

Economic Development Commission
Special Meeting
November 5, 2012
Windham Town Hall
Meeting Room
979 Main St., Willimantic, CT

Call to Order- the Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:32 PM. Those present were Bill Hettinger-Chairman, Bob Horrocks, John McCommas, and Victor Funderburk. James Finger was present as staff.

Citizens & Delegation: No one was present in the audience to speak.

Minutes: The Chairman referred to meeting minutes of Minutes of Aug 6, 2012, Bob Horrocks moved to approve – John McCommas seconded – all approved. Minutes of Sept. 4th, 2012 - John McCommas motion to approve – Bob Horrocks seconded – all approved. Minutes of Sept 10, 2012 John McCommas motion to approve – Bob Horrocks seconded. The Chairman noted that the draft minutes for Sept. 10th didn't mention those present - who were: John McCommas, Bob Horrocks, Bill Hettinger, and Victor Funderburk – minutes approved as corrected. Next the minutes of Sept 18, 2012 - John McCommas motion to approve – Bob Horrocks seconded- all approved.

Old Business:

Chairman's Report – The Chairman said he didn't have anything to report. We finished the Main Street grant in September, and we didn't have a quorum for the last meeting in October – which immediately followed the submission of the Grant to OPM. Now we need to look at our future direction, as there are a lot of loose ends. We need an update on businesses in Town; he then reviewed various correspondences – New England Economic Development conference – held during the Hurricane; Housing Coalition conference – postponed due to the hurricane; Governor's announcement on eligibility for aid for businesses affected by hurricane damage through FEMA. In looking through the information, the Chairman said it doesn't look as though anyone in Town will qualify – but there is a potential for low interest loans for anyone who would qualify.

Marketing/data efforts: The other two things are the parking regulations that we should have on the agenda, and the parking plan for Main St. Also the Mills zoning amendment passed and now they can do a lot of things, and the EDC had sent a letter of support. The Chairman said that this is a positive movement, and hopefully something good will happen.

Business Calling Program: the Chairman asked if any of the Commission members had been out to visit. He mentioned that Tractor Supply has had a turnover of management. He

explained that he also got a call from Sears, and was told that their North Windham Store was sold to a franchisee out of Pennsylvania who owns a lot of these and they focus on customer service. The Chairman mentioned the Pet Store in North Windham Plaza across from Wal-Mart, explaining that they switched places with the Driving School, and now they have expanded and are doing well in spite of other (National) pet stores nearby. He also mentioned that Cafémantic is expanding in the back, and now has a liquor license; and he has been to Fred's Barbecue a few times. Bob Horrocks said he had gone to Fred's during the middle of the week and it wasn't crowded.

John McCommas asked how to introduce oneself as an EDC member to business owners when checking on their business. The Chairman said he usually just asks how's it going without saying who he's with. Commissioner Horrocks said he usually introduces himself as being with the Town's Economic Development Commission, and asks how things are going, and if the Town can help, or how have they had been treated by the Town. Both Horrocks and Hettinger said that people are generally positive about relations with the Town over the past five years. Chairman Hettinger offered positive comments about Apollo Pizza in South Windham as they have grown. Commissioner Horrocks mentioned the Breakfast Place has expanded on Willow Brook St., and that whenever he goes there, at least two waitresses say hello – and as you leave they say have a good day. Not too many other restaurants do this, but it's a good business approach. He asked if we should looking to getting a consultant to advise businesses on how to be successful. Chairman Hettinger explained that Disney Institute provides this as the secrets to your business success, and there are programs through the Chamber of Commerce that helps businesses.

James Finger informed the Commission about recent zoning changes that the Planning & Zoning Commission adopted to help clarify the regulations and streamline the process. He worked with a couple of businesses to understand the proposed changes, and two came to hearing to ask for modifications so the new rules would not harm their businesses – which the PZC did to accommodate them.

The Chairman raised concern that he worried that we may be chasing businesses out with all the rules.

Mr. Finger explained that he felt that the PZC had accommodated most of the business and property owners. They are working promoting a more thematic plan to make the Town more attractive and to be a place where people and businesses want to be, and this is basically what was outlined in the 2007 Town Plan. They are trying to promote a more harmonious pattern of development and trying to avoid having a chaotic Hodge-podge of development with a lot of traffic generation that would cause congestion in the streets. In this way, they hope that the businesses will be more compatible and work together better.

Chairman Hettinger commented that he would hate to see any problems with the existing businesses, because - although there are a lot of different uses on West Main St. – it is filled up; there are no empty stores – or not for long.

Mr. Finger explained that he felt the Planning & Zoning Commission did a good job of trying to balance the regulations and in accommodating existing businesses or property owners with dreams of some commercial activity. He explained that he will be updating the book, and that they will be adding a digital zoning layer to the WINCOG-Geographic Information System (<http://www.wincog-gis.org>) so that people will be able to see the zoning as part of that resource – which has a variety of maps that gives you access to flood plains, soils, wetlands, and contours. You can also find several aerial photos on the site, and can get a bird's eye view allowing a person to see the property at an oblique angle from four different directions.

The Chairman asked if there was anything new that we are looking at. James Finger explained that he's been looking at a couple of other grants with other people – one is an Arts grant, but requires an Arts organization to be the lead organization

The Chairman then asked about the old Giant Vac property in South Windham, and James explained that a Chinese businessman bought the building, but they've just been doing basic repairs to the building, as he hasn't heard that the business has started any activity yet.

The Chairman then asked about the status of the Keeper building in North Windham. James explained that the Kawasaki dealer backed out of the deal, and the property is now back on the market.

Bob Horrocks asked about the Roger's Corporation property. James responded that he's been dealing with two real-estate agencies on a prospective business that wanted to buy the property, but nothing has materialized to date.

Downtown Subcommittee: Next discussion ensued about the recently condemned building on Main St., and the question of what the Town could do to help the property owner as it would be a shame to lose an historic building.

James Finger explained that one way - is trying to get grants to assistance businesses and property owners - as we recently did with the Main St. grant application, but the property owner involved did not supply the information to him to participate. The other way, would be as other communities – such as Norwich, New London and Middletown have done to approve a bond issue to provide business loans or grants to businesses. Much discussion ensued as to the practical problems of the Town trying to acquire the property or providing financial assistance to the property owners with no easy solution. The Chairman opined that he didn't think the voters would approve a bond issue for economic development.

New Business: Mr. Finger reported that the CT Economic Resource Council (CERC) announced a new subscription for listing up to ten properties for \$100 each. The Commission was interested in looking into this.

Citizens & Delegation: No one was present in the audience to speak.

The meeting adjourned at 9:32 PM

Respectfully submitted

James Finger

Planner/Business Liaison