MINUTES
Economic Development Commission

Meeting Date: Thursday, January 11, 2024
7:00 p.m.

Meeting Place: Madison Town Campus, Meeting Room A and Zoom Online meeting

OPEN MEETING

1. Mr. Duques called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Members Present. Ryan Duques, Matt Bloom, Tom Hummel, Lindsay Johnson, Drew Sellitti, Greg Wagner, Andrew Wood

Mr. Sellitti introduced himself as a new member of the Economic Development Commission. He noted that he is a kindergarten teacher and has worked for a series of small businesses in the child development area.

2. Pledge of Allegiance. The Commission members stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Approval of minutes, November 9, 2023. On motion made by Mr. Bloom, and seconded by Mr. Wagner, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of November 9, 2023 as corrected.

          Correction: Add Andrew Wood as present at the November 9, 2023 meeting.

4. Public Comment. There were no members of the public present.

OLD BUSINESS

5. Review for possible action 2024 Priorities. Mr. Duques commented that at the November meeting the Commission members had discussed the idea of developing clear goals and priorities for the Commission to tackle in the upcoming year. This should include initiatives that are achievable and also in sync with the Strategic Plan and Plan of Conservation and Development and Board of Selectman's vision. With an understanding
of the importance of being transparent in the development of initiatives and priorities, in advance of this meeting, he and Ms. Johnson met with the First Selectwoman and obtained her feedback. Following the meeting First Selectwoman Lyons provided her follow-up comments and these have been provided to the Commission members. Highlights of her comments include:

- The EDC should align their initiatives with the goals laid out in the Strategic Plan, which emphasizes tourism, recreational amenities and cultural and historic assets. It is important to align growth policies with the community’s values, wants and needs.
- Business retention is a cornerstone of economic development and should remain a priority.
- Academy will play an important role in the downtown development and the EDC should assist this project in developing a strong business plan
- Affordable housing is a critical issue and the EDC could be of assistance to the current Affordable Housing Committee
- First Selectwoman Lyons has concerns about the tax incentive policy and feels there should be an effort to revisit the purpose of this policy.

Mr. Duques noted that First Selectwoman Lyons also shared some updates as follows:

- The Town has been advised that the State will be moving forward with the second platform for the train station with a target for it to be up and running in 2027. Major steps that need to take place include an inland wetland swap and the construction of a temporary road
- The Academy project opening has a target goal of 2027
- The Town has received funding through a grant for the second phase of the Madison Center Project. The plan needs to be updated with a goal of this being completed in 2026.

Mr. Bloom noted that in First Selectwoman Lyons comments above, she encouraged the EDC to play a role in developing a strong business plan for downtown to help ensure the success of the Academy project since this facility could be an economic driver. He questioned the Commission’s involvement in this project to date. Mr. Wood noted the role of the Academy Committee to date has primarily been to determine what will happen in the facility and how it will be operated. He agrees there is a need for clarification of the role or charge of the EDC with this project.

Mr. Duques noted that the official charge of the Academy Committee does not talk about a role for the EDC. Mr. Wagner noted that during his time of sitting on the Academy Committee meetings, economic development was not discussed as a priority or focus of the Committee. There was a general idea discussed that people would come to the facility as a result of its use and structure and their presence in Town might generate some
economic activity. In general, economic viability and a good tax base create a positive economic climate for people to want to come to Madison for multiple purposes including participating in activities at facilities like the future Academy.

With regard to First Selectwoman Lyons’ update on the train station project, Mr. Wagner commented that the statistics show the number of people using the trains is significantly less than a year ago so some discussion on upgrading the service should focus on ridership.

Mr. Duques noted that members had been asked to submit their priorities for initiatives and he put these together in a document which he sent out to the members. The objective tonight is for the Commission to sign on to specific goals for the calendar year which will then be sent to the Board of Selectman for their blessing. In the past the EDC has not directly been provided with a clear direction or charge. Economic Development issues have become more complex over the years it is important now to develop a clear and direct charge with goals and priorities.

Mr. Duques also noted that he had agreed to serve as temporary chairman through this discussion process but the Commission should take action this evening to elect a new chairman vice chairman and secretary for the upcoming year.

Ms. Johnson suggested that a list of goals include an effort to coordinate and partnership with other groups and commissions since more can get done when people work together and also to work toward seeing the holiday lights event continues annually, but as a private rather than a Town sponsored event.

Mr. Sellitti commented that his understanding has been that the EDC existed to bring business to Madison, support existing business, and to find opportunities to grow the economy. He believes the one complication that can make it more difficult in Madison is that there is not a large anchor store that would attract people to Town, where they would then visit some of the smaller more unique shops. He would encourage an effort to help pursue opportunities to purchase land and bring more anchor businesses or corporations to Town and that any EDC charge should include exploring the development of new opportunities that would increase economic development and activity in Town.

Mr. Duques commented that one drawback to having tourism be an economic driver is the lack of places for people to stay. The Town previously participated with CERC for a study and the plan showed that schools, beaches and trails were all identified as draws for people to visit Madison and these could be areas to leverage to create economic vibrancy. It was also identified that Madison residents do not support the idea of larger anchor stores like Walmart. Tourism opportunities have been one area of focus of the Chamber of Commerce so the Commission can continue to work closely with and support them.
Mr. Hummel commented that he agrees the downtown beaches, Green and trails are great town tourism draws but at times the town feels stuck with this image. While it is important to preserve what Madison people love it is also important to provide opportunities to increase revenue in town and allow the Town to grow to meet the needs of residents.

Mr. Wood commented that affordable and diverse housing options is another important economic driver especially for helping to bring young families back to Madison and the EDC could consider coordinating with the Affordable Housing Commission on this issue by appointing an EDC liaison to attend their meetings and report back to the full Commission.

Mr. Sellitti suggested that the EDC could assist and support current businesses by scheduling regular meetings with local businesses. Ms. Johnson commented that these efforts should focus on promoting small local businesses. She also commented that, while schools and recreation opportunities are draws for young families, there should be some focus on activities and places that provide for and fulfill other needs of these families.

Mr. Wagner commented that wastewater is another issue that has an impact on economic development. Mr. Duques noted that the wastewater study will be going out for an RFP shortly. Mr. Wood suggested that working with the group overseeing this study would be another opportunity for an EDC liaison to be able to attend meetings and report back on the progress of this initiative.

Mr. Wagner commented that, while First Selectwoman Lyons expressed concern with the tax incentive program, he views these programs as important to encourage and promote projects that create job creation and economic viability. Responsible use of tax incentives can drive economic development by getting projects started. He suggested that the Commission review these programs and encourage their continued use within the parameters suggested by the First Selectwoman and then work toward possible expansion after some successful achievements.

After discussion the Commission members summarized their target goals broken down in specific areas as follows:

**Communication** - Work collaboratively with other Town boards and commissions by providing a liaison to attend their meetings and request that boards and commissions including the Board of Selectman, Board of Finance and Planning and Zoning Commission assign and send a liaison to attend EDC meetings and to also improve cooperation, better understanding and communication with civic organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and continue to work on joint projects like the economic summit and a coordinated calendar.
Mr. Duques commented that communication has been more difficult without a staff person. Miss Johnson suggested that communication should improve as boards and commissions move back to in-person meetings.

Other ideas to improve communication are to add back to the agenda standing update reports by the Board of Selectman, Board of Finance, and Planning and Zoning Commission which provides an opportunity for the EDC to keep updated on their activities and for these boards and commissions to remain updated on the EDC activities. The Chamber of Commerce should also have an agenda item for a report. Mr. Duques noted that there are no plans currently to hire an economic development coordinator following Sherry Coates resignation. The Town Planner will unlikely be unable to attend all EDC meetings but she could be asked to provide a written monthly report and possibly attend an EDC meeting as needed. The Commission can continue to improve communication with local businesses with increased outreach and by striving to be a more viable visible resource to the community’s businesses by expanding public relations efforts.

**Annual Holiday Lights Project** – Work toward developing a plan to privatize the “Light Up Madison” annual lights project.

**Review, Reevaluate and Refresh the Tax Incentive Programs** - Take into consideration the comments made by the First Selectwoman and review these programs to make sure they target and support the Town’s strategic goals.

**Further study of the Strategic Plan Survey**- Work to identify the types of businesses that align with the needs and vision of the residents of Madison. This would include looking at options for economic viability from different parts of the town and identifying the current values of the Town as the population changes. Mr. Duques noted that the First Selectwoman advised there might be some remaining ARPA funds available if needed for an EDC study or project. Mr. Wagner we'll get information on the strategic plan survey to pull out data that could be helpful. The Commission can also work to identify other factors like housing, waste water and transportation needs that could make commercial spaces more attractive for business.

Mr. Duques agreed to summarize the initiatives discussed this evening, forward them to the Commission and the to the Board of Selectman

**NEW BUSINESS**

6. **Election of Chairman.** On motion made by Mr. Wagner, and seconded by Mr. Hummel, the Commission voted unanimously to elect Andrew Wood at Economic Development Commission Chairman.
On motion made by Mr. Bloom, and seconded by Mr. Sellitti, the Commission voted unanimously to elect Lindsey Johnson as Economic Development Commission Vice-Chairman.

On motion made by Mr. Hummel, and seconded by Ms. Johnson, the Commission voted unanimously to elect Matt Bloom as Economic Development Commission Secretary.

7. **Approve of annual meeting schedule.** On motion made by Mr. Hummel, and seconded by Mr. Sellitti, the Commission voted unanimously to hold the regular meetings of the Economic Development Commission on the second Tuesday of each month in calendar year 2024 as follows:

   January 11  
   February  8  
   March     14  
   April     11  
   May       9    
   June      13   
   July      11   
   August    8    
   September 12  
   October   10  
   November  14  
   December 12  
   January 9, 2025

8. **New business items.**

   There were no items for discussion under new business.

CLOSE MEETING

9. **Adjournment.**

   On motion made by Mr. Wood, and seconded by Mr. Sellitti, the Commission voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 p.m.

   Respectfully submitted,
   Terry Buckley, Clerk