

Windham Economic Development Commission,
Joint meeting with the
Planning & Zoning Commission
MINUTES
March 5, 2012
7 PM

Call to order for each commission.

The Economic Development Commission, and the Windham Planning and Zoning Commission held a Joint meeting on March 5, 2012 in the Town Hall. Paula Stahl, Chair of the Planning & Zoning Commission called the PZC to order at 7:03 PM. Members present were Claire Lary, Dan Lein, Jean Chaine, Dawn Niles, Juan Montalvo, Paula Stahl, and Vic Rayhall. Bill Hettinger called the Economic Development Commission to order with himself as Chairman, John McCommas, and Mayor Eldridge; later Victor Funderburk, and Robert Horrocks arrived. Town staff present was James Finger.

Citizens and delegations

Bill Hettinger opened the meeting to Citizens and Delegations and invited the public to speak with a three minute limit.

Heather Meehan identified herself as the owner of Meehan and Daughters Real Estate. She said that on the subject of tax incentives, taxes should be lowered throughout the Downtown to attract businesses. On Zoning changes, she mentioned the Neighborhood Revitalization Zone which was a plan that was put together over 15 years ago, should be re-visited, and that the (NRZ) should be expanded to the majority of Willimantic – Downtown. She then commented on news reports of the Town buying up contaminated property, and said she wanted to remind everyone of the poor real estate management that the Town had of other properties. Some examples include the Mills, the Tin Tsin building, the WIP (Willimantic Instant Print) building, the YMCA, the Nathan Hale, the Hotel Hooker. She urged that what you (Town) should be doing is what's best for the Town's people. We need to support the Mills, as they have come to you (letter from Tom Briggs of Loch View to PZC and EDC), and have asked for a waiver or a change (in zoning regulations) so that they can survive. Another example of poor Economic Development is when Konover came into Town and wanted to take the Jillson Cinema and put a Christmas Tree Shop on Jillson Square, and they were turned away due to a lack of parking. This should be re-visited.

Next **Pam Viens** spoke saying that she had worked at Sherwin Williams for twelve years, and thought that the Town never got anywhere with Economic Development. With the Windham Mills, the Town should support them in what they want to do to survive, and get out of the way. She cited Lowes was a disaster. She pointed to Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowes who wanted to come in as major tax payers, and that other competing business - like Cash Lumber, Willard's, and Sherwin Williams still survived. She opined that the Town is imbalanced in what it wants to bring to Town that you're never going to move forward. You need to get out of the way, and let us do what we can do; otherwise it's not going to go forward. You only let people do certain things. You're giving the go-ahead to people doing the Hurley Building and 560 Main St., but the Mills you're saying No – its wrong.

Joel Meyers owns real estate in the Hill Section commented that the last time he went to an Economic Development meeting it was at the High School and that was before the Nathan Hale was auctioned off. He said that when the Town made the decision to go with a company who wanted to develop it, needed parking, and they really couldn't handle it. He also urged extending the zoning as he owns a property on Chestnut St. where there are three properties on one parcel and he pays \$13,000 in taxes. He explained that he has a beautiful that has running water with a bathroom and everything it needs to make into another apartment there to help him with paying the taxes, and every quarter its \$700 for water and sewer, and every day the prices are going up, and the tenants can't afford to pay any more. He said he agreed with what was going on with Main St. because it will benefit everyone. As far as purchasing the parcel for the industrial park – he asserted that it is - absolutely bad idea.

For anyone who is not familiar, Windham does some very good about some things, but is terrible when it comes to managing it. Don't do something that you don't know how to do. Don't spend anymore of our money – part of my \$13,000 – I think I pay about \$50,000 or \$60,000 overall in taxes (for all of his properties) a year – and I don't want to see you doing something else that's going to go bankrupt – and we've been told that the parcel that you want to buy for industrial – is contaminated, and we shouldn't touch that.

On Lowes – it should have been approved - there was a lot of opposition from a small group of people, and it should have been approved. Lowes would have been a gold mine for us in taxes – equal to Home Depot. He commented that he was on the Economic Development Board in Lee Massachusetts, and they spent about \$50,000 re-doing their Main St. and now the benefits are there. There's more money for the school system, and more money for everything.

Dan Ouimette of Ouimette Builders who built Victory Lane spoke next; he said he was raised here and thinks it's a wonderful Town. He said he thought we've come a long way, and it's fantastic what we're doing downtown. He said he hasn't followed all of the details, but is excited about what is happening on Main St. But for businesses, we need to help them – not to pay taxes; so we need to give them big tax incentives – not just a little bit – we need to do something that's outstanding – maybe something that's not been done before – anywhere else. Businesses aren't coming. We're getting small businesses, but we need big businesses something that's exciting for this Town. We're heading in the right direction, but we don't want to drop the ball. We need to check what other Towns have done – maybe fifty miles away – and then do better. We're beginning to come out of the hole, and can see the light, but we don't want to drop the ball. So let's give big tax incentives to new business.

Karl Nilsen representing Tom Briggs the managing partner of the Mills, as he had another commitment. He continued explaining that all the Mill owners are asking for - is for the two Commissions to take a look at it and see what has been done, and to see what the future plan is – to see what can be done; and to see if you can help them along. We'd like to show the Commissions what we can do, what we'd like to do, and to get the Commission's thoughts on this. James Finger reported that both Boards have a letter from Mr. Briggs in the packets requesting and urging that you set up a joint tour of the site whenever it's convenient. Also with respect to the Lowes project, he said he wanted to report that both the Planning Commission and the Zoning Commission had approved that project. It wasn't the fault of the Town; Lowes chose not to pursue the project on their own.

Paula Stahl asked Planner Finger for clarification on the Christmas Tree shop. Planner Finger explained that he didn't hear of a Christmas Tree shop, but knew that Konover was working on a plan for the Cinema's property with Ted Montgomery in the Economic Development Office. They wanted to pursue a larger development for Jillson Square, but they didn't present any plan to any of the Boards.

Ms. Stahl added that she doubted that it would have been a Christmas Tree shop, as they generally put them right next to a Highway. Then she answered Dan Ouimette to explain that she would love to give businesses a huge tax incentive, but the CT State Statutes limit what each municipality can do, and how long a duration it can be; so it's not up to the Town. Relative to the Mills, she explained to Mr. Nilsen that the Planning & Zoning Commission encouraged them to come up with a list of uses that are not allowed that they could look at so they could look at other possible uses – such as restaurants, banquet facilities, hotels, and conference centers – that are currently not permitted there.

Bill Hettinger suggested that the agenda be modified to discuss Mr. Briggs request for a tour of the Mills under item 3 – a? All agreed.

Economic development planning strategies in general

- tax incentives
- zone changes
- municipal signage (business directive, gateway)
- changes needed for pedestrian areas
- business park

Bill Hettinger then explained the purpose of the joint meeting with the EDC and PZC was a follow up from a year ago (in October), to see where each Commission has been and to jointly come to a meeting of the minds as outlined on the agenda.

Tax incentives

Bill Hettinger explained that the Economic Development Commission has been focused on reviewing the Town's tax incentives at the request of the Town Manager; and we have actually spent a lot of time on trying to figure out what we have for tax incentives in this Town – and what we can offer to people or can't offer to people. We've been trying to find out if we have the right ones, and what we want it to be. During the past few meetings, the EDC has gone through all the various tax deferments, and abatements that are available. We've got an Enterprise zone in Town which was adopted in 1987, and the problem with it is that there aren't a lot of business properties in it. It's basically from Jackson St. to the Natchaug River, from the Mills up to the Mansfield Town Line. If a manufacturing facility comes into that area, the State certifies their eligibility – they are entitled to a seven year phase in of taxes – there's nothing (no processing through any Town Boards) that happens in Town. The more interesting one is the Entertainment District that was passed in 1997 by the Board of Selectmen. Everyone has the idea that it is to promote

entertainment downtown like some place in Hartford. The fact is that the Entertainment District is for real property improvements for eligible activities that qualify for things like movie studios, or if you want to make guitars; but if you want to sell guitars it doesn't. So it's basically for the manufacturing or production of movies or those entertainment types of activities. It's kind of strange, because it's not what most people think of that takes place in most of these districts.

If you have a plan to do this, you get the DECD certification, and then come to the Town – it's a seven year phase in (of taxes on the improvements) based on the 1997 Resolution. Additionally, the Town can and may approve (up to) a seven year deferment on property assessments on ANY improvements to properties in the District. They are not automatic; they need to be approved by the Town Council.

The EDC has come up with guidelines for the Commission, which we're going to present to the Council for approval of those – and basically its saying we have to see some positive contribution; either it's a distressed building or condemned building, or an historic building. If they're giving us something in terms of value – like with the Hospital where they were putting in the water line; or they're giving us an economic impact analysis – and can demonstrate value to the Town. So that covers the Enterprise Zone, and the Entertainment District. The Entertainment District runs from the Mills all the way down to Price Rite along West Main St. along the south side of Valley St.

Paula Stahl asked for clarification on the incentive – (and whether) it could be anywhere in Town? Mr. Hettinger answered that there are similar ones, and it could be anywhere in Town (for a qualifying Entertainment Facility).

Ms. Stahl opined that if you think it's too large, you could petition the Town Council to revise the boundaries... Mr. Hettinger interjected that we probably also have to work with DECD. We had a problem trying to identify the correct map, and then James Finger found the original one signed by the State DECD Commissioner in the Town Manager's office closet.

James Finger clarified that there was a petition to extend the boundaries from the Downtown area to include the area westerly - all the way out West Main St. near the expressway.

Mr. Hettinger asserted that it may not be what we want it to be, but that's what it is.

Dan Lein asked if this through the State Statutes – and James Finger replied - that yes, the Board of Selectmen adopted an Entertainment District that covers from the Mills at 322 Main St. all the way west along West Main St., down to the Willimantic River (then back along Columbia Ave., then follows the railroad line parallel to West Main St. to pick up BIC-Cable, crossing over to where Price Rite is and returning along those Commercial properties up to Valley St. and down Jackson.). That is a State program, as well as the local option where we have some latitude (any improvement), but not for gambling facilities or drinking establishments.

Bill Hettinger re-stated that it is primarily for manufacturing or production of entertainment types of businesses. Some discussion focused on the common and ordinary understanding of the term ‘entertainment’, with many arguing that our Entertainment District doesn’t mean what most people think it means – concluding with Bill Hettinger agreeing that most people think it would include things like Toad’s Place or Union St. Place in Hartford – kind of a restaurant with bands and dancing or a theater; but that’s not what the statutes says it can do.

Paula Stahl commented that it would be great if we could get a guitar manufacturer here (Bill but we don’t have areas suitable in the district to accommodate that). Ms. Stahl continued saying that maybe what we should do is come up with our own zones with tax incentives that fit us; that if you do something that invests a certain amount in new construction and/or hires people for four jobs that supports local businesses – then we will give you ‘X’ in tax incentives. So you (Economic Development Commission) could come up with your own incentive boundaries that the Town Council would adopt. You could develop a matrix of items listing this and that (performance measures to evaluate the benefits to the community) so it would be fair to everyone.

Bill Hettinger clarified that the incentives that we have now, (and there are others) is somewhat of a negotiated incentive assessments that are allowed anywhere in Town to the extent that it’s allowed by law. It’s (for the) ‘Real property’ improvements – so if someone takes a downtrodden property and revitalizes it, that’s when those incentives would kick in – where we would cap the taxes at the current level – and then phasing in the new taxes. Those are the three tools that we have. The Enterprise zone for manufacturing – and the Entertainment District is also for manufacturing relating to entertainment types of businesses are directly through the State. So if you meet their requirements, then the Economic Development Commission (the Town) doesn’t have anything to do with those – but it’s the negotiated agreements (for the local option) within the Entertainment District, and for the entire Town.

Ms. Stahl commented that she liked to see us come up with an incentive program similar to another Town that created the incentives in the areas where you (the community) want (to see the development). In Cromwell – in the Downtown, in order to qualify for the tax incentives; you’re investing in that section – and you really need to be a strategic business (and they have a list of what that means – which includes) a locally owned small business, restaurants – but excluding national chains, affordable or loft style dwellings and targeting young professionals or retirees, two bedroom dwellings but only in certain limited circumstances, cultural establishments like theaters or performing arts boutique clothing stores or book stores, specialty food stores, an Italian market, a bakery, a chocolatier, cakes (mentioned that we should include cupcakes), an upscale wine bar, or a martini bar. So if you’re in Cromwell downtown and investing in those types of businesses, those are the ones that would get you incentives – not the national chains. Also - Kirby Row for professional services and office buildings.

Bill Hettinger agreed that this is what we have to decide – what we want; he explained that he was just describing what we have. What we have wasn't easy to figure out, and it may not make any sense. As Dan (Lein) pointed out, we have an 'Entertainment District', but it's not what people think it is. So he added, they (EDC) would definitely consider that (items that Paula Stahl had outlined) and wanted to look at that further, and would add it to the draft summary.

Ms. Stahl added that what you should look at - is the businesses that have the highest local multiplier, but added that there's nothing wrong with businesses coming from away (outside the community) because sometimes it brings services that you couldn't get here otherwise. But it's what they are contributing back into the local economy. Economic Development isn't just the mill rate (grand list); it's the local economy...

Mr. Hettinger interjected that we're (EDC) looking for the clusters downtown, and our strategy for downtown seems to be with Arts and Entertainment and having eating establishments, entertainment, and theaters that creates the nightlife on the (feet on the) street.

Ms. Stahl agreed, but added that this is only a small portion of our Town – and we need to think about the rest of the Town; and Mr. Hettinger agreed.

Changes needed for pedestrian areas

Dan Lein commented that it becomes problematic if you don't control the traffic flow in and through your downtown. He asked if you (EDC) have attempted to take control of the street downtown.

Bill Hettinger replied that we've had conversations up the line in Town Hall. He added that the EDC has asked, but hasn't gotten a response yet to a request from the Town Manager on a list of items to discuss with the State DOT, in trying to make the Downtown Main Street more pedestrian friendly. Our suggestions asked to address the traffic lights to respond to pedestrians when they hit the walk button that it responds more quickly. Another suggestion was to create additional cross-walks up and down the street. This is because many people don't go to the cross-walk, they just dart out into the middle of the street– in some cases, it's because we have very long blocks without cross-walks (on one occasion the State Senator almost got hit by a car trying to cross). This is true down at the Mills as there is a long stretch without any cross-walks. So the EDC sent its recommendations onto the Town Manager, and beyond that we're not sure how we can make it happen.

Dawn Niles asked how Manchester took over their Main street Downtown. Ms. Stahl asserted that it would have to be a decision that the Town wanted to take over the responsibilities for the Street from point A – B; but that means (the Town would assume) all maintenance and repairs for the Street. Bill asked about the numerous cross-walks on 195 by U-CONN with just a little orange cone in the middle of the Road. But, the State seems to object to that, and they didn't want to do

that here, they say they need to maintain traffic flow. Ms. Stahl agreed that the State wants to move traffic downtown as quickly and efficiently as possible. Mr. Hettinger agreed stating that our goal is to get people to feel comfortable walking back and forth (across the road). Ms. Stahl – yes it's a conflicting goal.

Dan Lein asked what we could do in the short term as bodies (EDC and PZC Agencies) to encourage this to bring it to fruition. Bill said in resignation, that he didn't know what more we could do (EDC provided input to the Town Manager on the issue); and Ms. Stahl opined that its probably beyond us (EDC and PZC Agencies). As its set up, the Town Manager is going to meet with the DOT Commissioner to discuss it, and that's the first big step (Ms. Stahl suggested to the Manager that when he came for a tour to take him to a cross-walk, hit the walk signal and open a folding chair for him to sit and wait).

Municipal signage (business directive, gateway)

Bob Horrocks then asked about the other recommendations the EDC made, including the business signage. Bill agreed that these too deal with the State Highway Commissioner. Bill then explained that they (EDC) were interested in three things involving signage. We were interested in business signage similar to what they have in Danielson, and Coventry is another example. (This is) where they have signs on top of the street (name) signs pointing to the Businesses on the side streets.

We have some great businesses that aren't on Main St. - Main St. is a state route, and when people come down Main St., they don't know that there are businesses on these side streets. We have people moving (their businesses) down onto Riverside Drive – and people (general public-shoppers) don't even know that Riverside Drive exists. So we are looking at way for the businesses to pay for a little sign to be on top of the street sign. This way – people walking down the street or driving will know that there is a business down a side street.

The second type of signage was gateway signage for the Town. So if you're out by Wal-Mart, you see Route 6 Expressway, and you would see another sign that says: Downtown Business District. You have the same thing in Columbia or South Windham. Ms. Stahl commented that they (PZC) have also been promoting this for a long time, and it's on the list for the Town Manager to discuss with DOT.

Mr. Hettinger: the third type of signage is to promote the museums and other attractions like the flower bridge, the Rail-Road Museum – similar to the signage directing visitors to the Nathan Hale Homestead in Coventry because it's not located convenient to anything else. We should have these if we are going to attract people to our cultural theme for those businesses in the Downtown.

Ms. Stahl – not to defend the DOT, but they will not install those types of signs unless the attraction is not on a State Highway. And so, they won't put up a single sign in our Town, because they are all located on a State Highway.

Dawn Niles commented as she had some recent experience with this subject, and she clarified that the DOT will not install these types of signs unless the museum is open to the public at least six of the seven days a week for 8 AM to 5 PM. So it's not where they are located so much as how many hours they are open – and this is the answer she got less than a few weeks earlier.

Mr. Hettinger said that the EDC has spent a lot of time on this; so he asserted that if the State rules are holding us back – let's change the State rules. The State has gone around wanting to pump money into development to promote the economy – you need the bodies, the movement, and the opportunity for commerce; and if we don't have that because of some State rule – then let's change the rule.

Dawn Niles clarified that it's not a State Statute – it's in their regulation review. John McCommas asked how Danielson did it. Some replied that they just did it, because it was on Town property and not on a State Roadway. Mr. Hettinger countered that they are right on their Main St., but we're not sure what we're going to do.

James Finger referred the members to their packets where he had examples of the Business signs in downtown Danielson, and reported that they are also on Route 101 in front of the new Shopping Mall in Dayville. It's interesting that the State would have this policy (to prohibit business signs), because they (business signs) are everywhere. The pictures show that they are not garish signs; they simply have the Business name and an arrow.

Dawn asked if the Town paid for the signs. Mr. Hettinger replied that the Businesses pay for the signs, and the Town puts them up. More discussion ensued.

Jean Chaine asked about getting some directional signs on Route six to direct travelers to downtown Business District by placing such a sign well ahead of the (route 6 bypass) turn directing people to Route 66; rather than having a big 'Willimantic' sign when they're on the bypass that discharges them (out across from the EastBrook Mall) to where the Mansfield Town Line is (located). So Mansfield gets most of the out of Town traffic.

Both Mr. Hettinger, and Ms. Stahl agreed that we want to route the traffic to us (downtown business district). Jean Chaine added that we have the same problem on the Columbia side – where we need to have a sign directing traffic to the Willimantic Business District. Jean Chaine then circulated pictures illustrating his point, and added that these pictures were sent to the DOT along with a letter a few years ago, that resulted in signs for a truck route – but they were positioned too late for someone to get in the other lane.

Mr. Hettinger commented that we also need to find out who inputs the data into the GPS that gives the wrong direction to drivers. More discussion ensued, concluding with the comment that the Town Manager needs to have a dialogue with the DOT Commissioner on these issues. Ms. Stahl commented that she liked the signs in Danielson as they were all the same color, and they are easy

to see that they are the business signs – with no logos or advertising. Mr. Hettinger asserted that this is essential for businesses on the side streets, (Food Coop was mentioned as example) and for the walk-ability downtown

Zoning changes

Paula Stahl gave an overview of the purpose and intent for the various Zoning Districts. From the Big picture we looked at what areas should be focused on commercial development - and what is unique about that instead of all being in one zone.

Downtown - to encourage and permit a high-density urban environment catering to retail businesses with an emphasis on arts and entertainment, and with a pedestrian orientation. This was adopted last summer (7/14/11).

Downtown Transition - to encourage and permit an urban environment similar to the Downtown District but at a lesser density as a transition between surrounding zones (This was adopted on 7/14/11)

General Business – generally goes from the Town Hall out (West Main St.) to (Gateway Commons) with some exceptions to encourage and permit a variety of businesses, similar to the Downtown but at a lower density than the Downtown districts, oriented to vehicular transportation and providing pedestrian connectivity. She explained that they are drafting these regulations for West Main, out the Route 6 Highway, Crystal and west side of North Windham.

General Commercial – This is also in process, and is to encourage and permit general commercial development, at a lower density than other districts, oriented to vehicular transportation. This would be for areas along Columbia Rd, Capitol Ave, Rte 32 south, Rte 66 north of Village Heights to Rte 6. (Mr. Hettinger asked for clarification on General Commercial and General Business as it sounded the same. Ms. Stahl agreed that they are kind of the same, but we looked at what type of businesses we want to encourage in the two separate areas. In a General Commercial, you wouldn't want to encourage fast food restaurants; you'd be encouraging car dealerships and car washes- so slightly different. John McCommas asked about exceptions, if you had a fast food restaurant that wanted to go into this area. Ms. Stahl responded that we have different categories. If it's a permitted use, then the staff has authority to approve it, and the Planning & Zoning wouldn't see it. We're not there yet, but we're moving towards it with the revisions. The next level is where it's for new construction, and the PZC would want to make sure that it's not conflicting with the neighboring building, and that the sign doesn't block the neighbor's business; so we'd want to take a look at it. Another category would be for a public hearing, where we might be concerned about something that went in there, and the neighbors would complain about it. So we look at the existing uses and the zoning map and try to include 'like things' because they tend to do better when they are near each other.

North Windham Commercial - to encourage and permit general retail/commercial development –with flexibility allowing the zone to be responsive to market trends, and help the Town to realize optimum economic returns - like the Wal-Mart area – encouraging the non-local businesses. This was adopted last summer (7/28/11)

Neighborhood Business – This is to encourage and permit neighborhood-scale businesses to provide services to nearby residences including a mix of uses with business/commercial on the ground (first) floor and residences above. This is for little pockets of neighborhoods where you could walk down and get a gallon of milk or a sandwich. They may be focused around our Pizza parlors – like Mama’s and Papa’s primarily at some intersections along Jackson and east Main St.

Village District – primarily for our North and South Windham villages, and to encourage a mix of uses, including neighborhood-scale businesses, in a village setting. South Windham may be around the Post Office, and maybe across Route 32 to include the area up by the Lumber Yard.

Manufacturing - to encourage and permit light manufacturing in harmony with surrounding commercial and residential development. This would include General Cable to Willimantic Waste, and pockets near Union St.

Industrial - to encourage and permit heavy manufacturing and earth excavation in harmony with surrounding commercial and residential development. This would include the area along the (Shetucket) River with existing gravel operations. Mr. Hettinger asked for clarification on the need for loading facilities in these area, and if the Manufacturing and Industrial zone would accommodate these uses? – Yes; for new manufacturing, we would structure it so if it’s near a residential use, it would not be the type of businesses with excessive trucks coming in and out of there. For any of the zoning that we are proposing to change - if there is an existing use where we are changing the zone where the use is permitted, they’re still allowed to continue they would be grandfathered in.

Business Park – This would be an area to encourage and permit a mix of industrial, distribution and manufacturing businesses with access to rail lines – even a business that manufactures Martin Guitars. This would potentially be the area along rail road lines.

Health Care – We have a phenomenal Hospital here. So a year ago, we created a zone around the Hospital and down to the Generations Building to encourage and permit a variety of medical related services and businesses at a higher density than other business districts. The Hospital and medical field pays good wages, and when the Hospital builds the three buildings that they are planning, it will be a huge boon to the Town when they complete them and have them staffed. (This was adopted on 2/17/11). So to piggy back onto this, we are also planning to create – a Professional Office zone surrounding the Hospital – this would be the...

Health Care - Professional Office - to encourage and permit medical professional offices in a density that is compatible with residential use. This will be for the area within Quarry and Mansfield Aves near the hospital.

Parking regulations – Ms. Stahl reported that they had also worked through the parking regulations, and dropped the numbers down so we now have a minimum and maximum – and these are lower than what our mandatory was before. We also have provisions for them to go above the maximum if they need it; and we have provisions for sharing parking – such as daytime and night-time.

Mr. Hettinger asked about parking for Downtown, especially for the second and third floors. Ms. Stahl clarified that the Town decided a long time ago, that for the Downtown, the Town was going to provide for the parking. Bob Horrocks asked if we have ever turned down a new business because they didn't meet the parking requirements – and told them to go elsewhere. Ms. Stahl responded that she didn't think a business would want to locate in an area where there wasn't enough parking for their customers.

Bob Horrocks clarified that this is a city, and if a business were in New York or Philadelphia, and they told a business that they had to provide parking, they would argue that it is a City. Ms. Stahl said we require zero downtown.

So we have turned away businesses that are outside the downtown. Ms. Stahl – not since we've (combined Planning & Zoning Commission) been around.

James Finger clarified that there was instance that didn't go to the Commission, and that's one on Main St. where the old CVS Pharmacy was located that changed into a restaurant; and there used to be a State Library next to it and they had 10,000 sq. ft. The restaurant use requires three times more parking, and they filled up the lot. So the property changed from a retail use into to a restaurant use; and the Library had only generated a demand of about three parking spaces – or thirty spaces once a month. Another restaurant next door wanted to expand into where the State Library had been, but there wasn't enough parking on the lot. Our new regulations still reflect a need for more parking for a restaurant use because they do generate more traffic.

Ms. Stahl added that the problem with restaurants, churches and movie theaters is that they demand for parking all at the same time; and we have to be concerned about public safety crossing the street where there are no crosswalks.

Mr. Horrocks but isn't this the problem we have in the city where people park down or across the street. Ms. Stahl responded that in the Downtown, we have crosswalks and there are no parking requirements (we have municipal parking lots). The site that James referred to has too small a parking lot for what is happening there. James added that there is nothing to code in the parking lot.

Mr. Horrocks said the frustration to expanding a business because there isn't enough parking and people are standing at the door and have to walk to a parking area as they do (downtown)... Ms. Stahl agreed, but that there is no public parking within a mile of there (that location)

Mr. Horrocks well they can park on side streets. Ms. Stahl – you can't park on Main St. in that area, and there are few side streets. In any case, if you're denied a permit, you could appeal it right – and make your case asked Mr. Horrocks. Ms. Stahl agreed this is correct. But – she clarified - the other restaurant did expand by adding about seven or eight tables, and he's doing well. James Finger agreed, that we allowed him to expand his kitchen area and move some of his equipment and storage into the vacant space.

Ms. Stahl then continued by reporting that they (PZC) is working on the regulations for signs as they are somewhat ambiguous; lighting; and to make sure that the regulations are clear and easier to understand so we create a level even playing field. The idea of being business friendly is not only making it easier to comply, but making the regulations easy to understand.

Also, we're working on revising the approval process for businesses selling alcohol – especially for restaurants selling beer or wine. Another item is clarifying the process – step by step - for getting zoning approval (Site Plans and Special Permits).

Victor Funderburk asked about the Incentive Housing Zone (IHZ). Ms. Stahl replied that the PZC is looking at four sites for the IHZ. In the Downtown area it's the Nathan Hale, the Hooker, and the YMCA building; allowing a greater density of housing – and (with) commercial retail on the first floor. Also in the back of Uncle Ken's area, duplex homes – correction townhouses – that are owner occupied; with mixed uses across the front along Main St with apartments upstairs. Another area is the Jillson square Cinema, the parking lot, and the old Lumber yard is on Church St. This would also require 30,000 sq. ft. of commercial development, and street façades that look like the Downtown – so it would fit in. This would add a new buildings and some economic development for housing and the commercial. This is a State program, and the Board of Selectmen and the Zoning Commission had to submit the application. The PZC inherited it, and it's been a couple of years in the works with a June 30th deadline. When we have it approved at the State, the Town is paid \$1,500 for any housing unit that is built.

Mr. Funderburk asked what we have to do to move it along.

Ms. Stahl replied that we have to have the regulations put together, and we'll look at a draft on Thursday (3-9-12); so we'll need to have a public hearing to get public comment on them. Then it's sent to the State for them to approve our regulations. This doesn't all have to be done by June (30th), but once we send it all up, we can't change it. This is a little scary. If they were our regulations, we would write our own regulation, and if we find that we should have done something differently, then we just revise it; but we can't do that with this (IHZ).

Mr. Hettinger said three or four places were mentioned; what if we (the Town) wanted to add more places?

Ms. Stahl replied that we could add places later.

Jean Chaine commented that if someone takes a building that already has say twenty units for example, they would have to create more units than were already there in order (for us) to qualify for the rebate. So in effect what is happening is that the unit sizes will be smaller to increase the density. In our regs it's like 450 sq. ft. – which may seem small to many of us who live in a 3,000 sq. ft. home. It's large enough for a single person to live in; but not families.

Ms. Stahl – clarified that one of the problems for us, is that we were faster than Jana (consultant at WINCOG), as we changed the regulations to allow residential by right downtown, so she had to re-write and change all of her formulas. So when we looked at it after we made the changes, we had already reduced the dwelling sizes down to the minimum that we felt comfortable.

Mr. Hettinger said that this is just an optional zone...(Ms. Stahl) –Yes correct. Mr. Hettinger so if we have a minimum of 450 sq. ft. and they wanted to build an 800 sq. ft. unit... (Ms. Stahl) – No it's not mandatory. It's an overlay zone – and the underlying zone is still in effect.

Mr. Hettinger he was just concerned that it wasn't mandatory, because if we have a property owner who doesn't want to have smaller units, that he isn't required to do so; this is just an option if they want to take advantage of it.

Jean Chaine reiterated, that if a property owner already has twenty units and wants them to be larger, then he won't qualify for more units

Dan Lein added that there are infrastructural problems as well - (for example) where do you put the garbage, and the utilities (for an electrical vault).

Jean Chaine added that once the standards are adopted, and then it's fast-tracked through the permitting process – we're out of the picture at that point.

Ms. Stahl concurred explaining that the incentive for the developers is twofold: one is the fast-tracked process because developers want to know of what they can get – because time is money, and 2) they get more units – so they make more money. So that's the incentive for the developer. The incentive for the Town is the \$1,500 that comes to the Town.

Mr. Funderburk commented that he has read that the last step is in dealing with the Public and explaining it...Ms. Stahl – replied that we've – or Jana has done three different outreach (meetings), so we technically don't need to have a public hearing before we send it up to Hartford; but the Board is not comfortable not having a public hearing. We want the public to have an opportunity to chime in on it...

Mr. Funderburk asked what could we (EDC) do to help support it... Ms. Stahl – probably just come to the public hearing – maybe in May. Mr. Hettinger commented that when Jana had her hearings they were on holiday weekends, and he wanted to stay away from that.

Ms. Stahl said that we (PZC) would have hearings here at night.

John McCommas asked about the \$1,500 – (several voices asked the question) who gets it? it goes to the Town. James Finger reported that it's actually more, but a few communities who have completed the process have commented that they still haven't gotten paid. The incentive for the developer is the streamlined process, and the density bonus. But, he added that the Planning & Zoning Commission went ahead and streamlined the process for everyone already when they revised the regulations last year. It's just that the State insists that we have to give a greater density bonus that what is stated in the regulations.

Ms. Stahl asserted that the fee that they actually give us is not the deciding factor.

James added that it's actually a payment for the increase in costs for the added municipal service demands; but it's just a one-time payment (as State money is available).

Dan Lein commented that the work that Jana (WINCOG Consultant) provided showed what impact it would have and where. Ms. Stahl added that part of the money had to go toward a market study; so we have a tremendous housing market study – and it shows that we need one & two bedroom housing for folks because of the demand.

Mr. Funderburk – how do you feel about the targeted groups – the commuters, students, single people congregating downtown and creating a community? Jean Chaine – responded that it'll add to business – what's the problem?

Ms. Stahl – commented that we are getting a lot of restaurants downtown, and we need to support them – until we get more apartments. We are going to have a thriving downtown.

Dan Lein shared his research explaining that going back to the 1990 Census, there were 22,000 people in Town; and in the 2010 Census – we have 25,000. That's a lot of people because in 2000 we only grew by 800 people. So in 2011, the Town has grown by 2,411; and of that change – 8.25% is in the Willimantic Service District. That's a huge increase– mostly in single or smaller units in the Willimantic Service District. So an 11% increase is significant, and we need to reap the benefit of it to our tax base and to also provide the service; but we're not seeing that increase in our tax base.

Jean Chaine commented that a request for tax abatement that comes before us really needs to be examined with a lot of scrutiny to see if the incentive is going to create a problem on the other end for infrastructural support. So we've got to be a little more selective on what's going to qualify for a tax incentive. He opined that he didn't think that we've been doing that in the past – it seems like in some cases, we've just been underwriting the business man's bottom line with tax payer's dollars; rather than the benefit that we're purporting to get.

Ms. Stahl asked (the EDC members) what businesses you've been considering giving for tax incentives. She then commented that she could offer some information from studies that showed the types of businesses that have a positive effect on the local economy – rather than a negative one. When you're looking at local multipliers in the local economy...

Mr. Hettinger responded that the EDC is actually asking from the businesses that are not rehabilitating a distressed or an historic building – is to give us a third party economic analysis - we'd love to see the comparative basis. But we've put it back to them to present to us – that we don't believe them, and we don't want to do the calculations; that we want them to someone like Fred Carsten from U-CONN or someone like that - for a third party independent analysis.

Ms. Stahl commented that they don't look 5, 10, or 20 years down the road. Fred does a great job for the impact during construction...Mr. Hettinger – No we want the impact of the jobs. This is how we're going to measure job impact...Ms. Stahl commented that she didn't think that Fred knows how to do that.

Mr. Hettinger answered that it may not come from Fred, but there are others who do it. That's what we're trying to get to, so we certainly want to include that to be part of our criteria.

Ms. Stahl said that she felt that we could probably get that information without making the business go through ... it's a very expensive analysis...

Mr. Hettinger countered – no there are people who can do it for just a couple of thousand dollars. But we don't want to be the ones putting the assumptions on it, we want them to have an independent third party look at the material. We don't want to rely on the Business to just stand up and say: 'these jobs are really good!' We don't want to be the ones judging the goodness of the jobs he asserted. We want a third party to look at the multipliers – even if it's the same reports that you've quoted. (It needs to be) something that we can rely on – then we can take a look at it.

Ms. Stahl– it's just that there are some industries that we should be targeting. These are medical, office, or manufacturing. She opined that she didn't think we should be giving incentives to national chains – because they put a drain on the economy – all the studies have shown that. Pinehurst North Carolina thought that their salvation was big box retail – with tax incentives. They have since discovered that this is not helping their economy because fewer people are working there.

Victor Funderburk asked about the multiplier effect, and that some incentives have little multiplier effect. Others – like the Incentive Housing Zone has the promise of some multiplier effect perhaps on the businesses downtown – and that becomes the criteria. He opined that we need to use this more in our thinking about what projects we support.

Ms. Stahl continued commenting that in the studies that she has seen, they vary slightly on the 'Businesses – from away' – the non-local business. They use so few local services, that it doesn't help the Town. Wal-Mart for example – probably doesn't use a local accountant, nor their printing, or their insurance, or attorney – these services are probably provided somewhere else; and their profits are definitely going somewhere else. Whereas our local businesses generally buy from other local businesses, and this keeps the money in Town.

Bob Horrocks agreed that we've discovered that we need to support the local businesses and help them expand because they are going to live through the hard times and the good times and will stay with you. They're not going to pack up and ship out.

Ms. Stahl added that Willards' may not have their accountant in Town, but they're probably within ten miles of here, and they bank here. So they are supporting our local economy by being here – where the big box stores – are not supporting our local economy.

Business Park

Mr. Hettinger introduced the subject of the Business Park, and that the EDC had been asked to look at the Town owned property in South Windham next to the Lounsbury Trucking on Route 32 where they have the lumber stored. It's a twenty to thirty acre parcel with Rail access that the Town is using to sell the gravel. We've done some investigation, as the Town Engineer had some numbers on how much it would cost to develop and get water to the site. We're looking at it as a

possibly business park – it has some nice advantages being on the River, and has Rail service. It seems to be consistent with the Town’s Plan of Conservation and Development, but it’s not consistent with what the State would plan for an Business or industrial park. The State says that if you want any money to do something with it, it has to have water and sewer.

The sewer is up by IGA – the water is across the street so it just has to be brought into the site. He said he wanted to make sure that we don’t run into problems with our own regulations in trying to develop it. Right now the Town is selling the gravel, and they have a couple more years on removing the gravel at wholesale. So the question is what happens after that? We don’t know, but we think an Industrial Park may be the use.

Ms. Stahl commented that an Industrial use there may work – it’s zoned for Industrial. She expressed concern with a lot of people working there for safety reasons – because there is no way out if there is a train across the track.

Mr. Hettinger added that there was some discussion with a neighboring Town in partnering on developing that possibly with a second access.

Ms. Stahl commented that she thought it might sell us short. She alluded to another area of 200-300 acres that could be developed as a business park with rail access that the owner is very interested in talking with us about it. That location and its size would not hinder any business from moving there. Whereas with a twenty acre site, you’ll have to determine which two or three might fit and be compatible together. But there’s a great spot. She said she hoped to put a meeting together with the owner to discuss this further.

Mr. Horrocks asked how it is zoned.

Ms. Stahl responded that it’s zoned Industrial, and we might want to revise the zoning to a business park to allow it more flexibility.

Mr. Horrocks asked if this is something that the EDC should be involved in at this point.

Ms. Stahl responded that once we know whether it’s a viable opportunity, then we’ll be talking with you. But we’re not going to know...

Mr. Hettinger interjected – two things are: the zoning of the property because you don’t know who – exactly is going to come in...Ms. Stahl intercepted saying yes we want to make it a Business Park where we have the flexibility and in an area where they can make a lot of noise, and have a lot of trucks – and it’s ok; and that’s about the regulations we have. Whereas, when you’re next to houses – like down there (referring to the Town owned land on Route 32 in South Windham) you have to be careful.

Mr. Hettinger concurred, adding that it’s a question of that, and is it consistent with the Plans of Conservation & Development so we don’t run afoul of the State when we try to do something.

Ms. Stahl commented that when you’re talking about putting in sewer all the way down...

Mr. Hettinger we’re not he replied, he didn’t think it would happen.

Ms. Stahl agreed adding that the State won’t let you do it because the State only wants you to have sewers where you’re going to have intense development. – Along that two mile stretch – it’s not

part of our Plan of Development, nor is it part of the Regional Plan of Development – nor is it part of the State Plan of Development; so it would take ten or twenty years to make that happen.

Mr. Hettinger added that what we're seeing is that the businesses don't really need the sewer. The State may say you do, but most of these places are not high intense sewer or water usage; they tend to be self-contained, and that site has good soils for septic...Ms. Stahl offered that a lot of what she has seen is the need for distribution centers – so they may only need three toilets.

Mr. Hettinger continued saying that we're (EDC) in a position to do that or any of them if it comes up...Ms. Stahl interjected that she would like to get more information on the other site, and is hoping that Matt Vertefeulle can get in touch with the owner to have a meeting to discuss it –but the owner has been out of Town. But we'll look at it, and see if we can get some State funding to get a Rail spur for designated loading that's part of the Town's property that people can put rail cars on, load them up, and ship them out.

Windham Mills Tour request

Mr. Hettinger referred to a letter from Tom Briggs of TWB Properties (aka Loch View LLC) requesting that the EDC and PZC come for a tour of the Windham Mills at 322 Main St. Willimantic. After a brief deliberation, the decision was made to hold the site walk on Monday, March 12th, at 6 PM at the Mills.

Citizens and delegations

Heather Meehan of the Windham Area Landlords Association (WALA) suggested the Commission include someone from Eastern (CT State University), as they are people who bring money into Town along with the Hospital. With respect to the problems with DOT, why not have State Representative Susan Johnson help with that. Next, she reported on potential tenants that she has looking Downtown include: non-profit for teachers, a bail bondsman, perception programs, and another one – they are all non-profits – she said she knew that is not what we are looking for, but that's all that she has. (members commented that at least it will bring people downtown). Ms. Meehan continued saying that she rents rooms, and that she is fully leased, and she has a waiting list, so there is a lot of demand for these. Also, she added there are a lot of businesses in Town that own property – and they are landlords.

On another topic, she alluded to a 'Strategic Plan that was prepared between 1996-98, and that various departments of the Town were not following this plan. She asserted that the reason that they had formed a Land lords Association was that they were getting beaten up with the regulations, and the Departments are not following the Plan and that this could result in some serious lawsuits. This is for the Neighborhood Revitalization Zone – strategic Plan. It was passed by the Board of Selectmen in accordance with State law back in 1996. It says that the Town is supposed to work with landlords and follow this (NRZ) Strategic Plan. In the Strategic Plan, it says that the Town is supposed to work with Landlords to come to a common ground. That they are not supposed to be finding every flaw we do, and fine us (repeatedly). It also says we're supposed to be adding trash removal services - not taking them away. It was (intended) for neighbors to work with the Town. Other citizens (Jeff and Pam Viens) spoke in agreement with this sentiment, and the two Commissions said they would look into this further.

Adjourned – the two Commissions adjourned at approximately 9 PM

Prepared by

James Finger
Town Planner