



Town of Madison, CT

Economic Development Commission

Draft

Minutes of a regular meeting of the Economic Development Commission held on September 9, 2021 via Zoom Videoconferencing

Present: Commissioners Ryan Duques, Matt Bloom, Eric Dillner, Mark Steffen, Jonathan Stein

Also present: Bruce Wilson, Board of Selectman; Justin Murphy, Board of Finance; Sherri Cote, Guilford Economic Development Coordinator

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

1. Approval of minutes of regular meeting June 10, 2021. On motion made by Mr. Steffen, and seconded by Dr. Stein, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of June 10, 2021 as submitted.

2. Public comment. There was no discussion under public comment.

3. Priority round table discussion planning. Mr. Duques noted that there has been discussion about setting up a priority round table discussion for planning for economic development issues. Discussion would provide guidelines on the types of economic development activities that would be considered beneficial and attractive to Madison and should be encouraged and those that would be considered not fitting into the Town's character even though they could offer some economic benefits like job creation. The roundtable style discussion would focus on the ways to prioritize potential projects that would be important to the Town and Economic Development Commission.

Mr. Duques noted that First Selectwoman Lyons has brought up the idea of a round table discussion during discussions by the Board during the approval of the Tax Incentive Program and during recent review of several applications. There has been some discussion on making this program narrower and more focused. There has also been discussion in prior EDC meetings on what priorities are important to the Commission, especially during the process of providing input for the Tax Incentive Program.

Mr. Duques noted that part of any discussion would involve getting feedback from the Board of Selectman. He is aware that the First Selectwoman has specific ideas and criteria that would be used as guidance for the alignment of economic development projects.

2-Minutes of a regular meeting of the Economic Development Commission held on September 9, 2021

Mr. Duques further noted that there has been discussion about how the development of a Guilford/Madison Economic Development position should be an integral part of the round table discussion so it might be premature to have this discussion at this time.

Mr. Steffen commented that he believes there is a need for the Economic Development Commission to receive guidance from the Board of Selectmen on what they see as priorities for the tax incentive program and for economic development in general.

Selectman Wilson noted that the Board of Selectmen is not totally unified on ideas regarding the Tax Incentive Program but they generally agree it would be beneficial for the Selectmen to come up with reasonable guidelines.

Mr. Steffen reviewed the Economic Development Commission Mission Statement that is listed on the website. He noted that vibrancy and adding to the grand list are two criteria that were discussed when reviewing recent Tax Incentive Program applications.

Dr. Stein noted that concern had been expressed that if a project had the impact of increasing the grand list, then it would be automatically approved. Specifically noting criteria that would make a project undesirable would assist with addressing this concern.

Selectman Wilson commented that, while it might not be good to become more restrictive, the Town relies on the layers of approval to weed out projects that would not be beneficial to the Town. The process should be set up to weed out undesirable ideas rather than making the program too restrictive.

Selectman Wilson further noted that it might be productive to include a provision to attach a letter from the Economic Development Commission on applications for the Tax Incentive program. There are specific criteria that the Town is looking for that would be helpful to be able to provide guidance to a prospective developer. This would provide input when thinking of projects that would have more of a tendency to receive support.

Mr. Stein suggested that it would be more effective to have this information come from the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance since they are the voting bodies where the Economic Development Commission is only able to provide guidance.

Mr. Steffen commented that specified criteria such as vibrancy can mean different things to different people. As an example, he commented that he would see more dense housing in the center of Town as a positive where others might not agree.

Mr. Duques commented that he agrees it is premature to set up a round table discussion. He suggested that the best action might be to put discussion on setting up a roundtable back on the Board of Selectmen and advise them that the Economic Development Commission needs guidance on desirable development projects and priorities. The issue of setting precedents should

3-Minutes of a regular meeting of the Economic Development Commission held on September 9, 2021

also be a part of this discussion. He agreed to contact the First Selectwoman for her input on quantitative guidelines and moving forward.

4. Inviting candidates to share economic development ideas at October meeting. Mr.

Duques noted that, traditionally, the EDC has invited candidates to a meeting to discuss their ideas and positions on economic development related issues just before the election. He asked if the members would like to invite candidates for the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance to attend the October EDC meeting.

Mr. Murphy advised that the Commission cannot endorse a candidate so it might be more appropriate to have the winning candidates attend an EDC meeting after the election. Mr. Duques noted that, in the past, the winning candidates have been invited to a meeting but, generally, they do not agree to attend.

Selectman Wilson suggested that he did not anticipate future Board changes to materially change the Board of Selectmen or Board of Finance's general views on economic development so he did not see it as a problem to wait until after the election to meet with the winning candidates.

Dr. Stein suggested that candidates be asked to provide a written response to a number of questions on ideas, or to provide an opinion piece or statement on their economic development perspective. This position statement should include ideas and actionable pursuits that would help guide the EDC on what the town can do to help fulfil the Economic Development Commission's mission. This should include a position on economic strategy for Madison for the future.

Dr. Stein suggested that if the Commission decides to have a meet the candidates get together after the election, that this be a one item meeting. He believes, at a minimum, the Commission should meet with the Board of Selectmen after the election to ask for guidelines on economic development matters.

5. Update on EDC and Planner positions. Mr. Duques introduced Sherry Cote who will be working as a part time economic development coordinator for Madison as a joint position with Guilford.

Ms. Cote provided information on her background which included the Chamber of Commerce, legislative activities, REX and Economic Development Coordinator for Guilford. She highlighted some of her work in Guilford which included helping businesses obtain PPE, loan forgiveness programs, providing access to other Covid related programs and information, assistance for employees with unemployment assistance, and assisting potential businesses with locating properties.

The Commission members welcomed Ms. Cote and noted that they hope to work closely with her on economic development issues.

4-Minutes of a regular meeting of the Economic Development Commission held on September 9, 2021

Selectman Wilson provided an update on the Town Planner position. He noted that there were two very good applicants and an offer has been extended to Erin Mannis, who is a Madison resident. There will be a vote on the appointment of this position and Ms Mannis is scheduled to start on September 20th. She has many of the same credential as Mr. Anderson had, however, she will need to become accredited.

6. Old business. Mr. Murphy noted that he agrees that a discussion on economic development should start with input from the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance. While there is a focus by the Economic Development Commission on the revenue side to provide opportunities to expand the grand list, there needs to also be a balance with maintaining the character of the Town.

Dr. Stein questioned the status of the recent wife proposal. Selectmen Wilson noted that this project did not get traction with the Board of Selectmen at this time. He noted that the proposed federal infrastructure program includes communications infrastructure so perhaps it could be considered in the future. Communication will be an important aspect of any efforts to encourage Madison as a great place to live given the new work-from-home trend.

7. New business. Selectman Wilson advised that at the Monday Board of Selectmen's meeting the Board will be acting on approval for property tax relief for a project with the Caleb Foundation and HOE Partnership, tax exempt organizations. The project is for the development of a 34-unit affordable housing project with one- and two-bedroom apartments. He is excited to see this project, which he believes is good for the Town, move forward. The estimated move in date is 2024. He noted that this project will have a fixed schedule of taxes for 20 years. Because this is a non-profit project supplies can donate goods or services and receive a tax write off.

Mr. Duques advised that an Ad Hoc Committee is being established to provide input on the American Rescue Fund Program and he encouraged anyone interested in serving as a resident representative to contact the Town. This Committee will be making recommendations to the Board of Selectmen. Madison is expected to receive \$5.2 million in infrastructure dollars which is separate from the Board of Education funding. The funds will be received in two tranches to be spent in four years. Previously the development of projects and decisions has been done by the Board of Selectmen but they would like to make this a more public process moving forward. The Committee will need to learn more about what types of projects are allowed and not allowed.

8. Adjournment. On motion made by Mr. Steffen, and seconded by Dr. Stein the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Terry Holland-Buckley
Clerk