

# Economic Development Commission

June 3, 2013

Windham Town Hall

Meeting Room

979 Main St., Willimantic, CT

**Call to Order:** the Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:55 PM. Those present were Bill Hettinger-Chairman, Bob Horrocks, John McCommas, Victor Funderburk. James Finger was present as staff.

**Citizens & Delegations:** None

**Minutes:** None

**New Business:**

**4a. Report – signage and lighting zoning changes.** The commission discussed the draft signage regulations given to them by the town’s Planning & Zoning Commission. Mr. Finger says the Planning & Zoning Commission is clarifying rules and providing guidelines. Commissioner Funderburk states that most importantly, signs should be artistic, creativity is essential. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is the visual age. Commission Hettinger appreciates the need for creativity in this visual age, but he’s also concerned that we are trying to act like we are an exclusive community where we can design what everything looks like. Places that can do that are in high demand and businesses are willing to redesign their buildings and signage to be in those locations.

Commissioners discussed the need for and value of signs for local businesses. While they understand the need for neatness, they don’t understand the need for such restrictive regulations. Mr. Finger asks commissioners to scan through the regulations and give comments to him so that he can summarize the comments, whether this commission wants to ratify these regulations or change some part of the regulations. Mr. Finger will see that comments are entered into public record at the public hearing that will be held on the new sign regulations.

**4b. EDC Annual Report.** The Economic Development Commissioner’s Annual Report was distributed prior to the meeting. Mr. Finger ask the commissioners to read the report and let the chairman know of any changes or additions. The annual report will be voted on at the EDC’s next meeting, July 1, 2013.

**4c. C-PACE. Property Assessed Clean Energy** Information about this program was distributed before the meeting and Mr. Finger further describes C-PACE to the commission. C-PACE is a financing program which allows commercial, industrial, and multi-family property owners to access funds for energy improvements. The Clean Energy Finance Investment Authority (CEFIA) administers the program and is offering financing to market their product between now and September. Unfortunately, we can’t do it that quickly. However, Mr. Finger and Linda Riquier have a created marketing package that describes the program and would allow Windham to advertise to property owners who would qualify for the C-PACE program.

After much more discussion and description of the program, Chairman Hettinger says that he and Mr. Finger have met with the Chamber of Commerce, and the Chamber says that mailings on the program would likely be ignored as everyone has been bombarded with advertising of energy saving programs. It is suggested that general publicity ie: in the Chronicle or in the town’s newsletter

would be best. And, then contact certain property owners that might be interested, maybe with someone who has already used the program who can speak to the benefits of the program.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

**Water and Economic Development** - Commissioner Hettinger asks to return to the matter of water and economic development. At the last EDC meeting it was suggested that an informational session should be held to educate the public on the water issues in Windham. Commissioner Hettinger has been in contact with people who are local water experts who suggest that UConn and the League of Women Voters might be willing to facilitate an impartial conference put on at a neutral site. Sites that might be considered include the Elk's Lodge or ECSU but, not at the town hall. Also, Chairman Hettinger reached out to people who can assist the town. So, Chairman Hettinger says, this commission has elevated the issue to the mayor and we are potentially contacting an impartial group to put on a presentation together. That's where we're leaving it now.

Commissioner Funderburk asks to talk about alternative 5 in the environmental impact study that was discussed at the last meeting. The alternative never talks about Windham. There is planning for the development needs of UConn and their need for water but very little mention of Windham's future needs. Mr. Finger says a bigger issue is the effect of drawing water from Windham Water Works to UConn will be the effect on economic development in Windham. The question is: Who will make the decision on this issue? The answer seems to be, the State of Connecticut.

Commissioner Funderburk made many good points on the need to be vocal about the EIS and the fact that it does not address the water needs of Windham. After much discussion of the water and economic development impact, Chairman Hettinger says he doesn't know what this commission can do about this issue and, the mayor has asked that we allow the political process to work. Chairman Hettinger will contact the *Chronicle* to request publication of an op-ed piece that he will write about the water and economic development issue.

**Business Signage** – Commissioner Funderburk will be in contact with Thread City Development about the signs previously discussed by this commission. Thread City Development has not yet had a meeting. He may have to pursue it directly with board members.

**Business Calling Program** - Commissioner McCommas reports that the Oriental Café seems to be attracting more customers of late. Mr. Finger reports that Medical Pharmacy is expanding into the former Edible Arrangements location (across from CVS on Main St.) and Edible Arrangements is moving to the former Electrical Wholesaler storefront on Watson Street. The need for signage for Edible Arrangement was discussed.

**Downtown subcommittee activities/reports** –None

**Other grant opportunities** - None

**Chairman's Report** – Chairman Hettinger asks Mr. Finger about the Chamber of Commerce meeting where there was a CERC site-finder presentation. Mr. Finger reported there was not a lot of information provided on the site-finder. There is a power-point presentation on-line and Mr. Finger will forward it to the chairman.

Chairman Hettinger reports on the Community Builders conferences and there is an event in East Haven on June 26, 2013 named "Market Your Town" that is an opportunity to pitch your town to economic development authorities.

Chairman Hettinger also reports on 6/23/13 conference for small business, to market their businesses to the state.

Commissioners discuss the cost vs. benefit of many of these conferences and after discussion it was agreed that the benefit of many of these conferences, outweigh the associated costs.

Commissioner Horrocks reports on the success of Victorian Days. It was a well-attended event, with buses from New Jersey and West Hartford. The event was quite successful.

Mr. Finger handed-out an article on the state's tax exemption on renewable energy installations. The legislature seems to be backing away from this exemption so that funds can be used to offset the state deficit. It looks as though the state may not be allowing the solar tax exemption. Chairman Hettinger discussed solar buildings and homes in the area and Mr. Finger says the economic incentive is in the price of installation.

Also, Mr. Finger handed out articles he found that talk about American Manufacturing, Economic Gardening, and Affordable Housing.

**Adjournment** – As there being no other business, Moved by Commissioner McCommas and Seconded by Commissioner Horrocks to adjourn the meeting. Motion Carried and meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Janet Laukaitis for

James Finger, Planner/Business Liaison