

Economic Development Commission
Thursday, June 8, 2023 at 7:00 PM
Town Campus, Room A

MINUTES

VIRTUAL MEETING INFORMATION

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REGULAR MEETING

1. Attendance

Present: Commissioners Jonathan Stein, Ryan Duques, Lindsay Johnson, Andrew Wood

Also present: Sheri Cote, Economic Development Director, Sheryl Trent, SBrand Solutions (Madison's strategic planning consultant), Dawn Jackson, incoming Madison Chamber of Commerce Executive Director.

2. Approval of Minutes of May 11, 2023 meeting

On motion made by Mr. Woods, and seconded by Ms. Johnson, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of April 13, 2023 and May 11, 2023 as submitted.

3. Public comments

There were no public comments.

4. Chamber of Commerce Report

Ms. Jackson noted that she has served as Director of Outreach for the Shoreline Chamber of Commerce and will become the Executive Director of the Madison Chamber on June 19th.

Ms. Cote reviewed an emailed report provided by Ms. Call the current Executive Director of the Madison Chamber, as follows:

- The Chamber Award Dinner is scheduled for June 27th.
- The sidewalk sale is scheduled for July 27th.
- The Beach Comer event is scheduled for August 17

- The Downtown Merchant's meeting is scheduled for June 12
- The Young Professionals Group will meet this month and M & Js. They are working with Bare Necessities to assist with a fund-raising event.

5. Guest – Sheryl Trent, Strategic Plan Consultant

Ms. Trent noted that she is a professional consultant with bases in Florida and Colorado, that provide services across the country. She has some background in city and local government and also has some economic development background. She is serving as the consultant for the Madison Strategic Plan. She estimates that the process will take approximately eight months and she is currently three to four months into the process. Activities so far primarily involve intense data gathering. The Town has established a Strategic Plan Working Group that has worked hard at obtaining public input. In addition, a Strategic Plan Advisory Committee (SPAC) is being formed. She will be working with both groups and will build on past work, together with information developed by the Committees on items to be considered as important ideas for the future of Madison. They will be looking for common themes in the area of values and priorities and then develop a plan on where the Town should be heading and how this can be accomplished.

In response to a question by Dr. Stein, Ms. Trent noted that she has been getting the information she needs and is very pleased with the number of residents who are participating and engaged in the process with passion. Ms. Trent also noted that, while some of the demographics of participating individuals includes the 55+ population, input has been provided by younger residents also but it would be good to get additional input for individuals with school age children. Tools that can be used to communicate with this age group include Facebook, the Town website, flyers, postcards, the school newsletters and sports events.

Ms. Johnson suggested a number of other options to reach families with young children including Ashley's Ice Cream, Madison House and sports concession stands.

Ms. Jackson suggested that a speaker go to local groups and organizations, Dr. Sein suggested publicizing at the local tennis club and Ms. Trent suggested that individual repost information on the Plan on their personal Facebook page or utilize sticky notes.

Ms. Trent noted that the goal is to complete the data gathering by the end of June so there is a need to really push on this area now.

Ms. Trent requested Economic Development Commission member input into what they feel are the most important drivers of economic development and what they feel are the detriments to economic development.

Mr. Duques listed items he believes are reasons people and businesses want to live and do business in Madison including shops, culture, open space, beach and vibrancy. It is the people themselves that provide the economic drive. He noted that the Economic Development Commission has previously developed an Action Plan.

3-Minutes of the regular meeting of the Economic Development commission held on June 8, 2023

Mr. Wood suggested that accessibility and location are driving factors noting that diverse accessibility will attract people.

Dr. Stein suggested that it is important to encourage smaller businesses and companies to come to Madison to help draw more young families and balance the demographics.

Mr. Johnson commented that she agrees accessibility to New York and Boston, while being in a quiet, friendly environment away from the hustle and bustle of daily living is a beneficial economic driver.

Ms. Trent suggested that the Commission members also consider trends that might serve as economic drivers.

Ms. Johnson commented that many young families like to eat out but there is not a lot of choices of restaurants in Town. She also noted that some families are drawn to Guilford because they have amenities like a Racquet Club or splash pad. To attract young families, she believes that facilities like a public swimming pool, ice rink and other places for family activities would be beneficial.

Mr. Duques agreed that the proximity to New York and Boston are important drivers for residents and businesses. Madison has good schools, a beach, and is not that far from Vermont for skiing. Other facilities that would be draws for economic development would include a theatre, pool and splash pad and these are items that should be considered for the future.

Dr. Stein commented that a current trend is working remotely and consideration should be given to how this trend can impact what is needed in Town. He suggested that consideration be given to focusing on facilities for families rather than transportation that would focus on getting people in and out of Town efficiently. He also noted that increased tourism in Connecticut is a trend with tourism up 12% in the State, the Town should latch onto this trend to provide amenities utilized by tourists.

Mr. Wood suggested that affordability is an important factor to attract young people. This includes the housing stock, taxes, and labor which are all factors that could attract an individual family or business to move to Madison.

Ms. Trent suggested that demographics need to receive consideration when looking ahead. The population of Connecticut is declining and is expected to continue to decline. In addition, the population also is aging. Consideration should be given to what the Commission should do to adjust to this population change.

OLD BUSINESS

6. Academy Advisory Committee Update

Ms. Cote noted that the Academy Advisory Committee has not held a meeting.

7. POCD Update

Dr. Stein noted that there is no update on the Plan of Conservation and Development.

8. Business Retention

Ms. Cote noted that she had attended four business retention & expansion meetings this month: Reliance Merchant Services, the James Madison, House, Seahorse Inn and Wall Street Gallery. The scheduled visit to Blue Moon by the Sea will be rescheduled. The comments from businesses visited are consistently overall positive. Business owners are aware and happy the Town is making this effort to learn about their concerns and listen to them. No major concerns have been expressed.

9. EDC Business Breakfast

Dr. Stein noted that the EDC Breakfast on May 25th was a nice, well done, successful event. This event served as an introduction between the Town and local businesses and is helpful to make the Commission more visible.

10. Strategic Plan Update

Dr. Stein noted that there is no further update other than what was discussed earlier in the meeting with the consultant.

NEW BUSINESS

Dr. Stein requested input on whether to take a break and cancel the July and August Economic Development Commission meetings as has been done often in the past. He noted that he will not be available in July. Mr. Duques noted that it has been traditional for the EDC to not meet in July and August, so he feels it would be reasonable to take off these months.

In discussion, the Commission members expressed concern that EDC input could be needed on the Strategic Plan. It was agreed to cancel the July meeting and make a decision on the August meeting at a later date.

Selectman Wilson advised the Commission members that there have been some concerns about the implementation of the Tax Incentive Policy. This program is currently not working exactly as it was hoped. The Board of Selectmen will be discussing some aspects of the policy and will come back to the Economic Development Commission for input.

Mr. Duques noted that one of the successful applicants of this program had been Jerry Davis with his Bradley Road apartment buildings. Mr. Davis has expressed that he could not have done what he did without this program. This project has added to Madison's vibrancy and grand list. He feels an effort should be made to publicly tell the story about the successful us of this program in order to generate more interest. This is an example of what this program can do when implemented for an economic development project.

Mr. Wilson noted that some unexpected obstacles have been encountered so this is a good time to make improvements to this program that will benefit both the Town and the potential applicants. Mr. Duques requested that consideration be given to having an EDC representative on any working groups on this item.

Mr. Duques noted that there has been discussion at the State level about reducing funding for Shoreline East. The EDC has been a regular voice in support of the shoreline train. This news is disappointing since the train has been viewed as having an economic development value. He noted that there has been disappointment with the utilization of this service and it is possible the increase in the trend to work remotely has had an impact on its use.

Mr. Duques commented that the only way to improve ridership is to provide more, not less, options. This decision will most likely further complicate any efforts to create an up and over for the Madison train station.

ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Stein adjourned the Economic Development Commission meeting at 8:07 p.m.