



Economic Development Commission  
Wednesday, June 9, 2010  
Windham Town Hall Meeting Room  
Meeting Minutes

**Members present:** Bill Hettinger, Victor Funderburk, Kay Haskell, Caesar Castro, George Buch & Eric Crowley

**Members Absent:** Bob Horrocks

**Town Staff:** James Finger, Neal Beets, Town Manager, Mayor Ernie Eldridge, Sharon Vernon, recording secretary

**Guests:** Jana Butts, Dagmar Nolls from WINCOG

**Call to order:** Bill Hettinger called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm

**Citizens & Delegations:**

None (Bill stated that the EDC enforce a 3 minute limit on speaking)

**Minutes:**

*Kay Haskell made a motion to accept the meeting minutes of April 14, 2010. George Buch seconded the motion. All members were in favor with one abstention, motion carried.*

**WINCOG – IHZ- Incentive Housing Zone presentation:**

Jana Butts commented that WINCOG is primarily working with the planning & zoning commission on this project and would like to get some feedback and guidance from the EDC and to see if this strategy is going in the right direction. She stated that they have now completed the housing assessment which is the first phase of this project, the second phase is a housing market analysis and development strategy. Jana added that they are very near to completion of this phase. Jana stated that WINCOG sub-contracted with AKRF to do the market analysis. Jana continued the presentation by giving the EDC an overview of the incentive housing zone. Jana stated that the state of Connecticut gave funding to the Town of Windham for this program and that it is an opportunity through the zoning regulations to create an incentive housing zone. The IHZ is focused on creating quality housing in

urban communities, Windham/Willimantic meets the state's criteria for this incentive housing zone. Jana added that the IHZ is a tool to promote economic sustainability and attainable housing and it is as much about economic development and enhancing community character as it is about housing. Jana also stated that IHZ is not about affordable housing it is about "attainable housing". Jana added that IHZs must be located in eligible locations. Jana passed around a draft of the housing market analysis for the EDC to review. Some discussion followed on the market analysis. Jana added that they are not considering housing that is not in walking distance to Willimantic's downtown or would not be publically visible. Jana stated that the IHZ could be mixed-use, commercial development on the first floor and residential development on the second or third story. Jana passed around the draft document of the results of the market analysis. Jana stated that some of the general conclusions are: there are many areas of over-supply of housing, she added that we don't have a housing shortage for most of the demographic areas and there is not a shortage of new housing, there are a lot of housing units that are not up to par, we need to create more quality, desirable housing. Jana commented that there is a need for housing for students and "empty nesters". Jana spoke more on Willimantic's amenities and that we should promote existing assets. She added that we should continue to enforce building conditions and blight, focus on and prioritize infill, pursue programs for rehab/façade improvements, streetscape funding and support all grassroots organizations. Some discussion followed on the requirements of the housing designs and the fact that we need to focus on downtown to increase the amount of students that come downtown, increase pedestrian traffic to patronize businesses, etc.

Jana asked the EDC what they thought would help facilitate the kind of development that they are planning and discussed the market analysis in more detail.

Kay Haskell discussed the need for quality, affordable senior housing. Kay added that she wants a safe environment, with a garden, good lighting, close to the bus line and walking distance to downtown. There was also some discussion on the Uncle Ken's location and the Katrina Houses.

Bill asked how this was different from the zoning that we have in place now. Jana responded that it is an overlay zone to the zoning map and it becomes an addition to the zoning map. There was further discussion on zoning, fringe properties, quality lower rents etc. and more feedback from the EDC members. Jana went into more detail regarding amenities. Bill Hettinger and the EDC members stated that they thought WINCOG was on the right tract with this program. Jana stated that when they are able to release the draft document of the market analysis she will send a copy to the EDC members for review and feedback.

## **Discussion of the role of Economic Development Ombudsman:**

Neal Beets stated that at a "goal setting" meeting in January, the Town Council identified economic development as their top priority and in order to make the commitment to economic development that the town should have an economic development ombudsman on staff. Neal added, not a new staff member, a staff person who would have additional responsibilities. Neal commented that he sees James Finger as having 3 roles: One is to convene staff when a major project is on the horizon, staff such as water, sewer, engineering, fire and code enforcement. Neal added that instead of having the property owner or developer meet with several offices the ombudsman would set up a meeting with all of the parties involved. Neal stated that they have created a development services group of town staff and James' responsibility is to convene that group, create the agendas for those meetings, work with the developer or property owner and to take minutes of the meeting to track the progress. Secondly, Neal stated that if there is a lead that comes from anywhere and they are beginning to conceptualize expanding a business in Windham or bringing in a new business to Town, James would have the responsibility to get in touch with them to see if there is anything he can do to assist them with their needs. Neal added that the third role is more of a continuation of what he just described and that is if you are in the process to get a building permit or land use approval from planning & zoning, any kind of town permit or permission and you have run into a roadblock such as meeting a deadline etc. James would help them navigate the process. Neal added that they have had some development service meetings, one with Windham Hospital regarding their 30,000 s.f. medical office building and two meetings with the Magnet School.

James Finger commented that he had a couple of leads recently, one seems to have some merit, the other one, the person was disappointed in terms of some of the rules and it just didn't work out. James added that they received the information that they needed in a reasonably timely manner. James also stated that he hopes to be in touch with the DeVivos regarding their project, he added that they have some ideas but are not ready to reveal them. James stated that he does not want to duplicate any work that the EDC is doing but he may be able to be of assistance and he also added that the EDC is welcome to give him some direction as to what they think he should be doing as the economic development ombudsman. Bill Hettinger asked how James saw himself fitting in with the EDC. James said that he would try to keep the EDC informed of new development when possible, and he would try to respond to the EDC's requests and needs. Some discussion followed on the new grocery store. James ended with there is not a lot of job creation other than what we create ourselves and that we need to work with what we already have. He added that we need to go out to the businesses see how they are doing, see if they need any assistance or have any concerns and see how we can help them.

## **CERC:**

Bill stated that CERC has had relationships with the town in the past and have worked with them on specific projects but we are currently not in any contractual relationship with them. Beth Wallace from CERC has offered a presentation for the EDC either in Rocky Hill or here in Willimantic. Bill also had some discussion on CERC's site finder database program which we currently are not subscribed to. Bill stated that Mark Paquette mentioned at his presentation that we may be able to get a discounted rate for the site finder program. Bill commented that he thought that the price was \$800 and the discounted rate would be \$400 or \$500. Bill summarized by saying that CERC has provided valuable services to the town in the past and he thought it would be beneficial for the town for the EDC to hear their presentation. The EDC members agreed that they should have CERC come to Willimantic to hear their presentation as a separate workshop not at an EDC meeting, and also agreed to ask them to set up some time in July. Some discussion followed on the site-finder database program.

## **Areas of Interest:**

Bill commented that Bob Horrocks will be out of commission for the next few months and we should cover the "areas of interest" spots that Bob was pursuing. Under Communication with current businesses Eric Crowley said he would fill in for Bob, under Marketing/Promotion of Windham/Willimantic, Victor Funderburk agreed to fill in, Bill Hettinger agreed to take on Attracting new businesses and Kay Haskell and Bill Hettinger also agreed to fill in for Communication with current Main Street businesses.

## **Commission member comments (activities & insights from the past 4 weeks):**

George Buch stated that he attended an information session that was put on by Community Builders and run by Northeast Utilities about 2 weeks ago in Berlin. He stated that it was an opportunity for us to get involved in Social Media for Community Marketing. George stated that it is for one year of consulting by Atlas Advertising of Denver, Colorado. This company has done successful economic development marketing for several other communities. N.E. Utilities is partnering with them in this grant opportunity, this would involve monthly meetings beginning June 17<sup>th</sup>, the value is estimated at \$7,500 and the application for the grant is due by Friday June 11<sup>th</sup>. Key points to the application are: Identify point person for project, population of town, what is the communities experience with social media, what you hope to achieve by participating in this project. George added that 3 winners are selected: 1 larger community, 20,000 or more, 1 smaller community, fewer than 20,000, 1 state-wide or regional economic development or regional planning organization, and the cost to participate *if chosen* is \$500. George stated that we would partner with Debra Gould of NTE, LLC. George spoke about Debra Gould's background & experience and said that she would like to

collaborate with us on this social media grant project, there would be no consultant fee just the right to use us as a model at the end of the project. After some discussion it was decided that George Buch be the point person. George commented that if the EDC approves to apply for the grant that he will be meeting with Debra Gould Thursday morning.

***Victor Funderburk made a motion to apply for the Social Media Grant, Kay Haskell seconded it, all members approved, motion carried.***

There was some discussion on what can be done to improve public education.

### **Other announcements & reports:**

Bill announced that on Monday June 14<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 am at The Spa at Norwich Inn, there is a workshop/presentation from Jeff Blodgett, V.P. of CERC on "Communities Connecting to Compete". This is a discussion on how communities can partner instead of compete. Bill stated if anyone is interested in attending to let him know, there is no charge.

Bill stated that there is a Windham AGvocate Program meeting Monday June 14<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm. at Windham Town Hall. Bill said if anyone is interested in attending this meeting, please let him know.

Bill also announced that on Tuesday June 29<sup>th</sup> from 4-9 in the Johnson Room at ECSU Library is a crash course in Fundamentals in Economic Development & Planning by Mark Waterhouse. The cost is \$60 for the EDC, Kay, George & Victor offered to attend.

Bill reported that the N.E. Sustainable Communities Workshop is being held at the N.J. Institute of Technology in Newark, the cost is \$75.

Bill stated that he would look into the Joe Courtney grant further to see if it's something that would be of interest to us .

Bill commented that he received an email from Mark Paquette stating that Roger Adams will be talking about the E-Pulse Program, so if anyone hears anymore on this program to please let the commission know.

### **Economic Development Initiatives:**

Bill asked the commission what initiatives could the EDC put out to help us move forward.

Kay commented that educating the EDC by attending all of these meetings is a good first step. She added that we should find out what everyone else is doing so we can stay on the same page. Kay also added that having an economic development ombudsman that can take care of the needs of the present and new businesses that are moving into town is a good initiative.

Finally Kay mentioned that we need to let these businesses know that the EDC is here for them. Bill added that we still have the draft letter that needs to go out to the businesses. Kay stated that we need to revise the letter to include James Finger. James commented that he would rather be called staff person instead of ombudsman because a lot of the community members would not understand what the word means. Victor added that we should stay focused on developing the region.

**Request of Town Manager and Mayor to place a Commission member on a leave of absence:**

Mayor Ernie Eldridge stated that he was the person who recommended Caesar Castro to serve as an alternate member on the EDC. He added that he did know at the time that Mr. Castro did have a couple of pending cases, but was told by Caesar that they would be resolved quickly and that they were both confident that he would be found not guilty. In the meantime Mayor Eldridge stated that the pending cases had not been resolved and another case came up where he was arrested at least one more time if not twice. Neal Beets and Mayor Eldridge spoke and decided that Caesar should take a leave of absence until he got these personal & legal matters resolved and then he could come back to the commission. Neal and Mayor Eldridge agreed that the constant articles in the newspaper was not good for the EDC and the Town's image. Mayor Eldridge added that he doesn't feel that this hinders his way of doing his job on the EDC, he said he felt that he did an excellent job, but that is not the issue.

Neal Beets stated that the town has adopted the Roberts Rules of Order and in article #13 empowers any deliberate body, board, committee or commission to evaluate and if necessary act in respect to the behavior of a member. The committee has a right and a duty to protect the committee's image as well as the purposes for which the committee is created. This committee was created to enhance the image of the town, it's in your vision statement on your agenda, which Neal applauded the EDC for, the last section states "by engaging in activities to enhance the image of the town as a place to live, work and conduct business" We are all here to do what is best for the town, even if it isn't necessarily good for us personally, we make sacrifices, you serve on this board without any compensation whatsoever and Neal added that he admires and respects the EDC for that, but at any point in time if it's member of the commission or member of the staff is a distraction that deters us for doing what's best for the town, I think it's appropriate for that person to take a leave of absence while these issues are addressed, we are not pre-judging guilt or innocence, that is for the court to decide, it's just to take a leave of absence so that the body can do the work that they are here to do.

Bill Hettinger opened the floor for comments. Caesar Castro made a statement expressing that he did not wish to take a leave of absence because he felt that it was a personal matter and that it did not interfere with

his ability to work or his commitment for the EDC. Caesar added that he felt that the issues with the Meehan's have not tarnished the image of the town or the EDC. Caesar also commented that the Chronicle prints the news articles which add fuel to the situation, but it is usually forgotten the next day. Caesar added that he still feels that he can bring more to the table and has been an asset to the EDC.

George Buch commented that he would not hesitate to acknowledge the contribution that Caesar has already made to the commission, especially with downtown businesses. George added that he knows that this was related to a private relationship issue which unfortunately has become public because of the criminal charges involved. George stated that from his perspective he would really like to see Caesar take a temporary leave of absence until the issues are resolved because even though it's a private matter it involves public charges which reflects upon the commission as a whole.

Kay stated that Caesar has been a tremendous asset for her as a business owner on Main Street, as well as the Latino business owners. Kay added that the EDC did not appoint Caesar to this commission it was the town council and she felt very uncomfortable to have the EDC make this decision. She also stated that she did not feel that the EDC had the power to do this and she added that the EDC would be losing their Latino contact person.

Victor Funderburk also stated that he did not feel comfortable making this kind of decision, especially since he knows nothing about the situation. He also commented that he felt that Caesar has been very helpful to the EDC.

George Buch stated that he felt that the EDC does have the authority to make these kind of decisions and that we shouldn't be passing the buck to the town council every time a decision has to be made.

Some discussion followed on who has the right to make these kinds of decisions and Neal Beets also elaborated more on Roberts Rules of Order.

Caesar added the comment that everyone knows that there is no such thing as a "temporary leave of absence"

*Victor Funderburk made a motion to table the item of "leave of absence" until the next meeting. Kay Haskell seconded it, all members approved with one opposed.*

### **Citizens & Delegations:**

Charlie Kratts spoke in favor of keeping Caesar Castro on the EDC and stated that the town charter should be the only board involved in removing a committee/commission member. Charlie also commented that James Finger as the economic development ombudsman was a great idea.

***Kay Haskell made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Caesar Castro seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 9:37 pm.***

*Minutes respectfully submitted by: Sharon Vernon*