



**Economic Development Commission
Monday, February 7, 2011
Town of Windham Meeting Room
Meeting Minutes**

Commission Members present: Bill Hettinger, Victor Funderburk

Commission Members absent: Eric Crowley & Bob Horrocks

Town Staff: James Finger, Town Planner, Sharon Vernon, recording secretary, Paula Stahl, PZC, Mayor- Ernie Eldridge attended to make a quorum for the meeting.

Call to order: Bill Hettinger called the meeting to order at 7:20 pm

Citizens & Delegations:

Update on the PZC revisions: Paula Stahl stated that the PZC started back in August on looking at different ways to increase economic development in town. She commented that they are thinking about changing some of the parking regulations and making North Windham a more business friendly area for additional development. Paula added that they heard that Windham Hospital needed their help in restructuring the zoning that would enable them to carry out their project, so the PZC decided to put everything on hold and in the months of November, December & January worked on a new zoning district called the B-4 Health Care District. Paula commented that it's a dense development and that this area is right around the hospital itself and is about 52 acres. Paula added that the PZC also revised their sub-division regulations to be more flexible for non-residential sub-divisions within the Willimantic Service District. Paula stated that those two changes are effective next Thursday February 17th. Paula commented that the hospital has submitted a sub-division plan to sub-divide approximately 16 acres. The whole hospital property is 36 acres and one fairly large parcel will be sub-divided into 3 lots, one in which they will have the 30,000 s.f. medical office building that has already been approved by PZC, and will be on our tax roles. Paula stated that

the PZC are continuing to work on their parking regulations. She added that in their research they have found that most business parking lots have too many spaces. At least $\frac{1}{4}$ of their lots were empty at peak times, some of the lots were $\frac{3}{4}$ empty and some were pretty close to being right. Our goal for our new parking regulations is that we want them to be flexible so we will be requiring less parking in most instances, and will be dividing them up by use, not sure yet how we will be doing that but we are working on how to group them. We are also working on a methodology to shared parking. Paula stated the PZC are focused on tax dollars and want to reduce parking because it means were creating lots of parking lots and asphalt doesn't pay much in tax dollars, we would rather have more buildings in those spaces.

Paula commented that they are back to working on the North Windham area and added that they are seeing two distinct zones, the eastside where Walmart & Home Depot are is more conducive for the larger retailers, & nation-wide franchise type businesses that are there and there is more land there than across the street. They're thinking maybe a North Windham Retail Area East & a North Windham Retail Area West. On the east side it would be geared towards the national chain type of business, we would increase the density as much as we can in order to have sufficient parking. Paula also stated that the PZC would like to change the set back requirements and increase the density. The PZC have talked about not having minimum lot size in order to increase development in this area.

Paula commented that the west side is more complicated, there is a fairly narrow strip of land that's owned by 6 or 7 different people, then there's the town garage and the airport. At some point in time the public works garage will probably move, so we should plan today for when that happens to increase development potential there. The regulations would encourage smaller commercial businesses there. Paula stated that they noticed the per acre tax revenue is higher the smaller the business is. Businesses like Home Depot & Walmart take up more land, while a smaller business like dunkin donuts is one of our highest tax revenues.

The PZC is looking to modify some of the existing zoning regulations in our B-1 District to encourage re-use of some of our buildings and we may extend it down to the river and on the sides. Paula added that their goal is to bring most of this to a public hearing in June. This would include: the parking regulations, the East side of the North Windham retail area, the rpo for health care and non- residential subdivisions outside of the service district and the B-1.

Paula concluded in saying that in the Fall the PZC will be working on the B-2, B-3, C-1, C-2 and also the West side of the North Windham area.

Some discussion followed on curbs in parking lots.

Tax Abatement for Windham Hospital:

James Finger stated that he met with the Town Assessor and the Finance Director to review previous tax abatement requests, there were three that were similar (medical buildings). James added that in those 3 cases they were granted a tax abatement for 50% over 3 years. James added that this applicant's request is for 50% abatement for a 5 year period. James also stated that in this case they are proposing to extend the water line which would make it worth the board to consider.

David Sessions, President of the Casle Corporation, a design/build/developer of medical office buildings gave a brief presentation: He introduced his real estate partner Bill Logenson and the Windham Hospital representative Ed Brusiers.

David started off saying that he wanted to commend the town officials for their time and work that was committed to this project.

Windham Medical Associates, LLC is proposing to build a 29,840 s.f. medical office building to house medical practices associated with Windham Hospital and it's parent corporation Hartford Hospital.

David went into some detail on the size, access and use of the building.

David stated that our physicians are noticing a decline in their revenues so they have become increasingly sensitive to operating costs in buildings and have been reluctant to commit to buildings. David added that improving quality of life services with these new medical buildings is very important to the role of economic development. David also stated that any abatement in reducing their costs is 100% to the physicians. The Town Assessor has helped us understand the grand list, assessment approach to the building to formulate the plan that we have submitted by application made on January 16th to Neal Beets. David added that he agreed with the town planner that it's a benefit to the Town and community on their

proposal of extending the water lines and that is why they have asked for a 5 year abatement instead of 3 year as a form of reimbursement for that.

Ed Brusiers stated that he has personally been involved with this project for almost 20 years, and this is actually the third time around, hopefully the last. The first presentation was made in 1991. Ed stated that these types of projects are difficult to pull together with all the physicians being independent practioners. We need to create an environment for these physicians so they can continue to recruit physicians to either expand or replace those that are leaving the practice. We need to have a class "A" medical building.

Some discussion followed on where the physicians would be relocating from and more details on the proposal for extending the water lines.

Victor Funderburk made a motion that the EDC recommend the abatement in this proposal be considered for approval by the Town Council as it's been presented here at the EDC meeting. Bill Hettinger seconded the motion, motion carried.

There was further discussion on the benefit of the proposed extended water line and recruitment of new physicians.

Chairman's Report & Commission member comments:

Bill Hettinger stated that he received a letter from Phoebe Godfrey requesting a support letter from the EDC for a HUD Grant for the Commerically Liscenced Cooperative Kitchen Economic Development Project, CLICK.

Bill commented that CLICK will serve as a business incubator in which people wishing to produce, sell and distribute their own food products can benefit from. People will be able to utilize a commercially licensed kitchen to produce their product and also receive business skills trainings, business development consultation, and micro loans to finance their business from the Community Economic Development Fund (CEDF). The second purpose of CLICK is to provide nutritional education to local students and community members via healthy cooking classes and food seminars.

Some discussion followed on the question if CLICK was incorporated and organized yet. Bill replied that he was not sure and that he received two separate letters from them. One letter requesting a letter

of support from the EDC for their HUD Grant to be addressed to HUD and emailed to CEDF, and the other letter requesting assistance with their 5013c application.

Victor Funderburk made a motion to table this request until the EDC receives more clarification on exactly what CLICK needs from them. Bill Hettinger seconded it, motion carried.

Victor Funderburk proposed the following resolution for the Arts and Entertainment District:

Be it resolved that the Windham Economic Development Commission recommends that the town council proclaim that the Town of Windham make the development of the Arts & Entertainment District a major component of all efforts to provide employment & economic development for the town of Windham.

Further be it resolved that an economic plan for arts, culture and tourism will be developed and implemented by the inclusion of arts organizations, museums, the university, creative local businesses, the Chamber of Commerce and the State of Connecticut in the town planning of steps to be taken to promote the development of the Arts and Entertainment District and the supporting businesses associated with the District activities.

After a lengthy discussion of this resolution the EDC decided that the resolution would remain on their agenda to be discussed further because they would like to request that the town make the Arts & Entertainment District more of a priority and also ask that it be promoted more and that the town make more of a financial commitment to the district.

Citizens & Delegations:

None

Adjournment:

Victor Funderburk made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bill Hettinger seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by: Sharon Vernon