



**Economic Development Commission
Wednesday, August 11, 2010
Windham Town Hall Meeting Room
Meeting Minutes**

Members present: Bill Hettinger, Kay Haskell, George Buch & Eric Crowley

Members Absent: Bob Horrocks, Victor Funderburk & Ceaser Castro

Town Staff: Sharon Vernon, recording secretary

Call to order: Bill Hettinger called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm

Citizens & Delegations:

None

Review/approval of Minutes:

Kay Haskell made a motion to accept the meeting minutes of July 12, 2010. George Buch seconded the motion. All members present were in favor, with one abstention, motion carried.

Commission member comments & economic development initiatives:

Bill Hettinger asked the commission members if they had any comments on activities & insights from the past four weeks.

George Buch commented that he is continuing to look at other community websites to help with developing our town's economic development section at our present Town of Windham website.

Bill stated that the past minutes referred to the town putting an updated list of downtown buildings on our website and asked Kay if that was something that she was involved in. Kay Haskell replied that she and James Finger were currently working on that list. Kay added that James has been on vacation for the past two weeks, and that he indicated to her that he has some of this already done, and that he is getting emails from the commercial realtors with properties that they have available. Kay also stated that the realtors suggested that we connect directly to their websites. George commented that it would be similar to what we already have with CERC and our current

downtown building database on our town website, but it would be a direct link to a realtor. George added that there is a sub-committee of the Town Council that is charged with revising the town website. They will be modifying the content of the website rather than the context.

Bill commented that some of the commission members met with David Mieczinski Realtor for the Keeper Corporation and that he was a wealth of information on what he saw in that building. David stated that the building has a unique loading dock on it, a turning around area for trucks, and it's a very nice modern space. Bill added that he had spoken to James Finger about meeting with some of the other major realtors in Town, Kay replied that James is arranging that meeting. Kay added that the meeting would be with Meehan Real Estate and Ferrigno Realtors. George stated that Ron Lyman would be a key realtor to include in that group. Kay also added that Meehan Real Estate would like to see the Willimantic Lumber Company move. Eric Crowley commented that he thinks it's a good idea to collaborate with commercial realtors, he added that he went to a planning meeting recently and learned that most of the information gathering happens online or through research where they found out about these commercial properties before they even decide on whether or not to come into town, so the more information that we have available for people the better chance we have of them choosing our town for their business. Bill suggested that some of the EDC members have a lunch meeting with David Mieczinski, he also stated that we would want to know from him what assistance he may need from the town and also what opinion he may have on some of these vacant buildings and what may be holding them back from not being sold. Bill commented that when James returns from vacation we will find out if and when he set up a meeting/tour and we will address that then.

Bill stated that he met with Paula Stahl from Planning & Zoning regarding the revision of the zoning codes in town. The entire district near Keeper Corporation is zoned industrial, so everyone that has gone in there from Home Depot, the Tractor Supply, Sears and anyone else near there have all had to apply for a special zoning permit. Paula told Bill at their meeting that she is very much in favor of changing the zoning there in North Windham to retail which it is being used for anyways. Bill also stated that they would like to change the zoning for the trailer park by the airport because that is also zoned for industrial, and should be zoned for residential. Bill asked the EDC how they felt about changing the zoning from industrial to retail in that area in North Windham. George Buch replied that he got the feeling from other town members that there is very little industrial development in this area and he felt that he didn't have a problem if they decided to change the zoning. George also stated that it might do better as mixed-use. Bill commented that mixed-use is only allowed in the B-1 District, and because zoning codes come from state statues they are difficult to change. Bill commented that someone was looking at the Keeper Corporation site to build a retail store, they may not take the whole building, could still be some space for industrial use there, could be industrial park usage, storage, all depending on how they

would divide up the site etc. If this retail business does not take place it could be marketed as an industrial building, or an entire retail site. Some discussion followed on possible uses for the site.

Bill asked the EDC if they should be working with the Senior Center regarding the possible purchase of the Willimantic Lumber Company. Bill stated that from an economic development perspective, it would be good to use the building for some sort of private commercial/industrial use for the town to keep the building on the tax rolls and to generate jobs. George replied that any use for the building would be better than seeing it as an empty lot, and also if it's used as a Senior Center it will bring more people into the downtown. George stated that since there is nothing eminent happening that we should just wait and see how things play out. George added that representatives from the Senior Center have spoken to the owners of the Jilson Theater and it's not a possible site for them. Kay added that the Generations site is at the top of their list as far as desirability.

Bill stated that if you have a business that you have done significant improvements on located in the enterprise zone or the entertainment district that you may be eligible for a tax abatement. Bill added that when the town had the economic development department Ted Montgomery would sign the forms stating that the property was indeed located in that zone or district then the form would go to the Assessor's Office. Joan Pasquewich indicated to Sharon Vernon that either a Chairman of the EDC or herself could now sign the forms. Bill suggested that we have Joan Pasquewich from the Town Assessor's Office come to a meeting in the near future to educate the EDC on the different available tax incentives. Some discussion followed on whether or not the EDC role is to make recommendations to the town council on tax abatements. Sharon stated that she had sent out some information on enterprise zone & entertainment district benefits when the EDC first started, and would be willing to re-send that information. It was also suggested that once the EDC has a better knowledge of the tax incentives that we should put them on our website. Kay added that she spoke to Rep. Susan Johnson on how we could change our tax incentives to reward the people who are improving their properties instead of punishing them by raising their taxes and Susan said that we should present our ideas to her for their hearings.

Mission Statement:

Bill stated at the last meeting Kay pointed out to the commission that there are multiple different mission statements for the EDC. There is a mission statement on the bottom of the agenda, a mission statement on the economic development website page and also one on the commission's page on the town website.

After some discussion it was decided to stay with the mission statement on the agenda. *George Buch made a motion that the commission use the*

mission statement that is located on the bottom of the EDC agendas, Eric Crowley seconded it, all members present approved. Motion carried.

Old Business:

Bill stated that the EDC revised the letter to the downtown businesses and that we should have it signed and sent out as soon as we have all the names and addresses for the businesses. Kay replied that the Chamber of Commerce is working on a list of businesses for them and it should be ready by the time that James returns from vacation. George suggested that Bill sign it as Vice-Chair so that the letter can be sent out asap.

Temporary leave of absence for an EDC member:

At the last meeting after some discussion as to why the EDC was asked to make this decision since it was the Town Council that appointed Ceasar. Victor suggested that the EDC make a recommendation (not an action).

This was the motion made at the last EDC meeting:

Victor Funderburk made a motion that the EDC recommend to the Town Council that Caesar Castro be placed on a leave of absence until all of his legal issues have been resolved. George Buch seconded it, all members present approved, motion carried.

At the last Town Council meeting they voted to postpone the issue indefinitely.

New Business:

Kay Haskell asked a question for Ceasar since he could not make tonight's meeting; his question was: Can business owners on Main Street put their clothing outside of their stores on their sidewalk for sale. After some discussion on this and on complaints heard from citizens on the appliance store putting out their refrigerators etc. it was suggested that Matt Vertefeuille of Code Enforcement would be the town staff person to resolve this issue. Bill also suggested that Ceasar give an update to the EDC when he finds out the answer to his question.

Citizens & Delegations:

None

Kay Haskell made a motion to adjourn the meeting. George Buch seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:56 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by: Sharon Vernon