



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

Commission Members present: Bill Hettinger, Victor Funderburk & Bob Horrocks

Commission Members absent: Eric Crowley

Town Staff: James Finger, Town Planner, Sharon Vernon, recording secretary.

Call to order: Bill Hettinger called the meeting to order at 7:14 pm

Citizens & Delegations:

None

Review & Approval of minutes:

Bob Horrocks made a motion to accept the minutes of January 3, Victor Funderburk seconded it, members present approved. Victor Funderburk made a motion to accept the minutes of February 7, Bill Hettinger seconded, Bob Horrocks abstained, minutes approved.

Chairman's Report :

Bill Hettinger stated that next month there will be a new DECD Commissioner in Hartford, her name is Katherine Smith, formerly from ING & AETNA Insurance Co. Bill mentioned that several years ago He and Katharine Smith worked together in the Real Estate Department. Bill added that since he does know her, she will make a valuable contact person.

Bill commented that he read an article in the Chronicle that Willimantic's Blockbuster will be closing soon and he said that he

received a request from the town manager Neal Beats that James Finger find who their real estate agent is to see what the plans are for the building.

Bill also mentioned that he heard that the roof caved in because of snow in the back of the Keeper warehouse property. And the round Quonset hut in Windham collapsed because of snow. Bill suggested that James check in with these buildings to see if there is anything we can assist them with. Bill added that specifically with the old Windham building because of a possible fire. Some discussion followed on Giant Vac and if Matt Vertefeuille has not looked into any of the buildings above then we should.

Meeting with DECD on CDBG Small Cities Funding:

Bill stated James Finger, Neal Beats, Mary DeMarco & himself met a week or two ago with four people from DECD regarding Community Building block grant money. Bill commented that Windham is too small to be an entitlement community so it has to apply for funding through DECD.

DECD's priorities have been housing & economic development. The last few years the town has done housing. Discussion followed on housing rehab projects and Small Cities CDBG town meetings.

Bill stated that some of their priorities were streetscapes, façade improvement program, loan fund for small downtown businesses. Bill commented that Streetscapes if we applied would no longer be accepted. Bill gave a few examples of past economic development projects that were approved a few years back. Bill added that no one has used Small Cities CDBG funding on economic development projects in five years.

James added that recently the state has put an emphasis to promote economic development, but they put together this large, thick manual that was so complex that no one applied.

There was some discussion on the Town's Community Revitalization Strategy application that was submitted to the State a few years ago. Bill explained that the DECD representative reported that - yes they have it sitting in a pile on a desk, but that they don't have any review criteria to evaluate it. But if they did, it wouldn't meet a few of the priority issues of the State and the Federal government; plus they don't have anyone in the office to spare to look at it now.

Victor Funderburk suggested setting up a meeting with other towns that have pending CRS applications. If anyone needs a copy of the CRS application, you can find it on the Town of Windham website, under Resources, 4th document down. Further discussion followed on the CRS application.

Bob Horrocks commented that the Jamaican Restaurant desperately needs windows and he suggested that we look into a loan program for them, possibly an interest free one. Some discussion followed.

Victor Funderburk read his draft for a Resolution to make Windham a Regional Center for Arts, Culture and Tourism. A discussion ensued:

Bill Hettinger commented that the document needs to be more concrete, and there should be a plan for action.

James Finger agreed, and explained that if this was submitted as a resolution, it should include a list of specific actions that you want the Town to take. Most of the discussion that followed focused on trying to clarify what the resolution would accomplish.

Victor discussed the need for agencies getting together and sharing mailing lists, the need for maps, signs, lists of businesses, websites & marketing. Victor also brought up the Bruce John meeting (Destination Willimantic) on March 15th at the Episcopal Church, 220 Valley St., this will be a collaboration of groups looking for leadership. Victor invited the EDC to attend Bruce John's meeting.

Victor mentioned that Jean DeSmet received a \$10,000 grant for advertising for the Third Thursday Street Fest, some discussion followed on applying for grants.

Bill stated that the goals lists has on it 2 sign programs. The Killingly model and a Coventry model. We need signs to direct people to the Historic downtown. Discussion followed on the 2011 Goals:

1. Business Friendly Town
2. Downtown Revitalization
3. Sign Program
4. Main St. Crosswalks
5. CDBG Small Cities
6. Business Calling Program

There was also a suggestion that maybe Victor's resolution should be submitted as a proclamation instead of a resolution, everyone agreed on this.

Victor asked Bill what is the action step to getting a vision? Bill replied that you would call each member of the interested agencies along with the EDC and other interested citizens, choose a meeting room and during those community meetings, come up with a vision that all agree on.

Bill also added that he didn't think that this was a role of the EDC. He said that he thought there were other organizations in town that are more qualified. Bill also added that he wasn't comfortable presenting anything to the town without concrete, specific steps.

Bill suggested to wait until the meeting on March 15th to see what their collective vision is and go from there. He also stated that he would like to continue this discussion at the next meeting.

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
And revised by James Finger*