



Town of Madison, CT

Economic Development Commission

Draft

Minutes of the regular meeting of the Economic Development Commission held on September 10, 2020 via Zoom Videoconferencing

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

Also present: Dave Anderson, Town Planner; Justin Murphy, Board of Finance Liaison; Bruce Wilson, Board of Selectmen Liaison

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

1. Approval of minutes of regular meeting, August 13, 2020. On motion made by Mr. Bloom and seconded by Mr. Steffen, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of August 13, 2020 as submitted.

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

3. Invitation to candidates. Mr. Duques suggested that the Commission invite the candidates for State Senator and Representative to meet with the Commission at the October 8th regular meeting, to provide them with information on the Commission's goals and ideas about economic development in Madison. This would provide a good opportunity for the Commission to interact with current or potential State legislators and help them understand local needs. Prior to the meeting he suggested that the Commission members spend some time developing some ideas for topics to discuss with the candidates. He suggested that the meeting time for the October 8th meeting be moved up to 6:30 to take care of business so the balance of the meeting time can be spent in discussion with the candidates.

On motion made by Mr. Duques, and seconded by Mr. Bloom, the Commission voted unanimously to move the time of the regular meeting of October 8, 2020 to 6:30 pm.

Mr. Duques suggested that a small working group of Commission members meet to work on crafting topics for discussion to provide to the candidates in advance and also develop an appropriate format for the meeting. He suggested that discussion focus on approximately 3 primary topics of particular importance to Madison. One topic important topic he would suggest is the issue of waste water. For a format he would suggest that each candidate be allowed 10 – 15 minutes to respond to the Commission's input and explain how these ideas fit into their vision. Because of the zoom format making could make the meeting a little more complex.

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In response to a question by Dr. Stein, Mr. Duques noted that the concept of the meeting would be to give the candidates an opportunity to meet the Commission and for the Commission members to meet the candidates and communicate priorities. It will also be helpful to hear from the candidates and understand how they interpret and support the Commissions' ideas and priorities.

Selectman Wilson explained that it is important that this meeting not be seen as a forum format. It is important that it not appear as a campaign event since the Commission is a public entity and a town organization should not sponsor a candidate forum or debate. It would be more appropriate as an opportunity for the EDC to communicate its vision and priorities and let the candidate ask questions.

Mr. Duques clarified that this event would not be considered a debate but an opportunity to inform the candidate about the EDC and its goals, especially in light that economic development is seen as an important issue at the State level.

Mr. Anderson suggested that a group discussion of ideas related to economic development could be effective and could lead to the generation of ideas to pursue.

Dr. Stein questioned if it would be more appropriate to meet with one candidate at a time as a way to minimize the potential political image.

To help the Commission develop areas to focus on as priorities, Mr. Duques reviewed the Action Plan. In discussion, it was agreed that areas to focus on as high priorities include waste water, marketing efforts, support of businesses, future needs and the role of the EDC as an educator and advocate for these areas and how Covid 19 has impacted economic development and created long term challenges. He believes the Action Plan provides a good starting point for a discussion and many of the items in the plan are interrelated.

In discussion, Commission member came up with topics that were specifically related to the State including general cooperation with Hamonasset State Park, possible uses for the area near Hamonasset State Park and the importance of a spirit of cooperation with Hamonasset State Park on how to improve the park and its surrounding area. Another area that concerns the State would be the platform at the train station and continued development and improvements of the downtown area which includes State Route 1. The topic of Tax Incentive programs to encourage businesses is another topic that involves State legislation and programs.

Mr. Steffen and Ms. Miksis agreed to work together to develop and fine tune a list to utilize in the discussion with the candidates. It was suggested that they forward their ideas to the rest of the Commission members in approximately two weeks to provide an opportunity for further input before the October 8th meeting.

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4. Update: Tax Policy Presented to BOS. Mr. Duques noted that the Board of Selectmen had been provided with a copy of the Tax Incentive Policy with the updates recommended by the Economic Development Commission. At the last meeting he had reported that he attended the Board of Selectmen's meeting when this item presented and with a recommendation for action, to explain that the purpose of the change is to better align it with the Economic Development policies and to add guidelines for potential users. A decision was made to not act on the policy at that meeting but this item is now on the agenda for the Board of Selectmen's meeting for next Monday. Mr. Anderson plans on attending the meeting to represent the EDC.

Mr. Wilson commented that he does not anticipate much discussion on this item and expects it to be approved. In response to a question by Mr. Duques, Mr. Wilson noted that he is not aware of any plan that has been made to be able to hold a Town Meeting, which would be required to approve any applications submitted under the policy. They have been looking at how other towns are considering holding town meetings. The general understanding of the process under the covid emergency procedures, is that the Board of Selectmen can approve an item and send it to Town Meeting in the form of a question written in the affirmative. If a quorum is not present, the question passes.

5. Board Reports (BOS, BOF, Planning and Zoning)

Board of Selectmen's Report – Mr. Wilson reported that the Town is working on the development of an application for events in Town that includes information on the number of people, the time frame and the format. Activities allowed are based on guidance from the State but it is understood that these can be subject to change with little or no warning.

Board of Finance Report – Mr. Murphy noted that the Board of Finance met in August. The financial reports have been fairly stable and Departments have been continuing to work hard to track all pandemic and storm related expenses for possible reimbursement from the State or Federal government. The Board of Education was anticipating the need for a special appropriation of \$500,000 for covid related costs but was able to receive reimbursement already.

Planning and Zoning Report- Mr. Anderson highlighted the following activities for an update on Planning and Zoning activity:

- The application by Chase Bank for the former Guilford Savings Bank building at 634 Boston Post Road was approved.
- There is an application for a small subdivision on the agenda for the meeting next week.
- Demolition of the general's residence project at Boston Post Road and East Wharf Roads has begun. They were able to salvage some components of the building. They hope to be able to include some pieces from the building in an exhibit for the Library or the Historical Society.

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- The Town Facilities Assessment is now underway. The assessment should take approximately three months to complete. At the conclusion the plan is to the work on the development of a Master Plan for Town Facilities

6. Old business.

a. **Update on New Haven Airport Expansion project.** Mr. Duques advised that he had drafted a letter of support for the airport expansion as requested by Sean Scanlon. Mr. Scanlon had attended a prior EDC meeting to explain the project and the EDC members had indicated their support for this project as an important economic development activity for the region.

b. **Light-Up Madison Project.** On motion made by Mr. Duques, and seconded by Dr. Stein, the Commission voted unanimously to add to the agenda under New Business, Item #6.b, Discuss for possible action recommendation for funding for Light-Up Madison Project.

Mr. Duques reported on a vision of an idea from John Matthews from the Madison Beach Hotel, who had begun a discussion on ways the Town can encourage the spirit of the Town during the holiday season. He had met with Mr. Matthews and Mr. Anderson to discuss ideas. They believe that 2020 has been a rough year for our commercial districts. Restrictions on businesses and the unknowns ahead have many business owners and residents stressed. One of the goals of the EDC is to help brighten the spirit of residents, and visitors and to act as a draw to town during the holiday season and early winter months. One way to brighten the spirits in Town and draw visitors is to develop a plan to light up Madison. The concept is to use the RFP process to solicit proposals to enhance Madison's commercial district through lights and decorations during this holiday and winter season. Through the RFP's the Commission would see what people come back with for ideas that would draw visitors to Madison and select a project to fund.

Mr. Duques noted that the concept would be for the EDC to assist with funding for the project, initiate and facilitate an RFP process, develop relationships with other non-profits like the Chamber of Commerce to facilitate programming and events if possible, encourage businesses and residents to light up Madison by promoting the initiative in the news and social media, and promote Madison as a destination. Mr. Anderson noted that the focus would be on Wall Street and the Downtown area.

Mr. Murphy agreed to work with the Chamber of Commerce on ideas and funding options.

Dr. Stein suggested that businesses be approached to provide matching funds or a contribution of effort in the project.

In response to a question by Mr. Dillner, Mr. Duques noted that the beginning timeline goal will be to develop the RFP before the next EDC meeting. The Commission will initiate the RFP process with direction from the Finance Office, evaluate responses and then vote on a

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recommendation for selection of a project at a regular or special meeting. A special meeting might be necessary to approve the RFP to be utilized in order to keep the project moving along within the timeline.

Mr. Anderson agreed to research if any permits would be required to move forward with moving this project forward. Mr. Duques agreed to serve as a liaison with the Board of Selectmen to keep them advised of the idea of this special project.

Mr. Duques recommended that the EDC provide the initial economic support for the Light-Up Madison initiative by approving the use of funds available in the Tourism line of the EDC budget and by requesting additional funds from other agencies and non-profits.

After discussion, on motion made by Mr. Duques, and seconded by Dr. Stein, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the expenditure of up to \$7,000 from the Tourism line in the EDC budget for the Light-Up Madison project.

As a related matter, Mr. Anderson reminded the Commission that there is a need to continue communication with the Beach and Recreation Department about the issue of trash removal. Keeping the downtown area clear of trash will be even more important as attempts are made to draw additional residents and visitors to this area. It was agreed that this topic should be discussed as an agenda topic at a future EDC meeting.

c. **Discussion regarding Chamber of Commerce posting issue.** Dr. Stein requested that the Commission have a discussion regarding a recent concern brought to his attention about the Chamber of Commerce and some attacks on the business of a State Senator over a political issue. It should be stressed that the Chamber of Commerce should support and lift up all businesses and should not be involved in any political issues and should remain non-partisan. He asked if the EDC should have a role in working with the Chamber on this recent issue. Mr. Duques noted that he had a recent discussion and has been advised that the Chamber is working to resolve this issue internally and he has requested a response from the Chamber. If the EDC is not satisfied with the manner in which the Chamber resolves the issue, there can be further discussion at the next EDC meeting or at a special meeting.

d. **Municipal Re-Development Authority legislation.** Mr. Steffen noted that he had brought the Municipal Re-Development Authority legislation to the attention of the EDC members at the last meeting. Under this program municipalities can partner together to reach the population level of 70,000 required to form an authority. He agreed to forward a copy of the legislation to the Commission members and asked that this item be included on the agenda for a future meeting for discussion and possibly for a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen. It was suggested that this legislation could be another topic for consideration during the meeting with candidates at the next EDC meeting.

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8. Adjournment. On motion made by Mr. Steffen, and seconded by Mr. Bloom, the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 p.m.

Terry Holland-Buckley
Clerk