

MINUTES
Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Steering Committee
4-5 p.m. Thursday, April 26, 2012
ACCESS Agency 1315 Main St, Willimantic CT

Present: NRZ Steering Committee Chair Brenda Sullivan, Secretary John LaTour, Treasurer Roger Morin and Steering Committee members Kathy Dubay, Kerry Foust, Ron Haddad, Joel Meyers, Andrew Seeling, Laura Smith, Pam Viens and Jeff Viens; Windham Town Planner James Finger; Kate Fortier - ACCESS Agency; Bonnie Calkins, Heather Meehan, Atty. Charles Popple. **Absent:** NRZ Steering Committee members Nancy Rivera, Ed Rivera, Rosita Vining.

1. Call to Order – 4:12 p.m.

2. Opportunity for the public to speak:

J. Finger reminded the group of the upcoming Town Pride Town Wide Clean-up day on April 28, and the bulky waste pick-up service the week of May 21, 2012.

3. New Business:

Request from ACCESS for letter of support –

Kate Fortier of the ACCESS Agency made a presentation about two new “Access to Assets” programs for which ACCESS is applying for grants and requested a letter of support from the NRZ Steering Committee.

One program promotes affordable housing with local ownership for multi-housing (2-3 units), which involves ACCESS purchasing properties and rehab’ing them, with the owners contributing sweat equity, similar to Habitat for Humanity. The program identifies potential homeowners, connects them with resources (i.e. developing a savings plan, working out sweat equity, an affordable mortgage, etc.) and allows them to buy the property at a reduced cost. Properties must meet housing codes. Local, licensed contractors do the rehab work. The identified property owners’ incomes must be less than or equal to 25 percent of median income if they are renters, or 50 percent for homeowners.

NRZ members suggested they also be required to take CHFA first-time homebuyers classes and/or classes in becoming a landlord.

ACCESS has identified two properties at this time, a two-family house at 128 Main St, and a three-family house at 75 Brook Street. Sales agreements are currently in place.

The other program, a “time bank” modeled after the Portland Hour Exchange in Maine, creates “alternative currency” – there is an hour-for-hour trade of services, with no cash involved. This program would be open to anyone, including children and senior citizens.

To get these programs started, ACCESS is applying for \$350,000 in tax credits which can then be sold to a company, i.e. CL&P.

Fortier said the deadline to submit the application is May 1, 2012.

Fortier also said ACCESS is applying for a grant to revive the Youth Build program.

A motion was made by J. Viens to authorize the NRZ Chair to write a letter of support. Motion seconded by J. Meyers. Passed unanimously.

4. Opportunity to nominate new NRZ Steering Committee members:

A motion was made by J. Meyers to nominate Heather Meehan of Windham, seconded by Kathy Dubay, approved unanimously.

A motion was made by P. Viens to nominate Bonnie Calkins of Hebron, who owns property on Chestnut Street within the NRZ, seconded by J. Meyers, approved unanimously.

5. Old Business:

Natchaug School -

Pam Viens, chair of the NRZ Housing Committee, reported on a walk through the neighborhood next to Natchaug School with Principal Jeff Wihbey, and around the school. Mr. Wihbey pointed out problems with graffiti, a hole in the grounds, a need for more lighting and to replace old globes. P. Viens also said she has invited the School Resource Officer to attend NRZ meetings. H. Meehan said she would contact the school regarding the need for “recess bags.”

Third Thursday -

Regarding NRZ and WALA sharing a table at Third Thursday street fests this year, J. Meyer said he would take responsibility for the paperwork and payment, and NRZ could reimburse him for half the cost. H. Meehan said she would provide a table and it could be set up in front of her property at 820 Main St.

B. Sullivan requested authorization from the NRZ committee to buy a banner for Third Thursday and other community events. The motion was made by H. Meehan, seconded by K. Dubay, and passed unanimously.

Windham Mills –

There was discussion about a proposal by Tom Briggs to change plans for the mill properties to include rental housing. Currently the plans are restricted to commercial development. J. Finger said Briggs doesn't want to see the property go back to the town, and is trying to make it financially self-supporting.

B. Sullivan asked if the committee wanted to express support, by consensus, for the housing proposal, but committee members said they wanted more information and some were concerned about competition from this project for local rental property owners.

J. Finger suggested members attend then May 7 Economic Development Commission's meeting where there will be a presentation, as well as the May 15 Windham Town Council meeting. Pam and Jeff Viens and Joel Meyers said they would plan to attend the council meeting.

J. Finger also noted that more apartments are planned for the 560 Main Street property.

Report on Taylor Court Community Garden, an NRZ-support project -

A. Seeling provided an update on the partnership with St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Valley Street. Food grown by the church is being donated to the Covenant Soup Kitchen. Seeling invited members to join the church for an event, "Do the Spring Thing," which includes a plant sale, a special service, and a presentation at the community garden. He also reported on a successful workday at the garden with volunteers from ECSU on Town Pride, Town Wide day.

Seeling also read a request from St. Paul's Episcopal Church for a mini-grant of \$200 from the NRZ for a multi-faceted program to connect the needy with resources and the local community, including such things as job counseling and learning gardening skills. The request was tabled until the next meeting when there would be time for more discussion.

Discussion of updating the Strategic Plan -

...tabled because the meeting was running late. It was also suggested that discussion of alternative ways of handling the NRZ's funds, and criteria for mini-grants and/or loans be placed on a future agenda.

6. Treasurer's Report: Roger Morin reported no funds have been expended.

7. Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made by P. Viens to approve the March 29, 2012 minutes, seconded by K. Dubay, approved unanimously.

8. Additional opportunity for public comments – none.

9. Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by NRZ Steering Committee Chair Brenda Sullivan