

**MINUTES**  
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2012**  
**7:00 AM**  
**JORDAN ROOM, MATTHEWS TOWN HALL**

**PRESENT:** Chairman Paul Jamison; Vice Chairman Tim Jones; Members Paul Babinski, Rachel Garcia\*, Greg Klein, Bev Martin, Roger Martin, Jerry McGuire, Steve Thomson\*, John Urban, Tina Whitley; Assistant Town Manager Jamie Justice; Deputy Town Clerk Lori Canapinno

**ABSENT:** Member Mike Simons

**ALSO PRESENT:** Jim Johnson – Perigee.net; Steve Van Tol - Moonblink Communications; Consultant Dave Garner

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Jamison called the meeting to order at 7:05 am and declared a quorum.

**INVOCATION**

Mr. Martin rendered the invocation.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

Ms. Martin motioned to approve the minutes of the November 17, 2011 meeting. Vice Chairman Jones seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**Business Incubator**

Mr. Justice explained the taskforce met to discuss the incubator and propose suggestions. Vice Chairman Jones said the taskforce believes the incubator is feasible but as they ran the numbers it became apparent that the building at 196 South Trade Street would be too small to house the number of tenants that would be required to meet the site's overhead costs. Alternative incubator models could involve acquiring a larger site or the institution of a virtual community.

It is clear that the town needs a point person – an Economic Development Director - to head this project. The taskforce is making the recommendation to hire an Economic Development Director to lead this and other projects to fruition.

\*Ms. Garcia arrived.

APPROVED 5/17/2012

Ms. Whitley noted that EDAC member Steve Thomson has reviewed many different incubators around the country and he says there aren't any self-supporting incubators. She went on to explain that the Ben Craig Center at the University of North Carolina – Charlotte is funded by grants and the university. The bottom line is that the Board of Commissioners needs to hire a full time Economic Development Director so they can take the reins on this project. There is nothing else that can be done until the Board fills the position.

Mr. Justice noted that Mark Bryant and Dennis Harlow of Wingate University had been involved in previous discussions, but it now appears that Wingate will not be able to play a role in the development of an incubator, although Wingate participation may be possible at some future point when they expand their entrepreneurship program. That partnership could potentially solve some of the economic issues related to running an incubator.

Mr. Johnson said the virtual model seems to be a good opportunity, especially for those entrepreneurs who need consulting and technical support rather than a brick and mortar setup. He said there are a lot of experienced people with the necessary background who could work part time or for a low salary.

Chairman Jamison asked what the costs would be to involve SCORE or the CPCC Entrepreneurial virtual model. Consensus was those options are prohibitively expensive. He asked about the potential cost to set up the basic framework for a web-based system. Mr. Johnson said it wouldn't cost much, if anything, if web-based forms and information was placed on an existing website. Webinars targeting specific topics could be useful too.

Mr. Johnson explained that there are many different types of employee testing available, which can help an employer determine people's skills. They're all computer-based and pretty simple and would be very helpful to new entrepreneurs, especially those who don't yet know how to hire the right people.

Mr. Johnson also suggested seeking out partnerships that would allow for discounts on services for these businesses, such as discounted internet or phone lines.

Chairman Jamison asked if incubator information could be added onto the existing framework of the town's website. Mr. Justice said it was possible to add a separate link or whole new page from the existing site.

Mr. Justice noted that the town doesn't have to hire a Director as an employee of the Town – it could be a contracted arrangement. It could even start out as a part time position and grow to full time if necessary. Ms. Whitley said these suggestions need to be raised to the Commissioners, with the request to release some funds to hire someone to actually get an incubator off the ground. Mr. Klein said the taskforce discussed hiring someone with grant writing experience. Some of the salary expenditure could be offset if grants are received.

Mr. Urban asked how the town could go about connecting with other people in the economic development industry. He said he would not vote to fund \$125,000 for economic development when there are Commissioners who would not be in favor of anything an Economic Development Director might suggest. He said he would be completely on board with it as soon as Town Board of Commissioners was open to the whole concept of being "open for business." He suggested it might be time to have Frank Warren or someone else review the town's policy issues on things like economic development incentives, density and things of that nature and then explain to the Town Board what needs to be done differently. This could be something like a refresher on what Frank Warren has already done. Mr. Urban said he's not sure the Town Board understands the new pressures that are on society as a whole – the dynamics are changing and without the Board being educated on these new influences the Board will just continue going down the same path. He noted that they just recently learned that Matthews is the only one in the area without an economic development incentive policy, which could cause prospective businesses to eliminate Matthews from consideration immediately. The Board didn't even know that until very recently. He said a new Economic Development Director might come in with great fresh ideas but until the Board is educated, those great

ides will go nowhere. Ms. Whitey said the role of the Economic Development Advisory Committee is to advise the Board on these matters, so perhaps EDAC could do some research or talk to Frank Warren and then bring that information back to the Town Board. If the Town Board releases some funds a portion of them could go back to Frank Warren.

Chairman Jamison suggested informing the Town Board of the potential merit regarding doing something with the town's website. He is also in favor of giving a limited budget to Frank Warren for a "refresh" using today's economic truths. He also is in favor of leveraging the existing town website to use as the framework for a virtual incubator, or at least asking for permission to send out an RFP to see what it would take to put something out there.

Mr. Justice said Frank Warren has been very generous with his time in the past and it's possible that he could come to an EDAC meeting to talk about this. Ms. Whitley asked Mr. Justice to put that request into the report to the Town Board and Mr. Justice said that could be done. He said that would indicate that EDAC has done all it can for now on the incubator concept and that a larger issue exists that needs to be addressed. Ms. Whitley said it is very important to start on this now because the sportsplex project is underway. Mr. Urban said the sportsplex is being seen as something that will solve all problems, but that is not the case.

\*Mr. Thomson arrived.

Mr. Urban noted that the Planning Board just discussed a list of issues it would like to address in the coming year. EDAC should review that and see if there are hot button issues that need to be addressed by EDAC as well. He also suggested all volunteer boards do the same thing.

Mr. McGuire said it sounds like it would be premature to hire someone until it is known that the Town Board will work with them. Mr. Urban agreed. He also said the lack of a completed Unified Development Ordinance, Downtown Master Plan and Land Use Plan adds to the difficulty. That indicates there is no plan at the higher level to show what they want to do.

Mr. Justice said the Town Board needs a report on the incubator concept and the use of the property at 196 South Trade Street. He suggested revising the report to include the reasons why it won't work and add suggestions as to how to proceed, like refining the vision, and bringing that back to the Town Board. The recommendation that goes to them could include the evaluation of the incubator and the next steps that EDAC would like to pursue. Mr. Justice would have to revise the report and include the funding request of up to \$125,000, the suggestion to consult with Frank Warren, discussion of the virtual incubator model and clarification that the Director could be a contracted and/or part time position. By consensus it was determined that Mr. Justice will have that ready for the next Town Board meeting on February 13. He will distribute his revisions to EDAC as soon as possible.

Chairman Jamison said it would be a good idea to get more information on those Planning Board objectives that Mr. Urban mentioned. Both groups should be supportive of each other. Mr. Justice said the Chairmen of each group could meet and discuss relevant issues. Mr. Justice noted that all of the town's advisory boards used to meet to share information. Mr. Urban said it would be good to continue that practice.

Mr. Martin asked what types of businesspeople have been expressing interest in Matthews recently. Ms. Whitley said there were small businesses and restaurants but not a lot of retail. Some of the small business interest was from people working out of their home who could be good candidates for an incubator. Mr. Justice said he too hears from possible incubator candidates as well as those looking for existing retail or industrial space. He also hears from those associated with big projects that come through from the state level.

Mr. Martin suggested it would be good to examine the town and determine what properties are available and list their possible uses in order to determine what the town has and what type(s) of business it should focus on attracting. It would be a good task for an Economic Development Director. Mr. Justice agreed.

### **Downtown Wi-Fi/technology update**

The Committee heard from Steve Van Tol of Moonblink Communications, Jim Johnson of Perigee.net and Consultant Dave Garner.

Mr. Van Tol explained that a public Wi-Fi system could connect to the backbone of Mr. Johnson's existing network and use equipment attached to a number of buildings in the Matthews Station Street area. It could be free to the public and could be used for marketing purposes with a customized log-in page with town and/or business information. In addition, it is possible to set it up so that users' names and emails addresses could be collected for marketing purposes, although that is not mandatory. It would be fully customizable and users could log in for any length of time the town chose to allow.

There was discussion about the future of Wi-Fi and cellular technology. Cellular technology is used mostly for phones and some hotspot devices. Wi-Fi's infrastructure is designed for public use and is seen as an expected service now, not a luxury. Mr. Van Tol said Wi-Fi access is more important than ever and will remain important even as other technologies like cellular access progress.

Wi-Fi signals use the 2.4 GHz or 5.8 GHz bands and are dependent upon line of sight equipment. Multiple wireless networks can coexist without interference from each other. There are other technologies like WiMAX or 900MHz technology, which deal a little better with non-line of sight issues, but in terms of public Wi-Fi the traditional 2.4 or 5.8 GHz are the predominant use. The weakest point of any Wi-Fi network is the end device – a radio can transmit for miles but an individual laptop or smart phone might be able to pick up signals only within a couple hundred feet range. A sufficient number of radios need to be in place to cover the desired area.

Mr. Van Tol said there are almost no security issues involved in running Wi-Fi and tying in with existing firewalled networks. Security has been a big concern over the last few years so wireless safety has been beefed up to the point of being safer than wired transmissions. Mr. Johnson pointed out that public Wi-Fi users do have to secure their own computers and practice safe surfing practices.

The hardware would consist of small radios, about twelve to fourteen inches square that would be placed on the outside of a number of buildings and placed an eight to a quarter of a mile apart. The radios should be placed about 25 to 35 feet above ground and permission would need to be obtained from the property owner of each targeted location.

Mr. Johnson introduced Dave Garner, who worked with the City of Monroe on a similar initiative for their downtown area. Mr. Garner added to the security discussion and said that the biggest security issue comes from people who abuse free Wi-Fi services, like those who illegally download movies or music, or those who try to use the service to send out unsolicited bulk email. There's not much that can be done about illegal downloads but bulk email transmissions can be stopped.

Mr. Garner explained that he works with a national corporation called WildFire Connections. He designed and maintains the Wi-Fi system in Monroe, which was installed by WildFire free of charge to the city and it's been working very well for the past three years. He said WildFire does charge for installation in some areas, so that potential cost would have to be determined.

He said the scope of the project would depend on how large an area needed to be covered. Monroe plotted out their desired coverage of their downtown district and placed hardware on their government buildings. Matthews would have to determine where and how well that coverage was desired. He suggested starting with a small area as part of a pilot program and then widening it out later if complete coverage wasn't immediately possible.

He explained a downside that he deals with – the Wi-Fi signal in Monroe is designed for outdoor use only, but it does penetrate some buildings. Some businesses try to use it even though it's not a good signal inside their building and then they call him to complain about the poor connection.

He explained that Monroe keeps their connection wide open with no credentials required and an unlimited connection time. They use a splash page with some advertising – WildFire handles that aspect of the service. Mr. Garner suggested the town get in touch with Bob Dunlap of WildFire for more information on advertising services.

There was some discussion regarding the need for free public Wi-Fi. It would allow information access to visitors, offer exposure for any entity that is involved, and simply open doors and make it easy for people to learn more about Matthews, its services and resources and its businesses. It would simply make it easier for people to spend time in Matthews. Other towns and cities find it very helpful with marketing and some allow local businesses to advertise on their splash page. Some capture user's email addresses and use them for marketing as a reward to the businesses that are paying to advertise on the site. The splash page could be a big benefit to the town because it could direct visitors to specific things. The town could partner with another entity to maintain the system.

It was also suggested that the network could allow for the installation of security cameras that send the video feed to the Police Department. Police would be able to monitor those areas of town in live time.

Chairman Jamison said the group should explore the options of a town-owned system versus a privately-owned system or some hybrid of the two. That structure, whether or not it would be revenue-driven, the size of the service area and location of each piece of equipment, and pinpointing the exact purpose of such a system are all questions that need to be answered.

Mr. Martin suggested the service area could be expanded throughout the town. The wayfinding system that is currently being developed could allow for satellite radio locations as would various commercial and government buildings around town. Mr. Urban said the wayfinding kiosks could include integrated with a laptop or tablet to offer maps, program information or anything else the town wishes to share. That would allow thousands or hundreds of thousands of visitors per day to have access to this town information. That could also allow security cameras in places where there may be security concerns.

Mr. Urban noted that some people fear the idea that Matthews could lose its small-town identity. He said there are plenty of ways to integrate new technology while still looking quaint or old-fashioned.

Mr. Van Tol noted that the cost of equipment has dropped considerably in the last few years – a radio with 100 Mgs of throughput costs approximately \$70. Mr. Garner agreed and said camera prices start at approximately \$300 per unit. Some service providers don't charge anything for equipment or installation because they can use the equipment setup to sell their own subscriber services. .

Chairman Jamison asked for taskforce volunteers. Chairman Jamison, Mr. Thomson and Mr. Martin will meet and investigate these issues. Mr. Johnson offered his expertise as a consultant to the taskforce. By consensus it was decided that Mr. Justice will include information regarding this project in the update to the Town Board.

### **Façade Grant update – 189 North Trade Street**

Mr. Justice explained that the door to the property still needs to be painted. Once it's painted, Mr. Justice, Mr. Urban and Senior Planner Jay Camp will perform a site inspection and review the paperwork. By consensus it was determined that the report will be distributed to EDAC members via email instead of waiting until the next scheduled meeting. The town will then make a big marketing push for the Façade Grant Program and use this property as the example of how well it can be done.

### **Economic development incentives**

Chairman Jamison reviewed the events of the joint EDAC/Board of Commissioners meeting of January 9, 2012. The speakers from the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce and the UNC School of Government discussed various options. The Board of Commissioners has asked EDAC to further investigate the feasibility of such a policy. Mr. Justice said the key takeaway was that it's important to create a policy that states the town is willing to consider offering incentives for projects but that each project would be considered on a case-by-case basis. He said he believes the Commissioners felt comfortable with that since they would still have discretionary authority.

By consensus it was determined that a special meeting of the full Economic Development Advisory Committee will be held on Thursday, February 16, 2012 at 7:00 am to discuss possible economic development incentive plans.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **Appointments**

Ms. Martin motioned to renew Paul Jamison as Chairman and Tim Jones as Vice Chairman. Mr. Babinski seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Chairman Jamison and Vice Chairman Jones will serve those positions for the 2012 calendar year.

#### **Term limits**

Chairman Jamison said he was open to the idea of term limits but is afraid there might be difficulty finding people to serve. Mr. Urban said sometimes board and committee members get entrenched and term limits might help keep things flowing.

Mr. McGuire suggested allowing some number of multiple terms before mandatory rotation. He noted this group has welcomed new members through natural attrition. Mr. Justice said there have been only a small number of applicants each time an open position has been advertised. Mr. Klein suggested adding other seats for those interested parties and Mr. Justice noted that the subcommittees offer those seats. That is how Mr. Martin and Mr. Thomson first became involved with EDAC.

Ms. Whitley suggested advertising for specific types of people, such as developers, hotel management, restaurateurs and the like. Mr. Justice suggested EDAC develop a membership subcommittee that could talk to people and generate interest in future vacancies.

By consensus it was determined that EDAC members will review the issue and discuss it at the March meeting.

## **SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Business Development**

Vice Chairman Jones explained the next Mayor's Breakfast is scheduled for Friday, February 17, 2012. It has not yet been announced. The announcement will be sent out to a wider group than what was previously used – this invitation will be open to all Matthews business entities and will also be placed on the Chamber calendar.

Ms. Martin noted there have been problems in the past with attendee no-shows and volunteered to contact those on the attendance roster to remind them of the event. Vice Chairman Jones also noted there will be a reminder email sent out about two weeks prior to the event and another email sent out one or two days before the event.

### **Downtown**

Mr. Justice said he will meet with Planner Jay Camp to discuss the progress of the Downtown Master Plan.

Ms. Whitley said there is no communication with the downtown merchants and noted the Downtown Merchants Group has not met for some time. She said that list needs to be updated and asked if Annette Privette-Keller could send out her list of downtown contacts for review.

### **Development Process/Planning Advisory**

Mr. Urban suggested meeting with outgoing Planning Board Chairman Jim Jiles and current Planning Board Vice Chairman Jim Godfrey to discuss ways to link the work of the Planning Board and Economic Development Advisory Committee.

## **STAFF REPORT/ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

Mr. Justice noted the September 2012 Democratic National Convention has been reduced from four days to three.

Mr. Urban was reappointed by the Town Board to serve another two year term as the Board liaison to EDAC.

Salem Services Group, LLC has purchased the former Structural Preservation Systems based in Matthews. Salem was originally part of that company and repurchased it after Structural announced its closing. It appears that 30-40 of the 100+ employees who had been laid off will regain their jobs.

Annette Privette-Keller will present an update on the wayfinding project to the Town Board during Monday's meeting.

Squirrel Lake Park renovations are complete and renovations to the Ag Building and former Bradford Clinic facility are underway.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

The development process advisory project is being worked up now and the final report will be coming soon. Mr. Justice will distribute that information to the Committee when it becomes available.

Mr. McGuire offered to put together the next business summit to take place in April or May.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Martin motioned to adjourn. Mr. Babinski seconded and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:40 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Canapinno  
Deputy Town Clerk

DRAFT