

Economic Development Commission

January 5, 2015

Special Meeting

Windham Town Hall

979 Main St., Willimantic, CT

Call to Order: Chairman Hettinger called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM. Those present were Pam DeVivo, John McCommas, and Victor Funderburk arrived at 7:38. Also in attendance; Demetrio Ricciardone, Savings Institute Branch Manager; Rick Nassiff, realtor with Keller Williams Realty; and James Finger, as staff.

Review / Approval of Minutes - December 1, 2014. Moved by Commissioner Horrocks and Seconded by Commissioner DeVivo to approve the minutes as presented. Motion Carried.

New Business – Update on National Endowment for the Arts Grant – for Willimantic Whitewater Park. Mr. Finger reported that the art installment at the Whitewater Park has the Town's financial support. The \$150,000 grant has an in-kind cash-match of \$5,000 from the town and \$5,000 from ECSU - in addition to in-kind support with staff and facilities.

Commissioner Horrocks reported that the Town has received a new grant for the paving of the walkway from Mackey's to the Whitewater Park.

Guest Speaker – Rick Nassiff Commissioner Hettinger asked Mr. Nassiff for his assessment of the Town's real estate market. Mr. Nassiff reported that in 2014, the market improved, and gave several examples of this improvement. He also stated that the market in Storrs is "on fire", because of U-Conn's Storrs Downtown project.

The real estate market was discussed and Commission Hettinger asked what can be done to make the town more welcoming to people driving through. Mr. Nassiff said the town needs more businesses like Main Street Café, Cafémantic, Nita's, and A Cupcake for Later. But, overall there was interest and activity in the Willimantic real estate market. He also suggested that the Town Managers should go to Hartford and meet people and introduce the town.

The Town also needs to help investors rehabilitate buildings with some grant funds or other incentives as the general return on investment for private developers is not enough to support most projects. With respect to trying to bring in large format retailers - they'll find their way here if they can make money. He cited Wal-Mart and Home Depot as examples - as they didn't need any incentives to come here.

Old Business

Update on Council Directive on Town owned property at 804 Main Street. The

Chairman reported that he had presented the EDC's recommendation to the Town Council, urging that the Town improve the property at 804 Main St. to create a 24 space parking lot. The Town Council directed the Town Manager to research the cost of this proposal - and as an alternative to develop an RFP to develop/sell the property.

Business Calling Program–None

Downtown Arts & Eats District–Commissioner Funderburk reported on meetings and the Arts and Eats commission's efforts to raise money for maps and brochures.

Business Signage Program underway –Mr. Finger reported that the Business Signs are up, but due to the length of some of the Business names, the size of the signs had to be larger than planned and the size of text had to be smaller.

Chairman's Report–Chairman Hettinger reported that about ten resumes had been submitted for the Economic Development Director position, and asked if any commissioners would be interested in serving on the interview committee. Commissioner Horrocks expressed interest in serving of the committee and will contact the Town Manager's Office.

A proposal for a high speed internet and broadband initiative was discussed and the Town has submitted a letter of interest in participating.

Chairman Hettinger reported that the WINCOG site is supposedly shut down. Windham is now a member of the Southeast Council of Governments; check their web-site at: <http://www.mapgeo.com/SCCOGCT>

Finally, the Chairman said that Mr. Finger had given him two proposed budgets for the Commission to submit. Much discussion ensued, with the consensus of the Commission urging the Chairman to bring a budget proposal to the Town Council that would include up to \$500,000 for anticipated grants- so that we could have confidence in applying for matching grants; and additional funding for the new Economic Development Director to have sufficient operating funds to do promotional work, and to invite prospective developers to Town to show them around.

Other reports/correspondence/announcements –

Commissioner DeVivo asked if the Commission could revisit the comments that Tom DeVivo made at the December meeting, as she felt that the Town needed a business plan for the new parking garage. She wondered if the Town Council would like the EDC's help with the parking garage, and if so, she would like to invite Cynthia Van Zelm to discuss the garage in Storrs. Commissioner DeVivo

also would like to ask the Town Council what this commission's role in the issue would be, if any.

Commissioner Hettinger agreed to ask the Town Council what this commission can do to prevent loitering in town. Mr. Finger said it is an issue for the police.

Citizens & delegations comments/questions –

Demetrio Ricciardone, Savings Institute Branch Manager, discussed what is needed in and from an Economic Development Director.

Adjournment - MOVED by Commissioner McCommas and SECONDED by Commissioner DeVivo to adjourn the meeting at 9:30p.m. Motion Carried.

Respectfully submitted by Janet Laukaitis

and revisions by James Finger, Planner/Business Liaison