

# **Economic Development Commission**

*Special Meeting March 24, 2014*

**Windham Town Hall**

**979 Main St., Willimantic, CT**

**Call to Order** - Chairman Bill Hettinger called the meeting to order at approximately 7:45 PM. Those in attendance were: Bill Hettinger-Chairman, Robert Horrocks, John McCommas, Victor Funderburk. Also present was James Finger - staff, and guests were Jean deSmet, and Andrew Gutt of Thread City Development

**Discussion – open public forum** on work projects to include in the Town's prospective MSIF (Main Street Investment Fund) grant application for 2014.

The Chairman opened the discussion on ideas that anyone had for the Main Street Program, and referred to the list of suggestions that the Town Manager made regarding possible ideas for the Main Street Grant, and the following ideas were offered.

1. Reprise the Facade program we submitted last year . This is not practical as some of the property owners have changed, and there's not enough time to re-do this type of project with new owners with the limited time to get the grant completed by the end of May.

2. Renovate the Main Street streetscape with new sidewalks, trees, and lighting; possibly extending the same design up High and Windham Streets to create a visual link with ECSU. Generally it was agreed that this is the most fundable idea within the constraints of the grant.. This should also include street lighting (direct and indirect to highlight building), electric outlets and speakers for mini-artists to accommodate performance spaces." As suggested, maybe it could possibly extend up High and Windham Streets (or other streets) to connect to ECSU (although there was some question as to whether these areas had just been redone).

Both Jean deSmet and Andrew Gutt suggested that we really need to have a professional Landscape Architect to prepare a streetscape design. Streetscapes constantly come up in grants like this. We have some preliminary ideas in the Town Plan and in the 'Putting the Pieces Together' report from 20 years earlier, but no design we can point to on what needs to be done. The general consensus was that it might make sense for the town to hire a consultant to design the streetscapes.

3. Construct a new Town Road segment with sidewalks, trees, and lighting on Town-owned land near the former movie theater, that creates small lots for development on Town-owned land that could be marketed for small downtown businesses, possibly by the Thread City Development Corporation. - The Planner explained that this couldn't be done within the time constraints of the grant because of the 1996 referendum asking the voters to decide to develop or keep the parcel open - and the decision was to keep it open.

4. Visual and functional improvements to Riverside Drive. No one had any thoughts on this. Given the narrow roadway from Bridge Street following the Railroad down to the rear portion of the buildings - mostly fronting on Main St.

5. Marketing of the vacant Tin Tsin lot to develop a building that complies with all zoning and historical design requirements, possibly through the Thread City Development Corporation. The Chairman asked Andrew Gutt - representing Thread City Development about the idea of Councilman Tom DeVivo that the Town donate the Tin Tsin property to Thread City Development. Mr. Gutt replied that Thread City doesn't have the capacity to manage or develop any of the downtown properties, but would welcome the opportunity to have a community discussion on the subject in order to come up with the best plan for the property - and for downtown.

*In addition, the Chairman offered the following ideas for discussion:*

6. Work on the Mills area as a gateway to downtown, including painting the town owned Textile Museum building, signage, etc. for the flower bridge, and streetscape improvements to connect this to downtown. This would take more time than available - plus it would have to be approved by the Town Council before submitting it as part of the grant.

7. Funding for tourism and business signage downtown. This is not likely to get funding, and we are working with businesses to pay for their own signs.

8. Improvements to the Tin Tsin lot as formal parking, a performance/arts space, and connection to Riverside Drive. The Commission was most in favor of this, but there was concern that we didn't have sufficient detail on the actual construction to qualify for funding.

Finally, the ideas #5 and #8 on the list offered conflicting uses of the Tin Tsin lot. Depending on who was asked, it should either be sold, formally fixed up as a parking lot, and/or used as access to Riverside Drive. Moreover, representatives from Thread City Development indicated that they were not in a position to develop properties, but instead offered to hold a community discussion (perhaps in conjunction with the CT Main Street Center) on the future of the property, balancing the competing ideas for its use.

**Adjourned at approximately 9:45**

*respectfully submitted - James Finger*