



Economic Sustainability Commission

MINUTES of the January 14, 2026 regular meeting.

MEMBERS PRESENT: David Jessee, Tyler Huntington, Melba Ribeiro, Jack Moracco, Eliazar Posada-Orozco.

MEMBERS NOT PRESENT: Jim Porto, Sheila Dalton, and Jason Merrill

STAFF PRESENT: Jon Hartman-Brown, Staff Liaison; Lany Newman, Economic Development

GUESTS PRESENT:

Chair Jessee called the regular meeting to order at 6:04pm at Carrboro Town Hall.

1. Consider November 12, 2025 Meeting Minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes from the November 2025 meeting. Members noted that the minutes were clear and accurately reflected the prior meeting's discussions. A motion was made by Mr. Huntington and seconded by Ms. Ribeiro to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Committee and Staff Reports

a. Carrboro Business Alliance Update

Staff provided an update on the last CBA meeting where they presented a proposal for a living wage initiative. Feedback from local businesses indicated conceptual support for the living wage goal, coupled with concern about implementation challenges due to current economic conditions. Business owners expressed difficulty absorbing additional labor costs without impacting pricing or sales.

b. Staff Update

Staff provided an update on current and upcoming economic development initiatives including exploration of a joint retail leakage and gap analysis with the Town of Chapel Hill, development of a joint small business accelerator program that is about to launch, progress and delays on a local business connection database, implementation of Disparity Study results, and continued work on an annual business recognition ceremony.

3. Social District Discussion

Mr. Hartman-Brown outlined the statutory framework for the potential establishment of a social district within Downtown Carrboro including operational requirements like signage, cup labeling, enforcement, and management. Interest from several downtown businesses was

noted, particularly on the east side of downtown. The Commission discussed potential coordination with a future Chapel Hill social district to ensure consistency and continuity. Safety considerations, pedestrian traffic, and the relationship between a social district and potential pedestrian-only street areas was also discussed. The Commission expressed interest in hearing more directly from the broader business community before making a recommendation to Town Council.

A motion was made by Mr. Jessee and seconded by Mr. Huntington to direct staff to continue exploring the social district concept, engage additional businesses and stakeholders, and return with a more formal proposal for Commission consideration. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Incentive Policy Discussion

The Commission continued its review of a proposed economic development incentive policy framework. Staff explained that incentives would primarily be structured as property tax abatements tied to new investment, job creation, or capital expenditure, while protecting the Town's existing tax base. The Commission discussed the importance of focusing incentives on industries that bring new revenue into the local economy, such as arts, entertainment, cultural, and green technology sectors. They also discussed alignment of incentives with community values such as placemaking, design standards, affordability, mixed-use development, and the long-term rationale for incentivizing commercial development to balance Carrboro's predominantly residential tax base.

A motion was made by Ms. Ribeiro and seconded by Mr. Jessee to direct staff to continue development of the incentive policy, including economic modeling and refinement of parameters, and to return with a more detailed draft policy. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Racial Equity Commission Appointment

The Commission discussed ongoing challenges in recruiting candidates for the Economic Sustainability Commission. Members shared outreach efforts to date and acknowledged difficulty identifying individuals who have the capacity to serve on one board let alone liaise on the Racial Equity Commission as well. Consensus was reached that additional time is needed to recruit suitable candidates to fill ESC vacancies before a liaison is chosen to represent the ESC on the Racial Equity Commission.

A motion was made by Mr. Jessee and seconded by Mr. Moracco to table the Racial Equity Commission appointment indefinitely until ESC membership is full. The motion passed unanimously.

6. Informal Discussion and Announcements

The Commission briefly discussed recruitment strategies for new membership.

There being no other items before the Commission, Chair Jessee adjourned the meeting. The meeting ended at 7:09pm.