



Economic Development Committee Minutes  
7 April 2022

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 4/7/22, held remotely, supported by Zoom.

Called to Order: 7:04 pm

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

Also present: Julie Pierce Onos, Director of Economic Development; Peter Berry and Caroline Tripp, guests

Members Absent: Peter Daniel, David Cote, Chris Hardy

**Preliminaries**

Call the Roll – attendance is noted above

Preamble

New Preamble (Town of Acton Board and Committees, script for remotely conducted meetings), read by 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.

I. **Regular Business**

- Review of meeting minutes from previous meetings
  - 17 March 2022 – approved by all present, except for Dan Malloy and Larry Kenah who were not at the March 17 meeting.
- Public participation – one call-in user
- Update from Economic Development Director

Julie reported that the online permitting group is continuing to meet.

Julie announced that the town of Acton has been awarded a FY22 grant from the MA Office of Travel and Tourism's Recovery Grant Program of \$78,000 for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Wayfinding project from the LRRP (Local Rapid Recovery Program). It's a joint collaboration between Acton and Concord and spearheaded by Economic Development and Planning Departments in both Towns. All the money has to be committed by end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2022).

Here's the Commonwealth's 4/5/22 press release:

<https://www.massitsallhere.com/2022/04/05/massachusetts-announces-4-million-in-travel-tourism-recovery-grants-to-80-organizations/>

Here's the Town of Acton's 4/6/22 press release:

<https://jgpr.net/2022/04/06/town-of-acton-awarded-78000-travel-and-tourism-recovery-grant/>

With regard to new DBAs, Julie reported that there were 13 certificates with 3 of those representing new DBAs, the others are renewals.

Julie said that the manufacturing summit that took place at Minuteman Tech the previous Wednesday was successful, with about 50 attendees. The conversation got deep enough to go beyond the surface of issues affecting manufacturers and the vocational school. Attendees committed to meeting quarterly.

Cooperative Elder Services has a ribbon cutting coming up, Julie will send information to the EDC members.

With regard to Kelley's Corner, Julie is continuing to meet with business owners, gathering their concerns, and supporting their work on a joint marketing effort.

Tom Moberg, Building Commissioner will attend the next meeting of the EDC. Representative(s) to discuss a proposed archaeological bylaw will also attend the next meeting.

Julie asked which members would like to go on tour of Haartz - Catherine, Dan, and Mike said they would like to participate. Julie will check with Dave C. and Chris.

Mike Majors had a question related to the manufacturing consortium. He said that the reason they got started was they got tax incentives to hire locally. Could we get a report from them about how the hiring is going? Julie said that she knew Haartz had about 30 openings, but she doesn't know about Insulet. Mike stated that since there were tax incentives involved, it would be good to see how the companies are doing with regard to their hiring obligations.

## II. New/Special Business

1. Discussion about two town meeting articles about bags and plastics
  - Peter Berry and Caroline Tripp

Peter introduced himself to the committee as a former Select Board member and active participant in several other committees and initiatives in Acton. He and Caroline are part of a group that drafted two warrant articles about banning plastics and charging for bags at checkout.

### **First Article: Polystyrene and Disposable Plastic Reduction Bylaw**

Ban on one type of plastic (polystyrene, symbol 6), including rigid polystyrene (clear plastic), plastic knives, forks, spoons, clear plastic clamshell containers. Any kind of plastic straws, stirrers, chopsticks, and splash sticks are banned because they are not recyclable at all regardless of what they are made of. Food-safe plastics (labeled as 1 and 5) are acceptable. Bylaw would prohibit retailers from putting plastic straws and utensils in take-out bags automatically.

David D. – gets it, it makes sense. Question – plastic lids for coffee cups? What replaces that?  
Caroline – dome lids are made of plant-based plastic. There are replacements for the lids. There are probably differences in price for some units, and there are a range of units available and prices. Suppliers sell them as units, when you get the cup, you get the lid.

Peter – Acton consumers are mostly environmentally conscious.

Dan – is supportive of what they are trying to do, but has a problem with how they are executing it. Because of inflation, this is a sensitive time to be doing this. The information provided in the materials is outdated and doesn't provide a fair analysis of the costs associated with the proposal.

Peter – legitimate concern. They are assuming that businesses will pass the costs on to consumers, and because Acton citizens are environmentally conscious, they will be willing to pay it. Consumers can bring their own cups. What they are trying to attack is the practice of using disposable items.

Dan – part of the bylaw should be that the town agrees that we are going to set up a purchasing group to help buy the items at lower cost.

Peter – was planning to do an information campaign to help businesses. It makes sense to try and get some type of purchasing group, working with Julie and Andrea (sustainability director).

Caroline – the big chains are already doing this and they are able to buy at more favorable prices.

Dan – structure of the operations are very punitive, with fees and Board of Health as package police. Would they consider an alternative approach – giving incentives, promoting businesses because they are green, and getting out of the inspections and punishment business. Board of Health should focus on health issues and get out of package police. The town should fund an initiative to help the businesses switch to more expensive supplies, and also promote the businesses that are doing the right things. What kind of fees could the town waive for businesses?

Peter – can talk to the town about that. They modeled this on bylaws in other towns. The health department makes sense because they already inspect all the restaurants in town. Peter thinks the Board of Health charges a fee for inspecting. There may be a way to waive that, or reduce it for those who comply with the restrictions.

Dave D – had sign bylaws in the past that created a lot of bad will. They were called zoning enforcement officers. A better approach would be to provide incentives. Town could give away reusable items.

Caroline – got grants to give away bags when they banned plastic bags. Their follow-up plan is to celebrate businesses. The intention is not to have the health department troll for violators.

Larry – the punitive tone comes across in the bylaw.

Peter – the group rewrote section about the violations from the original version of the proposal. Violating a rule of the Board of Health is \$10 per day.

Julie – There have been a few outreach efforts with regard to the proposals. Julie included something in her latest newsletter and Fran created a flyer to let businesses know about the EDC meeting. Fran gave the flyer to 26 businesses). The supply cooperative is an interesting idea, it has come up in town hall. If there is going to be a cooperative, it should go beyond just these products. The Board of Health is ok with being the enforcers about the plastics ban, but not the bag fee.

Catherine – asked about recycling and what businesses do with their waste. Are they following through to ensure that items are properly recycled? What about customers? Are they correctly recycling the items they receive from the businesses? Should the town focus more on communication and education related to proper recycling to increase the chances that things end up where they are supposed to?

Peter – recycling facilities are not great on plastics. Private haulers do not all collect recyclables.

Caroline – recycles through private hauler in single stream. Her son is in the business and he says that the companies do not do a great job on recycling.

Catherine – There should be more education and communication.

Peter – agrees, the more he learns, the more confusing it is. He agrees that we should put out an educational campaign.

Mike – He thinks we should wait until the state has a law so it is fair across municipalities. The recyclers should fix the problems that prevent some of the containers from being effectively recycled (like containers that fall off the belt). Polystyrene is not being used by many of the restaurants today as far as he can tell. The timing of the articles is not great and businesses will likely be confused. If the bylaw had a later target date, it would give more time for businesses to change their processes. He thinks that Roche Bros. does package meat in Acton and currently puts it in Styrofoam plates.

Caroline – 54 different communities have passed this, in the hopes that the state will pass a law, but the bills don't get out of committee.

Ann – rather than having Acton set up an organization for purchasing the allowable items, should talk to other towns that have passed the bylaws to work together to increase buying power. The merchant is paying for the more expensive compostable items and people are throwing them in trash cans and they are not getting to the right place. There has to be a way for the cost to be picked up by consumers and have them be educated about proper disposal. We have to start somewhere and the fact that state legislature is so slow prompts towns to take action. The state will only move when a large enough section of the state is doing this.

Dave D. – It would be much better if you could work with merchants instead of putting them in an adversarial role. If merchants felt they were included instead of being punished, it would be an opportunity to create goodwill.

Shirley – questions about the merchant's reactions, the group said they talked to 56 and only 3 raised concerns about costs.

Caroline - it was a big range. Some said they were waiting for this. Lot of them said they don't use some of things but they do use some things. Some asked what would they use for straws if they didn't use a plastic straw. The group that is using a fair amount of styrofoam are those doing a lot of take-out business.

Shirley.- Are they reaching out to the nonprofit entities that are using takeout containers?

Caroline – they haven't talked to Acton Food Pantry. They went to businesses in 2019 but then the pandemic hit and it wasn't time to roll it out then. There are some places they talked to that are having labor shortages, and don't have time to talk them about it.

Terra (call-in user) – very excited about plastic composting at the transfer station. Board of Health is already a package police, and this is a health issue. Loves the idea of a purchasing coalition. This is a prod to the state. She is supportive of the EDC and hopes they will work with the town to support things that are good for business and the environment.

Larry – supports what they are up to. It is about presentation and rollout. For places like Stop & Shop and Roche Bros, it's no big deal. Dan mentioned purchasing coops and Peter said he thought it was a good idea. But someone needs to lead the effort. Ann suggested working with other towns on this. A small number of people need to pick up the banner and lead this. People of Acton are more climate virtuous, and rather than having them say we are on the right side of this, they should also be willing to provide funding to take some of the cost pressure off some of the businesses. The Board of Health sent out a questionnaire and no one responded and they interpreted it as good news. However, the reason owners/managers probably didn't respond is that they are too busy running their businesses.

Caroline – that is why they went to talk to them rather than just send out a questionnaire.

## SECOND BYLAW

The second bylaw concerns requesting home rule exception to allow Acton to impose a minimum checkout bag fee of \$0.15 per bag. The Massachusetts Attorney General rejected Lincoln's bylaw as not being compatible with state law. If the warrant article is approved, the request for home rule would go to the state legislature, it would have to go through both the house and senate and be signed by governor. As long as the local community wants it, they usually approve it.

Larry – what problem are we solving here? It is more evident with the plastics ban.

Caroline – interesting question. FinComm opposed the original plastic bag ban, one concern was that it was just going to cause more use of paper bags. The best way to reduce all use of check out bags and move a disposable society to change behavior is to charge a fee. The \$.15 is somewhat arbitrary. The group was told that \$.10 was too low.

Peter – Idylwilde charges \$.25. Caroline says that it has caused change in behavior.

Dave D. - Why is this needed? In a lot of situations in stores, it is not a trivial matter to figure out how much to charge for bags used. For smaller merchants, having customers bring bags from the outside is a security concern (people can steal merchandise by putting it into their own bags). Some people don't like the reusable bags because they think they are unsanitary. Another case where it doesn't make sense – every prescription has to be in a bag (HIPPA regulations). It is another negative thing, disadvantaging the merchants in Acton.

Catherine – we don't know the total implications for businesses. They will have to pay sales tax and it is not clear if all merchants can easily state the specific item on sales receipt as required by the proposed bylaw.

Dan – this seems like a nuisance rather than a real solution.

Mike – Agrees with consensus. What problem are we trying to solve, confusing, seems arbitrary, and is unnecessary. There are too many unknown consequences.

Larry – parts of this haven't been thought out, particularly with different types of bags that are in all the retailers. Both of these articles were presented to the Select Board before FinComm and EDC were informed about it. They should have a public hearing about it.

Caroline – small bags for cards and prescription bags are not included in the bylaw because the bylaw applies to checkout bags.

Catherine – there is some confusion in the current version of the bylaws but presumably the Board of Health will figure out the details in order to enforce it.

Peter – reason they went to Select Board early was that they needed to know if they would put it on the warrant, avoiding the necessity of getting signatures to get it on the warrant.

Caroline – It is easy enough to do a flyer about what is being proposed. What is more helpful is to provide more detailed educational information.

Dave D. – Is this the language that will be presented at town meeting? It seems that it is not ready for prime time. He thinks it needs to be fleshed out more.

Ann – would like to allow wooden chopsticks.

Caroline and Peter – said they are allowed, should specify that it is plastic chopsticks that would be banned.

Dan – Has Select Board responded to the proposed bylaws?

Peter - They voted 4-1 to put it on the warrant. When the final warrant is prepared, then they go through every article. Now that the Select Board has put the articles on the warrant, they could have a community forum.

Larry – Does Select Board have any input?

Peter – what they presented to Select Board is what they voted to put in the warrant. There are a few minor changes. They go to legal counsel and there might be some changes as a result of that.

Dan – if, based on what they heard from EDC, they wanted to make changes, could they?

Peter – has to get something to John Mangiaratti to get to town counsel. They probably have the flexibility to give John something a little different than what they voted on, but it has to be done quickly.

Julie – first Select Board votes what goes on the warrant and then they will decide which things on the warrant they will support.

Peter – the group (who proposed the articles) has a meeting scheduled for next week and they will decide how they will go forward. If they make changes, they will send the revised articles to EDC.

Dave D. – will these be presented separately at town meeting? Peter – yes

### III. More Regular Business

#### 2. Updates from members

Larry will not be here at the next meeting due to a family obligation.

#### **ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN PREVIOUS MEETING (These items were not discussed at the meeting):**

Item carried over from previous meeting's list: Larry will draft a letter to the Select Board to express the EDC's dissatisfaction with the process that led to the two warrant articles being approved for inclusion in the town meeting warrant. **After the meeting of March 17, Larry indicated that he has not done this.**

Item carried over from a prior 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.

Julie will ask someone from the building department to come to a future EDC meeting to educate committee members about the permitting and inspection processes.

Julie will reach out to EDC members to see who is interested in touring the Haartz facility and if there is interest, will set up a visit for interested members.

Fran will create and distribute a flyer to town businesses that informs them about the proposed warrant articles and invites business owners/managers to the next EDC meeting.

Julie will follow up with Larry about adding a Planning Board representative to the EDC to take Derrick Chin's place. **After the meeting, Larry indicated that he has been in touch with the Planning Department and is awaiting word from them about a replacement for Derrick.**

Larry or Catherine will communicate with Peter Berry to forward additional questions and request materials ahead of Peter's visit to the EDC meeting on April 7.

3. Next meetings

- Thursday, 21 April 2022
- Thursday, 5 May 2022
  - Last meeting before town meeting

IV. **Consent Items**

None

Additional materials

- Draft meeting minutes from 17 March 2022
- Other materials used in this meeting can be found at <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-14921>

Adjourn – 8:59 p.m.

ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE MEETING:

Julie will check with Dave C. and Chris to see if they want to participate in a tour of Haartz. Julie will then arrange the tour for interested members.

For more information about the Economic Development Committee, please send email to [EDC@actonma.gov](mailto:EDC@actonma.gov)