



# Town of Madison, CT

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## Economic Development Commission

Draft

Minutes of a regular meeting of the Economic Development Commission held on April 8, 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, John Picard, Board of Finance; Keith Walker, Kevin Niebergall, Aer Wireless

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

1. Approval of minutes of regular meeting March 11, 2021. On motion made by Mr. Bloom and seconded by Mr. Stein, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of March 11, 2021 as submitted.

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

4. Discussion: Economic Development Position. Mr. Duques noted that, with funds coming to the Town under the American Rescue Plan, he would suggest that this could be a good time to look at crafting a role for a position to coordinate the economic development activities and implement Economic Development Commission goals in town. He recommended that the EDC work on drafting a proposal to fund a role to help focus on economic development opportunities and promote economic sustainability. There has been discussion with Guilford about working together on a regional position that would provide services for both towns. The Guilford Economic Development Coordinator recently retired so Guilford is currently working to decide what to do with their position. There has also been an effort to reach out to Lara Brown with UConn Extension to look at the possibility of obtaining a graduate student through their fellowship program for a limited amount of time to provide the EDC and Town with assistance on its goals. A large focus would be on helping develop ways to soften the impact of the pandemic on the Town.

Mr. Anderson noted that assistance with EDC activities would be beneficial since he is stretched thin with many other duties and would like to see more attention focused on economic development. He agrees that use of American Rescue Funds would provide an opportunity for funding to deal with difficulties that have development due to the pandemic, and this is an appropriate use for these funds. He also suggested that there be discussion with downtown

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businessowners to provide input on appropriate tasks. Working with Guilford and possibly even Branford could provide some benefits worth pursuing. If a position is created to fill this role, he would work closely with this individual but the position would most likely be supervised by the Selectmen's Office.

In response to a question by Mr. Bloom regarding guidelines for use of the funds, Mr. Wilson noted that guidelines have not yet been disclosed although he understands there is a large economic development component included and further information will be provided shortly.

Mr. Stein suggested that hiring an individual to fill a permanent position would make more sense than hiring a student since this could provide for more long-range benefits. Mr. Duques noted that all different possibilities will be considered.

Mr. Duques requested that any members interested in working to brainstorm to develop some initial ideas on this concept contact him.

3. Aer Wireless Internet Presentation. Mr. Duques introduced Keith Walker, Aer Wireless to share a proposal he has been working on for wireless internet that he believes can benefit the town of Madison. He described and showed diagrams on the broadband wireless system available from Aer. Their technology has a range of 4 miles and works with equipment that is placed strategically and has the ability to hop between the stations. By placing the equipment specifically they would have the ability to deploy a network that would provide a canopy over an area of town that would benefit from their service. The diagram displayed the coverage that could be provided using their devices and the coverage area shown focused on the downtown area but this could be expanded.

Mr. Walker noted that he would like to discuss with the Commission, the option of having Aer deploy a network in the downtown area and beyond including Hammonasset State Park. A decision could be made to offer free access to the internet in the downtown area for the restaurants and other businesses, as an economic development benefit, but to charge a fee for individuals using this service at Hammonasset State Park as a way to provide the town with a revenue stream. This system would also provide the economic benefit of allowing reservations to be made through a portal. Mr. Walker noted that their wireless service could be made available at a fraction of the cost of other providers and as the system is built out to other areas it would provide even more coverage and could produce a revenue stream for the municipality. They have prepared a proposal for Madison for the Commission's review. He noted that they could do a test of how the equipment works in the downtown area, to prove the concept, for a cost of \$10,000.

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In response to a question by Mr. Bloom, Mr. Walker reviewed the areas of the country where the Aer system is in place. He noted that they will be setting a system in Stratford and he invited the Commission to visit and learn more about the system, its cost and revenue.

In response to questions about installation, Mr. Walker noted that they work to identify vertical assets owned by the town or look to homeowners with appropriate vertical assets. The system is not impacted by either cold or heat.

Mr. Duques commented that this has been an interesting presentation and he believes it would be appropriate to look further if the Aer system could be an opportunity for Madison.

5. Updates:

5.a **Shared Wastewater Economic Study Update.** In response to a question by Mr. Duques, Mr. Anderson noted that the funds needed for the proposed WPCA comprehensive study will be requested as a special appropriation. There has been discussion on including the economic development component as a part of this study effort.

5b. **Light up Madison budget.** In response to a question by Mr. Duques, Mr. Anderson noted that funds for the 2021 Light Up Madison project have been included in the proposed FY 2021-22 budget.

5c. **Support of town budget.** Mr. Duques noted that he has been advised by the First Selectwoman that it would be more appropriate for the Economic Development Commission to provide a recommendation to support specific items included in the budgets that deal with economic development issues, rather than provide a recommendation to support the budget as a whole.

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

**Board of Selectmen's Report** – Mr. Wilson noted that a number of Floor Plain Ordinance updates have been recommended that would impact 150 homes.

**Board of Finance Report** – Mr. Picard noted that the Board of Finance is in the final stages of the development of the FY 2021-22 budget. The budget as currently developed provides for a 4% increase for the Town budget and a 1.2% increase in the Board of Education budget for a combined increase of 2.75%. The budget will be presented at a Town Meeting, then go to referendum and the final step is for the Board of Finance to set the mil rate. They will be looking at possible use of a portion of the undesignated fund balance to lower the mil rate and the impact of the increase on the public. The current goal is for a 1.7% - 2% increase. Mr. Picard 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

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Town wants and needs and the goal is to keep the increase for the upcoming year to under 3% if possible.

Mr. Dillner suggested that it would be beneficial for the Town to provide information on the impact of the budget increase on individual homeowners. Mr. Murphy noted that guidelines on the impact of the budget on properties of varying values could be illustrated at the public hearing. He will discuss this idea with the other Board of Finance members and the Finance Director. Mr. Duques suggested that this information also be put out to the general public through the local press.

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

- The project was delayed due to a wetlands issue and the Inland Wetlands Commission needs to take action before the Planning and Zoning Commission can take action so this project will be tabled until the May meeting.
- The application from Jerry Davis for his 30-unit apartment building project was approved by the Inland Wetland Commission so next week he will be seeking Planning and Zoning Commission approval.
- Bill Plunket has applied for approval to provide an outdoor dining option for an additional year.

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

8. New business. Mr. Duques noted that he was advised by the Chamber of Commerce that the Economic Development Commission will be receiving the Member of the Year award for its efforts on behalf of the Light Up Madison project. The award will be presented at an outdoor dinner on June 22nd and two tickets to attend will be provided.

Mr. Stein requested information on the authority responsible for the dog leash rule. He suggested that there be discussion on the possibility of offering an opportunity to allow dogs to be off leash at specific times and locations as a way to attract dog owners to Town by using the multiple trails as an economic asset. There are many dog owners who would like to have the opportunity to legally allow their pets to run on the trails with them. Mr. Anderson noted that it is his understanding that the leash rule is under a Town ordinance and is also part of some Beach and Recreation rules. Mr. Anderson also noted that he has a contact with UConn who works on trail related issues as part of her responsibility and he could talk to her about ideas to use the Towns extensive trail system as an economic development asset.

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9. Adjournment. On motion made by Ms. Foley, and seconded by Ms. Miksis, the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:02 p.m.

Terry Holland-Buckley  
Clerk