

EDC Minutes – 6 August 2015

These are the meeting minutes from the Economic Development Committee (EDC) of the Town of Acton, Massachusetts. The meeting took place on 6 August 2015 at the Acton Town Hall in Room 204.

The meeting was called to order at 7:31 by Dick Calandrella.

Present: Allan Gulliver, Ann Chang, David Foley, Derrick Chin, Dick Calandrella, Doug Tindal, Larry Kenah

Not present: Bharat Shah, Chingsung Chang, Josh Fischel, Nancy Dinkel

Summary

Public Participation (1)

There was no public participation.

Meeting Minutes (2)

The minutes from the EDC meeting on 16 July 2015 were approved with two minor changes related to people's names.

Board of Selectmen Report (3)

There was no BoS report. Chingsung Chang did not attend the meeting.

Re-Organization of the EDC (4)

Dick Calandrella and David Foley will work with town hall to stagger the terms of EDC members. (Currently, nearly all terms expire in June 2017.) At the same time, they will ensure that Ann Chang's designation is correct (not an associate member).

We decided to leave the makeup of the committee as it stands. We will reexamine whether additional members from other town boards and committees are needed after we meet with the ED Director. We will work to add an additional member representing the Chamber of Commerce.

Ann Chang Appointment (5)

The full text of the agenda item reads:

Appointment of Ann Chang as EDC representative to the Site Plan Special Permit Study Committee

One of the recommendations of the Kelley's Corner Steering Committee is that the Planning Board (PB) will have review responsibility for site plan special permits. Currently, the Board of Selectmen is responsible for such reviews. The BoS has asked that Peter Berry assemble a committee to examine both sides of this issue and asked that affected committees including the EDC appoint a member to the study committee. Ann Chang volunteered to represent the EDC on this committee.

The EDC voted unanimously to support Ann's appointment.

In the discussion that preceded the vote, different EDC members expressed the pros and cons of moving this responsibility from BoS to PB.

- Some people support the idea that such responsibility should rest with elected boards or committees. The BoS is an elected body. The PB members are appointed.
 - Ann Chang pointed out that some planning boards elsewhere in Massachusetts have such responsibility but that those PBs are elected bodies.
- Supporters of the change noted that the BoS has neither the time nor the expertise to perform detailed review of site plan special permits.

Acton 2020 Update (6)

Larry Kenah provided a brief report from the most recent meeting of the Kelley's Corner Steering Committee that had taken place on the previous evening.

- There was significant discussion about increasing the height limit in Kelley's Corner and whether that increase would allow four story buildings.
 - What might such buildings look like? (Pictures illustrated both good designs and less pleasing alternatives.)
 - Are four story structures really required for a viable development?
- Can we offer four stories only under specific circumstances?
 - Master plan only
 - Fourth floor consists of roof, gables, etc. (Such structures are sometimes called three and a half stories.)
- There will be a demand for residential in any mixed-use development project.
- The discussion continued on flexibility (design guidelines) vs prescriptive (zoning) regulations.

There was a brief summary of the plan so far.

- Proposed infrastructure changes
- Housing (residential) included
- Need to provide incentives for bundling of parcels
- Need to provide incentives for residential

Ann Chang asked about the proposed zoning changes. Larry pointed out that the revised zoning changes only applied to developers who submitted a site master plan. There are only a small number of such sites in Kelley's Corner and all but one require that several properties are consolidated.

There was a brief discussion about four story structures in Kelley's Corner. The KCSC is also concerned about whether four story buildings are required and the impact that allowing such structures might have on the overall Kelley's Corner plan.

Mission and Goals and Objectives (7)

Allan Gulliver provided a brief update on the results from the subcommittee (Allan Gulliver, David Foley, and Larry Kenah) that would create messages for the EDC and select several high impact projects as the EDC's first assignments.

Messages

The subcommittee decided that the EDC mission statement contains an excellent but concise expression of the purpose and role for the EDC.

EDC Mission Statement

A thriving business community is essential to the future of Acton.

To that end, the Economic Development Committee will:

- Help attract, retain, and grow businesses and jobs in Acton and improve the economic environment
- Help increase the value and desirability of our community by supporting the needs of the current commercial and industrial businesses
- Promote the appropriate development, redevelopment, and renewal of commercial property

Initial Project List

The project list was slightly larger than what the committee could reasonably focus on. This expanded list will allow the entire committee to select the set of projects that the EDC will focus on in the short term.

- The EDC will act as strong and active advocate for sewers in West Acton.
- The EDC will continue to press for zoning changes for Brookside Shops that reflect the commercial reality of the shopping center.
- The EDC will continue its ombudsman role for existing and prospective Acton businesses.
- The EDC will work with appropriate town departments to ensure that EDC information on the town Web site is accurate and current.
- The EDC will work to promote tourism as an important contributor to economic health.
- The EDC will support transportation improvements that benefit businesses.

Derrick Chin suggested that the EDC avoid Brookside Shops until the dust settles around earlier violations and measures put in place to eliminate the violations.

Other Projects

Several key projects were explicitly excluded from the previous list for one reason or another. The reasons are worth stating to help support the projects that eventually “made the cut”.

- **HDC Sign Bylaws** – As David Foley has indicated, the HDC will not propose any changes to the HDC sign bylaws for fall town meeting. There is nothing for the EDC to work on at this particular time.
- **Business Database** – As we have expressed many times, this is a serious project that requires support from town departments. It will be postponed until the EDC meets with the ED Director.
- **Promotional Video** – This is a complicated effort. We will complete simpler marketing activities before tackling this.

Doug Tindal again recommended that we invite the person we are calling the “Southborough Guy” for his insights on economic development.

Town Businesses Database Update (8)

There was no discussion on this item.

We had a brief conversation whether this or other rarely discussed items should remain on the agenda. Larry Kenah argued that any item that remains on the agenda should also appear on the short list of projects that the EDC is actively working on.

Marketing Survey (9)

Doug Tindal reiterated his suggestion that we invite the “Southborough Guy” to a future EDC meeting.

Historic District Commission Sign Bylaw Progress (10)

David Foley indicated that there were no changes to this item since the last EDC meeting. He recommended that we remove this item from the agenda until the situation changes. In the meantime, he will keep us up to date.

During his brief update, David pointed out that when fines for signs are challenged in court, the municipality often has the fines overturned.

Ease of Doing Business (11)

There was no action on this item but we chose to leave this item on the agenda.

Upcoming Meetings (12)

In Closing

Brief Discussions

Dick Calandrella suggested that we invite Marc Foster from West Acton to attend a future EDC meeting

Doug Tindal recommended a joint meeting with the EDC and the Planning Board.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 pm.

These minutes were recorded by Lawrence J Kenah, EDC Clerk.