

Economic Development Commission

March 4, 2013

Windham Town Hall

Meeting Room

979 Main St., Willimantic, CT

Call to Order: the Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:37 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 December 3, 2012, and explained that there wasn't a quorum for the January meeting. John McCommas moved to approve the December meeting minutes, and Bob Horrocks seconded – all approved.

Old Business

Business Signage – next steps - The Commission had asked the Traffic Committee for two investigations – crosswalks and business signage. The Traffic Committee deferred comment on crosswalks to the State as Main Street is a state highway - but, the traffic committee did not endorse the idea as they felt it would create traffic hazards, congestion, and confusion.

There was much discussion of the possibility of posting signs directing visitors to local businesses, on Main Street in Willimantic. The Traffic Commission has no problem with such signs provided signs are not posted on State-owned property.

This commission had many questions regarding the signs, such as: Where could the signs be posted? Who would design the signs? What would the cost be? Would businesses on side streets be included? How many signs could be on one pole?

The Chairman said we need to check with Public Works on the costs for business signs so we can discuss this program with Thread City Development. Mr. Finger agreed, and said he would check with Public Works on the costs, and locations of existing sign poles, and will try to find out what's involved in adding new sign poles. Some discussion ensued as to whether this program would be for just the Downtown, or Town – wide, and in terms of policies to recommend to the Town Council. Mr. Finger distributed the material from Killingly including the application form, policy guidelines, and pictures of sign fixtures that have been installed for examples.

Commissioner Funderburk will bring the business signage idea to Thread City Development and ask if they will design the signs.

Chairman Hettinger suggested that at the April 2013 meeting, when some of the questions might be answered, and then more concrete mechanics of the project can be determined.

New Business: The Chairman opened discussion on benefits and opportunity of a redevelopment authority. Chairman Hettinger presented his memo which outlined his thoughts on the town having a redevelopment agency. If the town would have a redevelopment agency, it would first have to have a project, then a source of funding; next would be a plan and finally a paid staff to administer the agency's project.

The commission discussed prior redevelopment agency's projects and the results. Questions about possible projects and funding sources were discussed. Any potential project would take a problem building or property and, over the course of 10 years or so, turn it into a productive economic asset.

Possible projects mentioned were, doing something with the major parcel and asking Thread City Development to join in the endeavor; or, turning the Hurley building on Main St. into a youth hostel for tourist who come to the area for recreational uses; such as canoeing/kayaking, hiking the local trails or the Mansfield Dam.

Commissioner Funderburk explained that he learned about a program in Waterbury through their Development Authority last fall when he a recent conference he attended. He felt that we need to take this step to acquire a property where we take it over and get people to pitch in to promote the economic development that we've been talking about.

Mr. Finger offered a history of efforts in the past referring to the Windham/Willimantic Community Redevelopment Authority, as they had acquired quite a lot of property in the early to mid 1970's, to assemble them to promote a better tax base. They demolished a number of buildings like the flat iron building at Main and Union St. and that became Jillson Square, and they provided financing for other buildings – like the new WILI building, Potpourri and the Cinema. They also spent about \$16 million on putting all the utilities underground along Main St., and installed the brick pavers. This was when Willimantic was an entitlement community and received regular funding from the federal government. Since then, we were downgraded to the State's – Small Cities program, and the funding has steadily been cut over the years. The Redevelopment program was disbanded in 1998, and there were efforts to establish a private corporation to perform the same tasks, but for whatever reason they have not wanted to pursue this.

Chairman's Report – Chairman Hettinger reported on a workshop being offered titled "Leading for Results. The workshop is being held at Three Rivers Community College in Norwich, on April 5, 2013. Tom Marano of Community Builders Institute will be facilitating.

Other reports/correspondence/announcements/activities – Commissioner McCommas asked about the tree clearing that has occurred on Route 6 in North Windham. Mr. Finger reported that the state owned property was cleared to improve the airport flight line. More clearing is coming, east of the dike walk and by the mobile home park.

Business calling program

- Downtown subcommittee activities/reports - Commissioner Funderburk recommended that commissioners make a trip to Storrs Center as it is quite impressive and a good example of collaboration between the town and private business. We need to have a parking garage in Willimantic and brainstorm on ways to entice visitors at the Storrs location to visit Willimantic.
- Chairman Hettinger asked that the tourism/recreation concept be added to the agenda for the committee's April meeting and invite the Whitewater Partnership to attend the meeting.

Other grant opportunities

C-PACE PROGRAM – Mr. Finger gave an overview of the program provided by the Clean Energy finance Investment Fund (CEFIA). This not a grant but a new financing tool for Commercial and Industrial owners to pay for energy conservation measures as a benefit assessment along with their property taxes. Qualifying property owners can use the program to pay for upgrading their boilers or heating systems, ventilation, and air conditioning equipment, leaky

windows doors, and insulation work. If they choose to sell the property, the benefit is transferable to the next owner.

The Chairman asked what the Commission needs to do, or is this just another tool in our tool chest.

Mr. Finger said that the Town is still working out the agreement with CEFIA, but he has been contacting property owners about the program to alert them to the advantages; and some have expressed interest. Once the agreement is signed, then we can actively market the program to our property owners who qualify.

Commissioner McCommas asked if the money was coming from the Town. Mr. Finger replied that it is not. The funding comes through private financial institutions working with CEFIA. The Town is only involved in collecting the benefit assessment and forwarding the money to CEFIA, and we are reimbursed for our administrative costs and expenses in collecting the money. Chairman Hettinger asked if the owners are required to do any analysis to prove that they are saving money as a result of the program. Mr. Finger explained that the property owners will meet with CEFIA to discuss their needs for energy upgrades, and these improvements will have to be evaluated in terms of the energy savings overall, and the life of the loan.

SOLARIZE CT - Mr. Finger apprised the Commission that the Town was informed that it was selected to participate in the pilot program for promoting the installation of solar panels on owner occupied homes. He added that Windham is partnering with Mansfield in this effort, and the goal is to market the program to interested property owners who qualify for solar panels and financing. Our hope is to get solar panels on at least twenty homes, and the more that participate, the lower the overall cost will be for all participants in the program. Participants are eligible for a State rebate of about one third of the cost, and a federal tax credit of 30%, thus bringing down the cost of the solar panel installation. The advantage to our society is that overall we could reduce our energy demand on the existing infrastructure, and the possibility of generating jobs.

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

Adjournment – As there was no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:26.

Respectfully submitted by:

Janet Laukaitis for

James Finger, Planner/Business Liaison

(revised)