



**Economic Development Commission  
Monday, June 6, 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.

**Guest Speakers:** Paula Stahl, PZC, & Jana Butts, WINCOG.

**Call to order:** Bill Hettinger called the meeting to order at 7:32 pm

**Citizens & Delegations:**

John Walker introduced himself as owner of the Shoe Smith downtown.

**Review & Approval of minutes:**

Bill Anderson made a motion to accept the EDC minutes of May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Bob Horrocks seconded it, all members present approved.

**Update on Zoning changes:**

Ms. Stahl stated that the goal for the planning & zoning commission is for the PZC to work on revising the zoning regulations that the town currently has to make it easier for people to develop. She added that the PZC is trying to eliminate the hoops that people have to go through to open up a retail business.

Ms. Stahl stated that the PZC is proposing that the physical area of the B1 district shrink slightly to focus more on the four-five story buildings downtown and then create another new zone that would surround that to make a nice transition between the B1 and neighboring uses. Ms. Stahl added that this would include the Lucky Frog which should be part of the downtown area but currently isn't.

Ms. Stahl also stated that they would take B1a out Main Street both directions a little bit down to the river and also take the other properties that are on the other side of Valley Street. The PZC is encouraging the type of development that the town wants such as: restaurants, activity for people and for people to be able to live in the upper floors of the downtown buildings.

Ms. Stahl stated that currently for someone to put housing downtown in the B1 they would have to go to a special hearing and argue their case as to why they should have residential on the upper floors downtown, (which is exactly what the town says they want), so that would be changed and it would be approved at an administrative level with certain guidelines. Ms. Stahl added that if it was something extra ordinary then it would have to go to the PZC for consideration.

Ms. Stahl commented that the PZC is tackling commercial development zones first and will tackle the residential districts after they take care of the commercial. Ms. Stahl commented that the goal & philosophy of the PZC is that someday the economic times will change and we want our town's zoning regulations to be ready to meet that change. Ms. Stahl added that all the work they are doing is to implement the "2007 Plan of Development".

Bob Horrocks asked Ms. Stahl what their timeline was. She replied that the PZC is having a public hearing at the town hall in 2 1/2 weeks, on June 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Some discussion followed on the changes of North Windham in the past 10-12 years. Discussion included the creation of a new district which is the Northridge Road area; it goes from the residential street Crystal Road to Route 6, the airline trail, up to Tractor Supply. This new district was created to encourage retail development. (Basically National Franchise stores).

Ms. Stahl also stated that the PZC are revising their sub-division regulations for properties that are served by public water & sewer, making it easier for more dense development.

Ms. Stahl commented that they are also proposing a change to the town wide parking regulations. Some discussion followed on the parking study done by Fitzgerald & Haliday and on the subject that many businesses do not need the amount of parking that they currently have. Bill Hettinger asked Ms. Stahl with the smaller amounts of parking spaces required for businesses would it be enough for snow removal storage. She replied that they thought that there would be enough space for snow storage because in the regulations each business is required to set aside spaces for that.

Ms. Stahl stated that they are doing some light “housekeeping” on revising some zoning sections that are not quite clear to users, or are not consistent with the State Statutes.

Ms. Stahl added that they are also putting together an informational package for new developers for the public hearing.

Ms. Stahl commented that this summer the PZC will be working on allowing chickens in the service district, mobile food carts in certain parts of town, and revising our regulations for our gravel operations. She added that starting in the fall the PZC will be working on regulations for other commercial districts such as West Main Street, Route 32 South, the other side of North Windham where the Aero Diner is located, the incentive housing zone (IHZ) and to look at other language for signs & lighting to make it easier for developers.

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

Jana Butts commented that she wanted to give the EDC a brief update of the last public forum and she also added that she wanted to ensure us that the IHZ regulations would be consistent and compliment the new sub-division regulations that are under development with the PZC.

Jana replied that the second public forum was held on May 28<sup>th</sup> upstairs in the town hall ballroom. She added that the same format as the first workshop was followed, a slide presentation and brief overview of the IHZ. Jana stated that they then discussed the different aspects of the design standards and then broke down the steps of the site planning process which are essentially traffic connectivity, building location, height & design, parking, utility areas such as loading dock needs, garbage pick-up, landscaping & open spaces.

Jana commented that the funnest part of the forum was the visual preference survey. Jana passed out the results of the survey to the commission. Jana stated that on the documents that were passed out to us were the highest scoring images on 3 main categories: Historic Main Street, property between Valley & Main Street next to Jillson Square and Residential Neighborhood. Historic Main Street received the most votes of 37, next to Jillson Square received 26 votes and residential neighborhood received 26 votes. The highest single image was not from our town, it was a photo of Pella, Iowa which received 10 votes. Jana stated that most of the images were taken from a website called Affordable Housing Design Advisor, [www.designadvisor.org](http://www.designadvisor.org) Jana said there is a gallery of photos and information regarding the housing on this website. There were 7 votes for 931 Main Street, 5 votes for the old Gem building.

The photo from Boston, MA received 9 votes, 8 votes for the Old Willimantic & Lumber Company, 5 votes for another image from Boston, MA.

For residential neighborhoods there were 7 votes for Madison, WI, 5 votes for Queens, N.Y. and 3 votes for Jamaica Plain, MA. Jana added that when this survey was taken there were no labels of the locations on the images so people could not draw any conclusions on them.

There was further discussion on the designs of the buildings.

Jana passed out draft copies of their locational analysis spreadsheet. She stated that this spreadsheet was designed to help compare different sites. James Finger complimented Jana on the spreadsheet layout and stated that the form would be very helpful to evaluate properties. Some discussion followed on the scores on the spreadsheet for the Town of Windham Criteria and the State of Connecticut's Criteria. Jana added that the scores were based on the results from the community survey and that they are not the final scores. (Highest score on the spreadsheet is the Nathan Hale Building)

Jana commented that within the next month she would be finishing the IHZ application that will then go to O.P.M. She added that the EDC would get a draft copy to review & endorse.

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

## **Chair Report:**

Bill Hettinger reported that Victor and he met with Neal Beets a couple of weeks ago to discuss pedestrian crosswalks, business signage, and the potential development of the industrial park. Bill stated that he thought the outcome was good because he saw several emails going to a variety of town staff which shows that the town manager has started the process on these three activities. Bill added that there was a note on the agenda that stated that there was a nice sign directing people to the Bassett's Bridge Farm in North Windham, the sign is left on 203 at the bridge. Bill added that this is a good example of the type of signs that we need. Bill also spoke of the signs on John Walker's property across from the Frog Bridge. He stated that we need to put up directional signs to businesses to help promote them. Bill commented that the Killingly ordinance charges the businesses \$75 per sign. Bob Horrocks asked what the impediments of this initiative would be. Bill replied that it's a state road and the state does not like advertising on their roads. Some discussion followed on possible ways this could be done.

Regarding the crosswalks, James Finger reported that the re-pavement project was put on hold until CL&P does it's work. Bill added that the D.O.T. has our downtown street designed for traffic flow rather than pedestrian flow. He also stated that we may be able to work with our legislature on that.

James Finger stated that a meeting is set for mid July on the industrial park.

## **Tax Abatement Guidelines:**

Bill Hettinger stated that Neal Beets asked that James Finger, Joan Paskewich, Town Assessor and the EDC assist in setting guidelines for tax abatements. James replied that he is working with the town attorney and town assessor on this initiative.

James also stated that at the last EDC meeting he passed out an article on "Tax Increment Financing as an Economic Development tool" and also a memo from the Town Attorney on "States Statues Authorizing Economic Development Efforts by Cities and Towns". This memo provides an overview of the various tools for promoting economic development for the town. James added that he is researching several community economic development websites which

has a lot more detail on their enterprise zone & entertainment district, downtown improvement and development areas where they do a bond issue. James added that we are not at a level to do a bond issue for improving an area or providing money incentives because of the size of our community and lack of resources to draw on.

Further discussion followed on the entertainment district and how it was adopted. James stated that it probably should have been done by an ordinance instead of being adopted by a simple resolution since we were giving away taxes and the public was not involved in that. There was also some discussion on the qualifications of the entertainment district incentive.

Bill Anderson agreed to review all of the tax abatement material and come up with a summary for the EDC. This would include reviewing the entertainment district qualifications and come up with some possible guidelines for tax abatements that need to be approved by the Town. (Economic impact analysis, cost benefit analysis).

#### **Other reports/correspondence/announcements/activities:**

Bill asked Victor to give an update on the arts & entertainment sub-committee. Victor replied that they haven't had a chance to hold a meeting yet because he has been too busy with other related meetings. Victor stated that he attended a meeting at Windham Arts Collaborative where they spent 13 hours with a consultant from the state's arts, culture & tourism department on how to re-organize, indentify arts, culture & tourism resources, networking with different organizations to promote arts, culture & tourism as economic development. Victor added that by attending these meetings when they have their sub-committee meeting he will have more information to help them get started.

Bob Horrocks stated that he has been attending some meetings put together by Bruce John called "Destination Willimantic". Bob added that someone in this group designed a great webpage – <http://www.willimanticusa.com/>. Bob said that this webpage contains information on art, entertainment and restaurants and mainly focuses on tourism. James Finger stated that the webpage designer was Mike Bloomer. Some discussion followed.

Bob Horrocks also gave a brief report on the Victorian Home Tours. He stated that they had over 200 people visiting homes, over 100 people attended the Brass Concert, 40 people went to the Lantern Tour, 50

people did a tour of Windham Mills, and they had a total of over 500 people attend "Victorian Days". Bob also stated that they had 13 Victorian homes to showcase, well over 100 volunteers, the horse drawn wagon and over 50 musicians playing throughout the weekend. Bob also added that they had terrific coverage from the Norwich Bulletin and the Willimantic Chronicle. Bob mentioned that there were a good number of people that came from out of state. James added that Mayor Eldridge stated that several out of town people had positive comments on the town and the event.

### **New Business:**

James Finger announced that Frog Bridge Gymnasium is still looking for a building. James added that they need a certain size space at an affordable rent and it's been difficult to find. James stated that he also spoke to Sear's and Salvation Army, they are also looking for suitable space. James also stated that he hasn't heard anymore from the South Windham manufacturing site that's been vacated. Some discussion followed on vacant parcels.

James stated that the first Monday of the month in July is July 4<sup>th</sup> a holiday, so the EDC will have to change their meeting date. James replied that he will look into the following Monday July 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 pm and will let us know.

### **Citizens & Delegations:**

Lori Jeffers stated that she thought it was inappropriate to hold the two IHZ forums so close to the holidays, the first forum was Easter weekend and the second was Memorial Day weekend. Lori also stated that the rents for the one & two bedroom apartments were too high for this area. Lori commented that there are rumors that Artspace has been flooded, and that there has been drug use & child abuse there.

She also commented that the Frog Bridge apartments were very expensive, the floors appear to be cement painted grey, high ceilings that didn't look like they were prepared right, no dishwasher and lack of closet space. Lori said she asked what you got for the money and was told "water & sewer". Lori added that there is no air conditioning and electric heat from a small unit. Lori stated there was also an issue with parking. Lori suggested that a store like "Old Navy" would work good on the parcel, it would bring college students to town and help spur development.

John Walker stated that opening a retail for profit center would help support Waim's activities. He said he set up a meeting with Rick Nassif & Waim to discuss this and suggested that the EDC encourage them. John also spoke about building large Victorian birdhouses on his vacant property on Jackson Street. He commented that he visited a park in Iceland where they had these beautiful birdhouses built on cedar posts and it was a cool tourist attraction. John stated that his dilemma is that he has no sidewalk in the front of that property and he would like the EDC to help him get one on his property.

Bernie D'Auteuil of 168 Walnut Street spoke in favor of turning Main Street into a one-way section in between Bridge Street and the Frog Bridge. He commented that this would help with traffic, parking and delivery vehicles that don't have access. He also stated that we should put up signs saying no through traffic and possibly putting a limit on some delivery hours. Bernie added that we need to tell the state that "We want our Main Street back".

**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 9:37 pm.*

*Minutes respectfully submitted by: Sharon Vernon*