to help shape the future of transportation services in our Town. For your convenience, there will be two forums held: Tuesday March 1 at 6pm or Wednesday March 2 at 10am. Register [here](#) for Tuesday March 1st or [here](#) for Wednesday March 2nd. Questions? Send a message to jpierceonos@actonma.gov!

A few years ago, there was an Acton manufacturing summit that was focused on hiring. The businesses are interested in making it more regional but rotating it between different locations. In collaboration with MassHire, there is an upcoming, in-person, meeting of manufacturing companies on March 30, 9:00 a.m. at Minuteman Tech High School. The idea is to get manufacturing employers in the same room as the towns (potential locations) as well as the schools that would be training students to be future workers. Once there is an event registration page, Julie will share that with EDC members. In the meantime, members can e-mail Julie if they are interested in attending.

Julie asked if the EDC might want to switch to monthly meeting as the “to-do” list grows. We could use the time in-between meetings for smaller working groups to do EDC work.

Julie has been meeting with individual business owners. She met with the owners of the Dunkin’ Donuts at the Powder Mill shopping plaza. They have other locations in other towns. They are strongly considering moving their Powder Mill Road location to Maynard to capture more customers but also to be able to have a drive-through. Julie said that they were great to talk to, and were transparent. The Dunkin’ Donuts locations in Acton consistently donate to the schools, are good citizens of the town.

Dave D. asked what is going into the Johnny Rockets location? There is a rumor that it is a Rolling Pizza storefront, but that has not been confirmed.

Julie said that Santa Fe Burritos is going in next to TC Landos. Julie met the general manager.

5. Next meetings

- Thursday, 3 March 2022

Larry would like this to be a remote meeting. Julie doesn't think any committees will be forced to have in-person meetings. It is easier to plan if we determine ahead of time to be remote.

Dave D. wants to follow up on Julie's comment about going to a once a month meeting.

Larry said that we were meeting twice a month in the past to prepare for town meeting. He asked if there are any articles coming up at the next town meeting that will require EDC input. Fran and Ann will try to find out.

- Thursday, 17 March 2022

IV. **Consent Items**

None

Additional materials

- Draft meeting minutes from 3 February 2022

Adjourn – 9:05 p.m.

ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE MEETING:

Dan will draft a memo to the town manager and Select Board to communicate the thoughts of the EDC relative to the town's business process analysis and potential IT solutions, informed by Dan's research into the OpenGov enterprise platform. Catherine and Dave D. will work with Dan on this.

Julie will create a list of grants to regularly share with the EDC to include their status (applied, granted) and related information.

Fran will set up a tour of the new fire station for the EDC members.

Julie will invite EDC members to the business forum regarding local transportation needs.

Julie will send information to EDC members about the manufacturing meeting to take place at Minuteman high school on March 30.

Item carried over from previous meeting's list: Larry will send the latest business inventory (data collected by EDC members last year and collated in an Excel spreadsheet) to Julie and will let EDC members know what he has sent to her.

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