



Economic Development Commission  
Wednesday, April 14, 2010  
Windham High School Media Center  
Meeting Minutes

**Members present:** Bob Horrocks, Victor Funderburk, Bill Hettinger, Kay Haskell, Cesar Castro, Eric Crowley

**Members Absent:** George Buch

**Town Staff:** Sharon Vernon, recording secretary

**Call to order:** Bob Horrocks called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm

**Citizens & Delegations:**

Peter Quercia from 300 Walnut Street spoke briefly on his wish to be a member of the EDC. Bill Hettinger told him that applications for committees/commissions are available on the Town's website. Bob Horrocks added that the EDC did have their limit of 7 members for this round. Peter also gave a brief statement regarding Pricechopper's interest to move to CT and he stated that he hoped that there were people available to reach out to these companies that may be interested in moving to our town. He also spoke briefly on Public Works signs, his offer of donating land for a public dog park and his dissatisfaction with town response.

Jeffrey Veins, property owner in town gave his comments on the agenda's list of items from the QVCC Conference. He stated that we want a clean town, good for our children. He agreed with the statement that committees and commissions need a shared vision, but he added that we need less committees and a smaller government. Jeffrey added that as far as ED being a regional effort, he thought we should focus on Windham/Willimantic. Jeffrey stated that on the item the need to focus on "smart growth", that we need to collaborate with ECSU, advertise more on our Town and offer more tax abatements.

Pam Veins, store manager in Town, stated that on a positive note she has seen the Town grow in the past several years, but would like to see the Town embrace ECSU instead of battling with them. She added that the university has so much to offer and we should be working with them.

**Minutes: Cesar Castro made a motion to accept the meeting minutes of March 10, 2010. Bill Hettinger seconded the motion. All members were in favor, motion carried.**

### **Chairman Reports & Correspondence :**

#### **Letter from Richard Bloomer on Economic Development suggestions:**

- Get our less employable & productive citizens working
- Job training necessary
- Town advertising
- Get floor and site plans, as well as pictures of empty buildings and open land with suggested prices, parking spaces, utility costs
- Make a video of the museum activities, Third Thursday events, art galleries, entertainment, pretty homes etc.
- Need a web designer to dress up the town web page
- Decide on industry such as manufacturing solar panels or other green industry and set up an attractive booth at a conference with video presentations, brochures etc.
- Find out if there are tax breaks, utilities price benefits, grants for companies

#### **March 25<sup>th</sup> QVCC Conference:**

- What kind of place do we want to live in?
- Need for all committees/commissions to have a shared vision
- ED must be a regional effort
- Need to focus on "smart growth"
- Government must be a driving force in ED; but ED is a community driven process
- Must survey local natural-social-economic capital resources
- Must have a plan of development & strategies for development
- Must determine a way to measure growth & success

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

Bob stated that he attended a Workshop in Town on Cooperative Economy. They made the point that there are all sorts of co-ops that can serve as economic engines such as: Food Co-ops, Worker Co-ops, Credit Unions, Art Co-ops, Housing Co-ops and Health Care Co-ops. Bob added that at this workshop they stated that these types of co-ops enable people to take more control over their lives and build more sustainable economies.

Bob announced that on Monday April 19<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 a.m. the Chamber of Commerce is having a Chamber Alliance Network Breakfast for anyone that is interested. At this Network breakfast you will be able to get to know your local businesses and services in order to refer them to customers. This is to help develop collaboration among the different businesses.

Bob also announced that there is a crash course on economic development & planning at Eastern on Thursday June 29<sup>th</sup>. This course is put on by N.E. Utilities.

Bob reported on the response from Town Manager Neal Beets on the recommendation the EDC gave them on supporting the CRS on the streetscapes project and the façade improvement project. Neil commented that his major concern for applying for these projects is that they are not ready to go into immediate construction and that it is his understanding that CDBG is looking for projects ready to proceed such as the Housing Rehab project which is already in existence.

Bill Hettinger commented that he thought if it was a priority, that there was a possibility that the town could have these projects be shovel ready in time. He added that the town's public hearing for CDBG Grants is Tuesday, April 20<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 pm. Bill also commented that speaking to Veronica Hunter & Bruce Sheridan of DECD, they relayed to him that their priorities were housing & economic development. Bill added that DECD preferred that the Town apply for a Housing Rehab grant due to the fact that a streetscape program would probably not be considered economic development. Bill also stated that we should wait and try to apply for this project during the next round of funding. There was further discussion on the status of the CRS approval and other points that DECD spoke to him about. (A scanned copy of his notes is attached with the minutes.) Bill made a recommendation that we investigate further on the "small cities program re-payment money" so that we could possibly use this for emergency small business loans or other small economic development activities.

Cesar Castro reported on "AGvocate" a green program. He stated that they will be holding a meeting on Monday June 21<sup>st</sup>. from 10:30 am to 2:30 pm at Goodwin College. Cesar stated that they will be discussing how the program works and how effective it has been in the past couple of years. Cesar passed out a flyer on the program and mentioned that they also have a website where you can get more information: [www.easternrcd-ct.org](http://www.easternrcd-ct.org)

Cesar also reported on a new organization coming into town called "Latino Community Services". Cesar added that it is a non-profit organization that has services such as counseling, advocacy and other programs. Michael Rivera is the director of the organization and it's located on Main Street. Cesar stated as soon as they are settled in he will meet with him and get us more information on the organization.

### **Guests:**

Linda Riquier commented that she came to tonight's meeting to introduce herself and to offer her services to the EDC. She stated that she has owned a small business on Main Street for 21 years and for the past 15 months is

working as the CT Works' "business services representative" for our region. Linda added that since she has worked there she has learned about the many different services that CT Works has to offer that she was not aware of, and it is now her mission to bring that message to everyone. She also noted that she served on the Ad-Hoc Economic Development Committee for many years and gave a brief history of the committee's responsibilities. Linda also gave some background information on CT works and spoke of the many workshops and services that they have to offer. Linda commented that she sees the job of the EDC as being available to business owners to offer them different resources when needed. Some discussion followed on Linda possibly continuing to do the Town's annual report.

Paula Stahl introduced herself as the chair of the planning & zoning commission and former chair of the planning commission. Paula stated that the Town's plan of conservation & development was adopted about 3 years ago. Paula said she would email a PDF of the economic development sections of the plan to Bob for the EDC to review. Paula added that a good chunk of the plan is focused on economic development because it is so key to our town. Some discussion followed on the plan and the need to get the zoning regulations in synch with it. Paula also discussed on how important it is to try to communicate with people so they don't have to go through so many hoops. Paula stated that the commission is having monthly working meetings on re-writing their zoning regulations. She also commented on how important it is to work with the existing businesses. Linda added that we need to retain the existing businesses so other businesses will come and we need to find out what is the best industry to succeed here.

Bob gave a report on the Northeast Connecticut Economic Partnership. He stated that Neal Beets asked the EDC to review the resolution for the Regional Economic Development District. Mark Paquette stated in his email that we would be the first officially recognized Economic Development District (EDD) in CT. Mark also commented that the current CEDS is a collaborative effort between NECCOG & WINCOG which began in 1998 and is called the North East CT. Economic Partnership which includes 22 towns. Mark added that they will need a resolution from each town stating their commitment to join which is due by June 1<sup>st</sup>. Mark also stated that the Strategic Plan Committee will be updating the current CEDS plan in the next 2 months and that we should review it ASAP and set our priorities for the town. Mark added that once the official district designation is approved by EDA, all 22 towns would be eligible to apply for and receive federal funds for economic development projects, as well as being eligible for planning funds. The goal is to submit the full application to EDA by July 1, 2010.

Some discussion followed on the EDD and Linda Riquier made some positive comments and gave her full support. Bob Horrocks suggested that we invite Mark Paquette to a future meeting for further discussion.

Kay Haskell reported on tax abatement as incentives for new businesses and building owners. Kay handed out a copy of the CT. tax abatement statutes and town ordinances regarding tax abatements. Kay suggested that we ask Joan Paskewich from the town's Assessor's office to come to one of our meetings to answer any tax incentive questions. Kay wrote up a brief summary of the EDC's authority & power which does include manage State Tax incentive programs, offering abatements and incentives allowed under CT state statutes. Kay also suggested that we assist Dean Roy (owner of 3 downtown buildings) with tax abatement because of the improvements that he has done on his buildings downtown. After some discussion, the EDC agreed that we should pursue this.

Bob handed out a draft document to the EDC with names of 12 planning reports that he reviewed. Bob stated that he found about 29 common concepts, strategies and principals among the reports. Some discussion followed on the common goals of these reports.

Bob also listed 6 areas that he thought should be the EDC's immediate concern and work, the EDC's primary areas of responsibilities, and a vision statement. Some discussion followed on the vision statement.

Discussion followed on the EDC members areas of interest and strengths. Bob Horrocks stated that he would like to work on communication with current businesses, marketing and promotion of Windham/Willimantic and attracting new businesses into town. George Buch stated he would be interested in the marketing and promotion of the Town, Victor Funderburk would like to collaborate & communicate with other agencies & business organizations in town, Eric Crowley would be interested in communication with current businesses, Bill Hettinger would continue to work on CDBG Grants, funding agencies such as DECD etc., as well as nurturing the development of non-traditional businesses, Cesar Castro will continue to communicate with current downtown businesses and Kay Haskell will serve as a ombudsman for businesses and continue to communicate with the downtown businesses.

### **Citizens & Delegations:**

Jeffrey Veins commented on regional economic development, the Town's Plan of Conservation & Development , the streetscapes project and inquired if there were any funding available for downtown development.

***Bill Hettinger made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Cesar Castro seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.***

*Minutes respectfully submitted by: Sharon Vernon*