



Economic Development Commission
Wednesday, March 10, 2010
Windham Town Hall Auditorium
Meeting Minutes

Members present: Bob Horrocks, Victor Funderburk, Bill Hettinger, George Buch, Kay Haskell, Cesar Castro

Members absent: Eric Crowley

Town Staff: Sharon Vernon, recording secretary

Call to order: Bob Horrocks called the meeting to order at 7:10 pm

Citizens & Delegations:

Chris McNaboe from Horizons gave a brief statement regarding a new project on Main Street. Horizons have been supporting artist Kerri Quirk in her residential and work needs for several years. She is a brilliant artist who is deaf and has autism. Horizons had rented a second floor studio for Kerri on Main Street for the past 7 years and have decided to place her on the ground floor with a storefront, studio & gallery at 861 Main Street. Chris stated that they would like to make some renovations to the space to contribute to the revitalization of Main Street. Chris added that they would be interested in façade money if it becomes available. Kay Haskell suggested that they go to Sherwin Williams for free paint for the façade. Chris commented that they would like to have a grand opening in time for the first Third Thursday event. Some discussion followed on the project.

Lynn Duval commented that the first Third Thursday would be starting May 20th, the Victorian Home Tour, the first weekend in June, and an event media list is being developed & updated on a new central website. Lynn also spoke briefly on reviving the Downtown Business Council.

Joel Comeau, previous owner & current note-holder to 790-796 Main Street stated that this building has a high mortgage & financial issues, the building is not supporting itself. There is temporary use of the second floor and no use to the third floor because no one wants to tear up a 130 year old vaudeville theater. The third floor would also need an elevator which is too costly for a private owner. On the second floor the office space has been re-zoned for residential apartments because office space does not sell or lease

anymore. He stated that their only choice is to try and get it approved for a boarding house. Joel commented that he had hoped that this meeting would be more like an open forum with business owners from downtown present, discussing problems, sharing opportunities etc. Joel also stated that the reception from the Town had been less than open armed. He added that when the new owners found out that the 2nd floor was re-zoned for residential they decided to open up a boarding house and did it without town knowledge, Joel said that the town reacted horribly with threats etc. He stated that corrections were done, some, 24 hours after the inspection and they still have not received any cooperation or response from the building department. Discussion followed on getting the business owners downtown together. Kay stated that she has a downtown merchant association list and building owner list for anyone who is interested.

Minutes: *Bill Hettinger made a motion to accept the meeting minutes of February 17, 2010. Victor Funderburk seconded the motion. All members were in favor, motion carried.*

Guests: Diane Nadeau

Diane had to attend the "Business with Pleasure" event this evening and could not make this meeting. Diane & Roger Adams have requested to have 5 minutes of each of our meetings, which the EDC has agreed to.

Reports:

Roberta Dwyer from Northeast Alliance also could not make it tonight. She has reported that the N.E. Alliance to-date has closed 10 loans, totaling \$464,000 coming from old & new revolving loan funds, including the old Windham Mills Technology funds. Another loan will be closing the end of March for \$262,000 which funded 8 additional loans from the Small Cities funds which we managed on behalf of the Town of Windham and & 9 area towns. She estimated that these total loan dollars of \$726,000 have originated and retained approximately 190 full-time equivalent personnel which have a conservative economic impact of over 8 million dollars. Bob Horrocks added that the N.E. Alliance is one of the organizations that act as a stimulant for small businesses.

Bob stated that he invited Paula Stahl, chair to the planning & zoning commission to our next meeting.

Bob commented that he received a pamphlet from Don Mullen on a Guide for Trail Towns, "how to develop your town into a trail town" this will be interesting reading for hikers and bicyclists and could also be an economic stimulant for our town. Bob also stated that he received a brochure from Alan Bolduc, broker for Windham Mills there was some discussion on office space & parking for the Mills.

Bob also met with Brian Hathaway who has asked the EDC to come up with a mission statement for the Town of Windham website. The draft mission statement is as follows: *The EDC works to support and promote existing businesses and to market and promote the town for the purpose of attracting new businesses. The commission works with town officials, town committees/commissions, and other agencies within the town by engaging in activities to enhance the image of the town as a place to live, work, and conduct business.*

Bob requested that the EDC look it over and discuss any changes if needed.

Bob stated that he met with Sharon Vernon and she has agreed to review the computer files from Ted and her computers, delete files that are not relevant and organize files that can be useful to the EDC. Sharon has also agreed to organize some of the boxes of files on the 3rd floor of the Town Hall, as well as take minutes of the EDC meetings.

Cesar Castro gave a brief report on the visits that he and Bob made on Main Street and passed out packets with useful information for new businesses. Cesar mentioned that many business owners were not aware of the different programs that the town had to offer such as the Sign Grant program, etc.

Sharon mentioned the "jump start" program that the former economic development office had developed, she stated that Roger Adams took the client files and business packets to the Chamber, as they offered to run the program when the office closed. Everyone agreed that business visitation should be a priority and needs to be very aggressive, EDC members need to listen & follow-up with business owners.

Kay gave a brief summary on the WINCOG Community Revitalization Strategy. She also stated that a full copy of the CRS can be obtained on the Town of Windham website: windhamct.com, under resources (summary was handed out at the meeting).

Bill Hettinger discussed the 2010 CDBG Grant and WINCOG CRS priority projects. Discussion followed on the new CDBG requirements for this year. Projects need to be "ready to proceed", most categories of funding will require a 20% match, only one grant application per town.

Bob stated that since the B.O.S. have already approved the CRS and decided that those were the priority projects, that we should support the same projects. Bob also added that he believed that these projects will serve to stimulate economic development in Windham/Willimantic.

Bill Hettinger made a motion that the EDC recommend to the Town that we apply for the 2010 CDBG funding for the Downtown Streetscape project (\$500,00) and the Façade Improvement program

(\$250,00) as outlined in the CRS strategy. George Buch seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Motion carried.

EDC Meeting schedule:

It was decided to go with the 2nd Wednesday of the month for EDC meetings @ 7:00 pm in the Town Hall Ballroom.

EDC member responsibilities for the next month:

George Buch & Cesar Castro will work on marketing and come up with some ideas for the website. Bob Horrocks, Sharon Vernon & Cesar Castro will work on materials for business packets. Bob Horrocks will go door to door for business visitations and liaison with the Town concerning the problems that 790 Main Street are experiencing. Kay Haskell will draft a letter to the business & building owners formally inviting them to come to the EDC meetings. Bill Hettinger will continue to work on CDBG Small Cities Grant requirements.

Citizens & Delegations:

General discussion on inviting town groups & organizations to EDC meetings.

Bob Horrocks adjourned the meeting at 8:50 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by: Sharon Vernon