



Town of Madison, CT

Economic Development Commission

Draft

Minutes of a regular meeting of the Economic Development Commission held on March 11, 2021 via Zoom Videoconferencing

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

Also present: Dave Anderson, Town Planner; Bruce Wilson, Selectman; Justin Murphy, Board of Finance; Craig Cooke, Superintendent of Schools; Ryan Galen, Chairman, Board of Education

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

Mr. Duques requested that the Commission open the agenda to add item 1A, Discussion with Dr. Craig Cooke, new Superintendent of Schools.

On motion made by Mr. Dillner, and seconded by Mr. Steffen, the Commission voted unanimously to open the agenda and add item 1A, Discussion with Dr. Craig Cooke, Superintendent of Schools.

1A Discussion with Dr. Craig Cooke, Superintendent of Schools. Mr. Duques introduced and welcomed Dr. Craig Cooke, the new Madison Superintendent of Schools. Dr. Duques noted that the Commission has long recognized the importance of quality schools serving as a primary reason for families to move into and remain residing in Madison. He is hoping for a strong relationship between the Economic Development Commission and the Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools.

Dr. Cooke noted that he is grateful to be the Superintendent in the Town of Madison. He provided information on his background noting that he grew up with connections to Old Saybrook, was a Business Major in College, obtained his MBA and worked for the Enfield school district. He then worked for Windsor and because of his connection to the shoreline through his time in Old Saybrook he was very excited to have the opportunity to return to the shoreline and work in Madison. He agrees that a town's school system is the primary driver for where families want to reside. Madison is one of the best school districts in the state, with many positive attributes and the results sell themselves especially at the high school level. The District offers a great quality product for the investment of tax dollars. Dr. Cooke also acknowledged the strong

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private school options also available in town. Dr. Cooke commented that he believes steps can be taken to market the schools, which can assist with economic development marketing efforts.

Mr. Galen noted that he had initially moved to Madison for his children to be involved with the quality football sports program and they have had a great experience. He agrees that quality schools are a draw for parents, especially those who are highly motivated and demand a lot from the schools. Madison has a particularly fantastic high school with many offerings with a very high percentage of students moving on to college. Students who choose to not go to college have options with the technical class options offered. He noted that the Board of Education is thrilled to have Dr. Cooke in Madison and they believe that his business background with its educational aspect and local roots will help make him a successful Superintendent. One of the challenges in Madison is the age of many of the school buildings and there will be some bonding items to consider in the upcoming years. Mr. Galen also commented that he understands the importance of economic development to provide important revenue needed to continue to provide quality town and school services, and to help offset some of the reliance on residential property taxes.

Mr. Duques asked if there currently were plans to re-open the High School to full-time? Dr. Cooke noted that a survey was conducted and the returns are due today. Indications thus far are that most of the students want to come back five days per week. The target currently is late March or early April for full return. He noted that completion of the first round of vaccines for staff has been very helpful and the approach of warmer weather should also help with additional opportunities for fresh air. They are hopeful to be able to finish this year with full day school in operation.

Mr. Dillner noted that he is involved with the Shoreline Arts Alliance and has worked closely with many of the school art teachers. He also noted that he is a hockey coach. He offered the assistance of the Economic Development Commission in any marketing efforts. Dr. Cooke noted that open communication with the EDC is important and he also noted that it is important to have a good relationship with local realtors and to connect with the business community. He would like to see the development of an internship program for students with local businesses and he welcomed the assistance of the EDC in establishing this program. He would also like to work on the development of a mentoring program.

1. Approval of minutes of regular meeting January 14, 2021. On motion made by Mr. Stein and seconded by Mr. Steffen, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of January 14, 2021 as submitted.

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

3. Light Up Madison Update. Mr. Duques reported that the Light Up Madison program was a successful initiative which was wrapped up a couple of weeks ago. Feedback on the program

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was very positive and the plan is to continue this initiative as an annual event, although the fiscal responsibility has been moved away from the Economic Development Commission budget. Mr. Wilson noted that the Board of Selectmen plan to fund this program in future years. He noted that the lights have been purchased so he requested that Mr. Duques provide him with any information available on the cost distinction between lights and labor for the past winter's activity.

Paul Sprague, a member of the public, expressed concern for possible issues related to light pollution with this project and Mr. Duques noted that they plan to bring in the Madison Energy Efficiency Committee to be involved in this project in the future.

4. Ledges Project. Mr. Anderson provided an overview of the Ledges project, a seven-unit condominium project located at 856 Boston Post Road. The project also includes creating two units at the family house on the property. The project requires approval from the Inland Wetlands Commission and the Planning and Zoning Commission. A public hearing is scheduled for the next Planning and Zoning Commission meeting on March 18th, at 7:00 p.m. He suggested that Economic Development Commission members watch this meeting to learn more about this application.

Mr. Duques noted that the EDC has been involved in discussion about housing density in the downtown area.

In response to a question by Mr. Steffen, Mr. Anderson noted that this project involves requesting a special exception in the zoning regulations. He also noted that the project involves two areas that are located outside of the development property but within 100' of wetlands.

5. Shared Wastewater Economic Study Budget Request. Mr. Anderson noted that the proposed WPCA comprehensive study is proposed for funding with a special appropriation. There has been discussion on including the economic development component as a part of this study effort. Mr. Wilson noted that the Board of Selectmen will be requesting a special appropriation and will be sending the request to the Board of Finance for consideration. The economic development component has not yet come up in discussion. The timing for the study will be determined once the funding is provided by the Board of Finance.

Mr. Murphy noted that the request for a special appropriation from the current fiscal year for this study will be presented to the Board of Finance on March 18th.

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

Board of Selectmen's Report – Mr. Wilson noted that the Board of Selectmen has recommended a budget for consideration and the next step is to forward the budget to the Board of Finance for review and ultimately to send to referendum for a vote by the taxpayers. The proposed budget includes a 5% increase for the Town operating expenses. Some savings were gained in the areas of benefits, debt service and health care. The proposed Board of Education budget includes a 1.4% increase for a combined Town/Board of Education operating budget increase of 2.3%. Mr. Murphy noted that the combined Town and Board of Education operating budgets with the bonding budget will result in a 3% increase. The Board of Finance will be considering ways to bring the mil rate down to an acceptable rate.

In response to a question by Mr. Dillner, Mr. Murphy noted that, under the proposed budget, the mill rate would be 28.81 mils which would be a \$180 per year increase for a typical house. He noted that the grand list has gone up .73 which is larger than normal. This increase is due to a mix of residential improvements, new construction and personal property.

Mr. Dillner questioned if the scope of the EDC generally included providing input on backing a proposed Town budget? Mr. Duques noted that historically the EDC does not take a position on the budget although it could be appropriate to comment on specific items in the budget that impact development. He is not sure if it is appropriate for a Town Commission to come out formally take action to support the budget.

Dr. Stein commented that it might be appropriate to comment on items to be included in the referendum vote in the fall since these could have an impact on the grand list.

Ms. Foley agreed that it would be appropriate to endorse the budget from an EDC perspective.

In response to a question by Mr. Steffen, Mr. Murphy reviewed the budget timeline noting that there will be a public hearing on April 28 following additional workshops which are scheduled. He noted that the proposed budget is available on-line.

Mr. Duques agreed to look further into what the appropriate role of the EDC could be regarding the budget and the Commission can discuss this further and make a final decision at the April meeting since there is adequate time.

Mr. Murphy encouraged EDC members to review the budget and forward any questions on specific items to him. He believes that, in the past, the EDC has had a role in specific items included in the budget such as the Light Up Madison project held this past winter.

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Mr. Wilson noted that the Town is in the process of completing a report on Town facilities that will provide important and helpful information and will provide information for a master plan. The report will also look at projects that the community needs, the capacity of the need and the best way to address this need. The effort has begun to get the community to recommend ideas and some ideas recommended thus far have included a studio for performing arts, space for self-improvement education, opportunities for community congregation, and maker spaces. There will also be a parallel process to explore the diversity of the Island Avenue School property which includes a discussion on the possible sale of this property. He noted that the space now available as a result of the Library renovation will help but there are still other program needs to be accommodated that could be identified.

Mr. Duques noted that the EDC had conducted a Community Space Analysis and this data could prove helpful in the Town facilities effort.

Board of Finance Report –Mr. Murphy noted that the budget is currently with the Board of Selectmen and will be moving along to the Board of Finance. The role of the Board of Finance is to find the most appropriate way to pay for what the Town wants and needs and the goal is to keep the increase for the upcoming year to under 3% if possible.

Planning and Zoning Report- Mr. Anderson reported on the following Planning and Zoning Commission items;

- Jerry Davis has submitted the application for his apartment building project. The project will be going before the Inland Wetland Commission and Planning and Zoning Commission for approval. The EDC has submitted a letter of support.
- Bill Plunket has applied for approval to provide an outdoor dining option.
- An application has been received for a small subdivision on Long Shore Lane
- A new application from a new owner has been received for the Marina Landing Project

7. Old business. There were no items discussed under new business.

9. New business. Mr. Duques noted that the Chamber of Commerce has started to advertise for a new Executive Director and he agreed to send out the link to the Commission members.

Mr. Duques noted that he, Mr. Anderson and other members had attended a meeting with officials from Hammonasset State Park to have an open conversation about park attendance in the summer and the impact of attendance on the town. The Deputy Commissioner had reached out to the EDC to review a prioritized list. There was discussion for input on ways to reduce the burden on Madison for traffic issues and emergency calls as a result of the increased use of this facility by

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residents across the state. Representatives from the State were interested in hearing the input and ideas of the Madison representatives. He asked that EDC members contact him with any further input. A determination will be made in May or June about the park capacity during summer, 2021. He noted that last summer the park hosted 2.67 million visitors.

9. Adjournment. On motion made by Ms. Foley, and seconded by Mr. Stein, the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 p.m.

Terry Holland-Buckley
Clerk