

Economic Development Commission

May 5, 2014

Windham Town Hall

979 Main St., Willimantic, CT

Call to Order: the Vice-Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:40 PM. Those present were Bob Horrocks, Victor Funderburk, and John McCommas. Also in attendance were Heather Lake, the Chronicle and James Finger as staff.

Citizens& delegations comments/questions –None

Review/approval of Minute – April 7, 2014. Minutes were not available.

Community Vision Topics

Citizen’s Institute on Rural Design - Grant project – A copy of the grant summary, prepared by Kate Fortier for the Access Agency, was distributed with the agenda. This grant application would support a 2.5 day community workshop around rural design challenge, including rebuild downtown, design of cultural trails, arts-based development, growth management & economic expansion, land & agricultural conservation, transportation planning. This grant would be used to encourage people and communities to achieve and sustain economic stability. Commissioners discussed this grant and agreed that it merits support from this commission.

New Business

Recommendation on study on walk-ability and bike friendly routes – Health District is seeking endorsement of their walkable and bike friendly routes study. There was discussion of Recreation Park and its assets and future potential. Commissioner Horrocks suggested meeting with the Recreation Department to explore possibilities. Commissioners support this study and James will send a memo to the Health District saying so.

Old Business

Business Signage –Commissioner Horrocks presented a sample of a business sign prepared by Signs Plus and reported the cost would be approximately \$100 and includes a galvanized pipe. Mr. Finger reminded the commission of the cost estimate provided by the Public Works Department. After some discussion of the signs, Commissioner Horrocks agreed to contact Brad Wojick from Public Works to determine if a lower cost is possible.

Business Calling –Commissioner Horrocks reported that he and Commissioner Funderburk met with Thread City Development meeting and discussed with them the possibility of having a downtown business council. Thread City Development would be interested in such a council but would request the town provide approximately \$200 monthly for meetings. Mr. Finger said that would have had to be presented to the Town Council at budget time and this idea may have to wait until next year. After further discussion, Commissioner Horrocks take a formal proposal to Town Manager, Neal Beets, to determine if some funding might be available now.

Main Street Investment Fund – Commissioner discussed possible projects to be funded by this grant. Mr. Finger suggested connection of the Greenway Trail, from Columbia to the Airline Trail. This would portions of the East Coast Greenway trail, through Willimantic. Commissioner agreed that this would be a valuable asset to town and it was Moved by Commissioner McCommas, Seconded by Commissioner Funderburk to extend the Airline Trail as per Joe Gardner’s diagram. After discussion and further clarification, Motion Carried.

Chairman's Report – Review of possible grants – Commissioner Horrocks reported on the place-making workshop he attended. He described a program to fill vacant store-fronts, which was presented at the workshop. Commissioner Horrocks will meet with Margaret Ladel, who created the program, to discuss how to bring the program to Windham.

Also, at the place-making workshop, Commissioner Horrocks heard about Larken Square in Buffalo, NY. A wealthy family purchased an old factory and converted its parking lot into a fair grounds, and invites truck vendors to gather and sell their products to local citizens. It's a very popular event.

Another program discussed at the workshop was distribution of plastic Adirondack chairs to local businesses, for placement in front of their businesses. Business owners place the chairs out in the morning and take them in at night. Commissioners agreed this may be a good option for Willimantic also.

Commissioner Funderburk discussed the use of window boxes filled with flowers, in the windows of businesses along Main Street. It was suggested that business owners could contract with Ladd's Garden Center for upkeep of the window boxes. Perhaps Thread City Development would look into this, or maybe it's something a downtown business council could do. Commissioner Funderburk also discussed improving the entrances to downtown Willimantic, with enhanced landscaping.

Other reports/correspondence/announcements – Mr. Finger said the Annual Report is due to the Town Council and he will report on the Business Signage discussed earlier and the possible expansion of the Enterprise Zone.

Commissioner Funderburk reported on Coventry's Economic Development meeting he attended, at which regionalization was discussed. Attendees were very interested and another meeting will be scheduled to discuss regionalization further.

Commissioner Horrocks reported that the Hurley Building is going to be developed; and 570 Main is being rented by Andy Gutt and will be used to host meetings, parties, and conferences. He also asked about the Economic Development Director position and the possibility of hiring a consultant instead was discussed.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Janet Laukaitis for James Finger, Planner/Business Liaison