



Economic Development Committee Minutes  
21 April 2022

These are the minutes of the EDC meeting of 4/21/22, held remotely, supported by Zoom.

Called to Order: 7:19 pm

Members Present: Mike Majors, David Didriksen, Catherine Usoff, David Cote, Dan Malloy

Also present: Julie Pierce Onos, Director of Economic Development; Robert Ferrara, guest

Members Absent: Peter Daniel, Ann Chang, Shirley Ming, Larry Kenah, 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 acting Chair Catherine Usoff. 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
  - 7 April 2022, minutes approved by all members in attendance
- Public participation – Alissa Nicol and Terra Friedrichs attended the meeting to provide support to Bob Ferrara on the Archaeological Bylaw
- Update from Economic Development Director

Julie informed the committee of a ribbon cutting on Monday, April 25 for Cooperative Elder Services Inc. (CESI), and the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce Gala on May 5. The proceeds from the gala go toward scholarships for local students.

Catherine complimented Julie on her newsletter to the business community, Acton's Business Boost. She encouraged all EDC members to sign up for the newsletter. Julie provided the link for signing up:

<https://actonma.us14.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=0e992eae15e02d21783b3b006&id=cc5fa05a7a>

and the link to the latest issue: <https://mailchi.mp/d99db1ed2341/actons-business-boost-newsletter-march-9009439>

Julie reported that outreach to businesses in the Kelly's Corner area continues. She asked for EDC member(s) to volunteer to help her with contacts, and with event planning. Dan said he would talk with Julie to get more information and would consider helping her with this.

Julie provided an update relative to the grant received for wayfinding work on the Bruce Freeman trail. A Request for Quote (RFQ) was released and a designer was chosen. Julie has invited the designer to attend the next EDC meeting. She would like to obtain feedback on ideas from various stakeholder groups. Dave Didriksen volunteered to help Julie with outreach to the Great Road businesses. The grant money, awarded to Acton and Concord, has to be committed by June 30, 2022, the end of the current fiscal year.

## II. New/Special Business

### 1. Proposed Bylaw - Preservation of Archaeologically Significant Resources

- Robert V Ferrera - Acton Historical Commission

Robert Ferrara shared a powerpoint presentation about the proposed bylaw with some background information. The presentation was included in the docushare repository for this meeting. The purpose of the proposed bylaw is to survey and document "archaeologically significant features and resources within the Town prior to large areas of land disturbance of currently Undisturbed Land in archaeologically sensitive areas." The bylaw will add steps to the permitting process for certain projects (in sensitive areas as specified in the Acton Archaeological Sensitivity Maps) to allow review by the Historical Commission.

There was a Community Preservation Committee (CPC) grant of \$10,000 made to the Historical Commission to support the preliminary assessment required by the bylaw. A survey done by the town (with 178 responses) confirmed that most respondents agree that it is important to identify and document artifacts. If the preliminary assessment determines that the project would result in affecting archaeological resources, the Historical Commission will recommend that the applicant have an Intensive Archaeological Survey performed but this is voluntary. Acton's counsel recommended that the additional burden should be voluntary for private land owners. The additional steps will be taken for any projects on town-owned land. There are specific timelines in the bylaw that the Historical Commission and applicant need to adhere to. There is an attempt to minimize the delay for applicants that are subject to this new requirement.

Mr. Ferrara mentioned that Barbara Rhines, Cultural Resource Planner for Acton, has been very helpful to the Historical Commission, particularly in designing materials to support communication about the bylaw.

Dan asked who does the preliminary survey of the property. Mr. Ferrara answered that the survey is done by professional archaeologists at a rate of about \$1,000 per day. They expect only about 1-2 surveys needed per year.

There were a few questions about the impact of the bylaw on businesses, especially small businesses. Mr. Ferrara responded that since the bylaw pertains to previously undisturbed land, he did not expect a material impact on businesses in commercial areas.

Catherine noted a typo in section 3.2.1 which says “Within thirty (35) days after receipt. . . “ Mr. Ferrara will check into that and they will fix the typo. She also asked if an applicant decided not to do a recommended intensive survey if that fact would be public knowledge, and therefore increase the risk of negative public reaction. Mr. Ferrara said that because the meetings of the Historical Commission are public, that fact would be public knowledge.

Mike asked if there would be any provisions to extend the timeline if there were weather issues (e.g., frozen ground and/or lots of snow) that prevented the survey work from being done within the required timelines. Mr. Ferrara said he didn’t think there would be any exceptions to the timeline, but that he would check on that.

The EDC members in attendance voted to support the proposed bylaw with the understanding that Mr. Ferrara would get back to the committee with answers to their questions/issues:

1. How much will businesses be affected by this bylaw?
2. The typo in section 3.2.1 regarding 30 or 35 days.
3. The implications, if any, of adverse weather affecting the ability to survey the land.
4. The public nature of the applicant’s decision to pursue or not pursue a recommended intensive survey.

## 2. EDC Positions on TM Articles

Catherine referred to an e-mail from David Martin, Select Board Chair, to all town committees about the Town Meeting articles. David said that the Select Board would be voting on their positions about the articles at their Monday, April 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. If any committees wanted to provide input to the Select Board, they should send their input in time for Select Board members to read before the Monday night meeting. The EDC members agreed that they should get their input to the board in time for the Monday night meeting.

- Ban the Bags

Committee members provided comments on the updated version of the proposed “act authorizing the town of Acton to establish a minimum charge for a checkout bag.” The newest version excludes the section about fines and downplays enforcement.

Dave D. expressed his strong opposition to the proposal, citing the unfairness of placing an undue burden on merchants. It would be much better to focus on encouraging more people to do more things that are good for the environment.

Mike stated that during the height of COVID, there were bans on reusable bags. Things can change making the bag charge confusing and irrelevant at times. He would rather see public service announcements to encourage people to bring their own bags.

Dan cited the administrative complexity of the proposed regulation, particularly the requirement for the merchant to print something specific on the receipt to document the bag charge. The regulation does not clearly solve a problem.

Catherine noted that the most recent version of the proposed article with details about the types of bags that will be excluded actually makes the issue more confusing. There needs to be more education on recycling in general and promotion of less use of disposable items and more recycling.

Dave C. expressed a preference for a smaller bag fee like \$.05 per bag rather than the minimum of \$.15 proposed.

Catherine offered to draft a memo from the EDC to the Select Board in time for them to read it by their Monday (April 25) meeting.

- Ban the Plastics

Catherine stated that she thinks there are still many questions that remain in the proposed article. There needs to be significant education to implement the bylaw effectively and fairly. The Select Board should consider the EDC input regarding implementation. She feels the article will pass and that the EDC will not be able to stop it. There needs to be very clear and purposeful communication about the requirements.

Dan is glad that the authors backed off on policing and made the bylaw seem less punitive than the original version implied.

Dave D. suggested that confusion about the bylaw will likely result in customers blaming businesses. The town should step up and provide sufficient communication to explain the requirements clearly. While Dave D. supports the intent of the bylaw, he thinks the timeline is too short and the town should be more flexible and work with businesses to implement the requirements.

Dave C. asked if we could be specific about how the town should communicate their expectations, maybe by providing poster examples.

Mike suggests that the town should wait until the state comes up with regulations on plastics and polystyrene so that our local rules are not inconsistent with the state regulations.

Dan thinks it is not clear how the Board of Health will intervene if a business is not complying with the bylaw. He also prefers a reward vs. punishment approach. Dan suggested that the town should have some skin in the game and should use town funds to reward businesses that are complying with the bylaw and share best practices across businesses.

Alissa Nicol (community member) objected to statements regarding citizens being against businesses and the town not having skin in the game. Citizens at town meeting are customers that support businesses in town and they have repeatedly and strongly supported sustainability initiatives. If customers are making demands for sustainability bylaws, it doesn't seem like there will be customer backlash as suggested.

Dan stated that the participants at town meeting represent only a small percentage of total residents in town. In addition, this small group would impose additional costs on businesses as the replacement items required in the bylaw are more expensive than currently used items.

Dave D. stated that many customers are from other towns, and that businesses will do what their customers want in order to stay in business. The bylaw would force businesses to do very specific things and on a specific schedule, taking these decisions out of the hands of business owners.

Terra Friedrichs (community member) supports Alissa's points. If customers are willing to pay more to accommodate the extra cost of required items, then there will not be a problem. Terra does not think the bylaw will not result in businesses moving out of town. Terra said that the duty of the EDC is to pay attention to what is going on in town, and what is being planned. She encouraged the EDC to come up with their own plans. Terra also mentioned that there is a group of apartment dwellers who are not in favor of the bylaw, due to concern about increased costs.

Dan stated that the EDC's responsibility is to comment on things that are inflationary for businesses and that we are not in favor of ramming things like this through without any public forums.

Catherine summarized that the EDC is in agreement with the goal of the bylaw but that we have suggestions about the implementation.

Dan offered to draft a memo from the EDC to the Select Board in time for them to read it by their Monday (April 25) meeting.

### III. **More Regular Business**

#### 3. Updates from members

Dan commented that he has been inside the new XGolf place, and it is great. Boston Market moving in next door, at the end of the former Pier One space. There is a new café in the same shopping center that is expected to open in a few weeks. The owners have another location in Chelmsford.

Mike brought up a concern about an article on the upcoming town meeting warrant that bans natural gas hookups. At the 2021 town meeting, an article passed to ban fossil fuel connections in new construction. The state denied the town's home rule petition, however, in January, according to Dan. Mike said that there has been some research done to show that banning the fossil fuel connections will cause more problems for the environment than allowing them. There is not enough time before this town meeting, however, to sufficiently verify the research.

Catherine reminded the committee that she will be taking over as chair after the town meeting per Larry's e-mail to the members. She suggested that if any members had ideas about how the EDC should operate going forward or what the agenda should be, they should contact her individually. Now that Julie has been in her position for some time and has a better idea of her priorities, Catherine suggests that we hear from Julie right after town meeting about her goals and how we can support them. Catherine expressed a preference for the EDC to be more proactive going forward. Other members expressed a desire to raise the profile of the EDC. It appears that the town doesn't really care about economic development and that the current Select Board representative has not really engaged with the committee, having not attended many of our meetings.

**ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN PREVIOUS MEETING (These items were not discussed at the April 7 meeting or this 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 has arranged for Tom Moberg, Acton's Building Commissioner, to attend the June 2 meeting.**

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. **Julie checked with Dave C. and Chris Hardy about their interest, and she has arranged for the tour for interested EDC members, tentatively scheduled for May 6.**

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 March 3 meeting, Larry indicated that he has been in touch with the Planning Department and is awaiting word from them about a replacement for Derrick.**

4. Next meetings

- Thursday, 5 May 2022
  - Last meeting before town meeting
- Thursday, 19 May 2022

IV. **Consent Items**

None

Additional materials

- Draft meeting minutes from 7 April 2022
- Draft Bylaw - Preservation of Archaeologically Significant Resources  
<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-15023>

Adjourn – 8:40 p.m.

ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE MEETING:

Catherine will write a memo to the Select Board before their Monday, April 25 meeting to communicate the EDC position on “an act authorizing the town of Acton to establish a minimum charge for a checkout bag.”

Dan will write a memo to the Select Board before their Monday, April 25 meeting to communicate the EDC position on “polystyrene and disposable plastic reduction bylaw.”

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