



**Economic Development Commission  
Monday, May 2, 2011  
Town of Windham Meeting Room  
Meeting Minutes**

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

**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 7:31 pm

**Citizens & Delegations:** None

**Review & Approval of minutes:**

Victor Funderburk made a motion to accept the EDC minutes of April 4th, with amendments; Bob Horrocks seconded it, all members present approved. Amendments were as follows: Move the title "2011 Initiatives" under the first paragraph of Chairman's Report. Change spelling of "commit to committees" under the Role of EDC line C.

**Update on Incentive Housing Zone (IHZ)- Jana Butts:**

Bill Hettinger stated that he attended the IHZ forum and that there was a diverse group of about 20 people that attended the IHZ workshop held on Saturday, April 23, 2011 at 10:00 a.m. at the Windham Town Hall Ballroom.

Jana Butts commented that the IHZ workshop lasted about 2 hours and she agreed that there was a diverse cross-section of people that attended and also that the Willimantic District was more represented than the Windhams. Jana replied that she started the workshop with an informational slide presentation, and then went into discussion on the Town's criteria in addition to the state's criteria of where the location of the IHZ should be. She added that the focus of the workshop was on this subject.

Jana also stated that she passed out community surveys that would help them to prioritize locations for the IHZ. Jana passed out these surveys to the EDC and will also give surveys to the Town Council & Town officials to complete. Bill Hettinger asked Jana to go into more detail on the state's criteria.

Jana replied that the most important criteria from the state are: The IHZ must be consistent with the State, Regional & Local Plans of Conservation & Development. The IHZ must be adjacent to transit services, and the IHZ must be in locations with public water & sewer.

Some discussion followed on the incentives that a potential developer may receive and also on parking issues.

Jana gave the EDC some of the survey results from the last workshop:

Results for question #1: What is the most important issue facing the town? Most answered: Education, employment & taxes.

Question #2: What is the overall quality of life in town? Most answered: Good, excellent & fair.

Question #3: Where should the IHZ be located? Some people suggested specific areas such as downtown, access to public transportation; it should be downtown to develop a walking community, places that would not remove the property from the tax role, being close to food production.

Question #4: Most important thing to consider when locating an IHZ on a scale of 1-5? Highest-ranking responses were: areas of blight & neglect, will not impact wildlife habitat areas, and the site must be an "in-fill" site.

Question #5: My biggest fear of IHZ is? The two highest-ranking responses were: "It will not contribute to the beauty of our historic community" and "It will be an additional burden to our school system" No one chose that they do not want any development at all.

Question #6: I would like to see an IHZ that will... The highest ranking responses were: to create more foot traffic downtown, encourage economic growth downtown through creation of mixed-use developments and to provide quality housing for a diversity of residents.

Question #7: Do you think it's important for the Town of Windham to provide additional incentives for developers within the IHZ? Answers were: Yes or yes under certain conditions.

Some discussion followed on "affordable housing."

Jana stated that the next IHZ forum topic is: "What should Incentive Housing look like?" That workshop will be held at the Windham Town Hall Ballroom on Saturday, May 28<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m.

Jana added that if anyone would like more info on the IHZ, to visit [www.wincog.org/ihz](http://www.wincog.org/ihz)

### **Discussion on business signage programs and improved crosswalks on Main Street downtown:**

After a lengthy discussion on these subjects, it was decided to make a formal request to the Town Council, the following resolutions were made:

#### **Crosswalks Resolution:**

*Bill Hettinger made a motion to urge the Town Council to explore changing crosswalks so it's friendlier to pedestrians crossing Main Street downtown. This includes improving the demand responsiveness to existing signalized intersections; eliminating some signalized intersections; and adding pedestrian crosswalks where appropriate, for example where there is significant existing jaywalking by the public parking lots such as by Cafémantic and by the Mills.*

*Bob Horrocks seconded this motion, all members approved.*

#### **Signage Resolution:**

*Bill Hettinger made a motion to urge the Town Council to consider adding directional street signs in order to help improve the viability of the businesses downtown, providing means for businesses to pay the town to install directional signs to be placed on top of the existing street signs, or stand alone sign poles as done in Killingly.*

*Bob Horrocks seconded the motion, all members approved.*

### **Tourism signage resolution:**

*Bill Hettinger made a motion to encourage the Town Council to explore opportunities for signage at the gateways to town and locations in town to provide direction to venues for arts, culture and tourism for example, such as signage for Garden on the Bridge, Railroad Museum, Windham Textile Museum, and as is done in towns like Coventry for their Historic District.*

*Victor Funderburk seconded the motion, all members approved.*

### **Discussion of community vision and plan – arts and entertainment district – formation of sub-committee:**

James Finger suggested that the EDC could request that the Town Council appoint an ad-hoc committee made up of art & cultural organizations.

Bill Hettinger commented that he thought they should start out with a sub-committee of the EDC.

Victor Funderburk, Bill Anderson and Bob Horrocks agreed to serve on the sub-committee. Victor stated that he would identify interested groups and would start a list of contacts.

Victor asked James if they could hold their meetings in the town hall, James replied as long as there is space available and that he post a notice because 3 EDC members would make a quorum.

### **Chairman's Report:**

Bill Hettinger stated he, Victor, Bob and Tom DeVivo toured the South Windham site where Tom DeVivo suggested that we create an industrial park on that town owned property. Bill said that the follow-up actions steps are: that Bob Horrocks speak to Joe Gardner, Town Engineer regarding the one source of water by the railroad tracks that needs to be re-located to the other side of the railroad tracks. Bill Hettinger & Victor Funderburk will set up a meeting with Neal Beets to see what he thinks of the project.

James Finger commented that Joe Gardner stated that the property is being graveled and that the Town is being paid \$2.00 a yard. James added that they raised enough money from the sale of gravel to pay for improvements to the Public Works Garage to put a whole new wing on. Bill stated that the gravel won't last forever, it will surely run out before a

5 year project was completed. Bill added that another issue is that people are dumping chunks of old cement on the property. Bill also commented that the site would have to be left suitably graded. James offered to talk to Joe to get some more details on the property. Bill added that he visited the Norwich industrial park and it didn't look like it had very much vacant space.

There was also discussion on possibly looking for funding to do a feasibility study on the project.

### **Tax Abatement Guidelines:**

Bill Hettinger stated that Neal Beats asked that James Finger, Joan Paskewich, Town Assessor and the EDC assist in setting guidelines for tax abatements.

James passed out an article on "Tax Increment Financing as an Economic Development tool" that Neal Beats suggested that the commission review. Some discussion followed on this.

James also passed out a memo from the Town Attorney on "State Statutes Authorizing Economic Development Efforts by Cities and Towns". This memo provides an overview of the various tools for promoting economic development for the town.

The Town Attorney explained that there is no statutory authority for Towns to reduce taxes that have already been levied for any property owner, and certainly not for a general area like the downtown. However, there are a variety of tools to generate economic development. The legislature has enabled towns to exercise a limited power to adjust future assessments for certain improvements to property over a graduated period in order to promote rehabilitation or new development. These are as follows:

- Negotiated assessments – section 12-65, section 12-65b, 12-65c through 12-65f
- Economic development bodies – section 8-126, section 8-169, section 8-186.
- Use of municipality-owned property by contract
- Tax Liens – section 12-195h
- Entertainment District

Discussion followed on these tools and on the steps to establishing a Redevelopment Agency.

James' packet also contained a copy of the Section-10 Windham code of ordinances, **and a draft of the EDC Annual Report for 2010 – APPROVED**; and a copy of a real estate ad photo on the sale of 18 Watson Street, Cushman & Wakefield state that this property is 4,800+ s.f. constructed of masonry block and metal with a glass storefront, it is currently being used for commercial sales & distribution, the total acres is 0.26 and the sale price is \$265,000.

James also said that he spoke with Sears, & the Salvation Army in Mansfield as they need to find a new site, and he had contacted a property here in Windham who might be able to accommodate them. In addition, he met with the people at the Frog View Gymnasium on their need to find a new site, because the property will be sold to someone who will be converting it into apartments. The EDC members discussed some possible site ideas.

**New Business:** The Chairman said that he would be attending a workshop in New Haven on May 13<sup>th</sup> on CT. Main Street Center finding money for your downtown.

**Citizens & Delegations:** None

**Adjournment:** *Victor Funderburk made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bob Horrocks seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 10:00 pm.*

*Minutes respectfully submitted by: Sharon Vernon – and revised by James Finger, Town Planner for clarification*

**SUPPLEMENTAL:**

*The Chairman sent the following letter to Town Manager, Neal Beets and Mayor Ernie Eldridge as the Commission recommended and approved:*

At the May 2, 2011 Economic Development Commission (EDC) meeting, the Commission voted to promote three projects designed to promote Windham businesses that require the Town Council involvement, and/or Town Manager direction to town staff.

**1. Improve Pedestrian Crosswalks in the Downtown.**

The Commission voted to urge the Town Council to explore the opportunities with the CT DOT on changing crosswalks along Main Street in the downtown area so as to promote a more pedestrian friendly environment. This includes:

- Add pedestrian crosswalks where appropriate, for example from the parking lot to Cafémantic, and at the Garden on the Bridge;
- Eliminate some signalized intersections; or

- Improve the demand responsiveness of the existing signalized intersections for pedestrians to provide a better means to cross instead of promoting traffic flow.

Rationale: Many people find it very difficult to cross Main Street to get from parking areas to patronize businesses on either side of the street. The existing signalized crosswalks apparently are timed to move traffic through the Main St. area, and take a while to change. This is not conducive to the downtown businesses, and is certainly not for pedestrian use. The result is that pedestrians become frustrated and cross the street at random – creating traffic hazards. The EDC would like to promote the efforts to improve the business climate, and pedestrian safety will benefit our Downtown businesses.

## **2. Business Signage**

The Commission voted to urge the Town Council to explore the opportunities with the CT DOT to improve the viability of downtown businesses by allowing the Town to install directional signs either on top of existing street name signs or on separate sign poles. The Town could recover its expenses by charging businesses an initial fee, and a smaller annual fee for the continued use. These signs would be on local streets intersecting with State roads.

Rationale: This is also common in many Vermont Towns, and here in Connecticut - Killingly has implemented a similar program in downtown Danielson by installing small signs directing residents and visitors to the businesses located on the side streets along Main Street/Route 12. This would aid potential customers driving along our Main Street to find downtown businesses more readily, and especially those located on side streets.

## **3. Arts, Culture, and Tourism Signage**

The Commission urges the Town Council to explore opportunities with the CT DOT to permit signage at the gateways to town and at locations within town along State roadways to provide better direction for drivers to be aware and to locate venues for arts, culture, and tourism. Examples include signage for attractions such as the garden on the bridge, railroad museum, textile museum, etc., and directing visitors to the historic downtown district (as is done in towns like Coventry – to the Nathan Hale homestead)."

Rationale: Many Economic Development seminars tout the benefits of promoting tourism as an economic development tool. However, in order for Windham to take advantage of its local arts, and culture, it's important to provide directional signage at the key intersections leading to these venues. Gateway signage should be located along State roadways (e.g. the route 6/66 split in N. Windham, the route 6/66 split in Columbia, route 32 at the Frog Bridge) directing visitors to the business district and historic downtown. In addition, it's important to provide wayfaring signage within Town on local streets to provide direction to the attractions, as many people may not know these venues exist.