

Economic Development Commission

July 1, 2013

Windham Town Hall

Meeting Room

979 Main St., Willimantic, CT

Call to Order: the meeting to order at approximately 7:37 PM. Those present were Bob Horrocks – serving as Acting Chairman, John McCommas, and Victor Funderburk. James Finger was present as staff.

Citizens& Delegations: None

Review/approval of Minute – June 3, 2013. Commissioner McCommas commented that there was a reference to Commissioner Funderburk’s comments about some matter as being good...good points – or whatever; but we should not use the adjective ‘good’ to refer to something like this – as it implies an endorsement. Also, for future minutes, when a commission member arrives late to a meeting, the time of arrival should be noted. He explained that he had come late for the last meeting – but it appeared as if he had been there for the entire meeting. Commissioner McCommas moved approve the minutes of the June 3, 2013 meeting with requested amendment and Commissioner Funderburk seconded the motion; all voted in favor.

Other reports/correspondence/announcements/activities Commissioner Horrocks moved this agenda item to the current time and reported on an article in the Chronicle newspaper. The article stated that - as reported by the Board of Education, 70% of students graduating from Windham High School go on to a two year or four year college. This should enhance economic development.

Also, Harrison Judd received an award from Main Street Connecticut for his photo essay on the demise of the smoke stack at the Windham Mills. This award was also awarded to the collaborators at the Windham Textile & History Museum too. This news is a positive benefit to the Town.

Commissioner Funderburk reported on his contact with Andrew Gutt a Thread City Development to ask if they could help contact businesses about directional signs for businesses, and he said that this was a good idea and he would like to move ahead on this. Mr. Gutt, said he would like to be able to approach a local business about the idea of having the signs on Main Street and would need to be able to give them an idea of cost. Mr. Finger reported the price is estimated at \$475 - \$500 (*actually \$375-\$400*). Mr. Finger said he will look in his notes for the information he had given to the board at a previous meeting, and get this information to the board members again. Commissioner Horrocks said he like to see us get the word out, and talk with businesses to let them know about this opportunity.

Commissioner Horrocks said that he noticed that “Fred’s Brickhouse Pizza” has closed. Mr. Finger reported that Fred’s is consolidating operations of the pizza business and the barbeque restaurant, and has opened again at 600 Main Street – taking over the Thirsty Frog. This should be a better location for them, right next to the Frog Bridge, and he said that he had heard that the Walk-In Clinic would likely expand into the place vacated by Fred’s Brickhouse Pizza at Gateway Commons. Commissioner McCommas said it was good that we didn’t lose this business.

Commissioner Horrocks reported that Thread City Development’s Promotional Committee is working with ECSU to organize a promotional program that would attract first year students for tours of businesses on Main Street. The idea being that students would be made aware of businesses

available to them and perhaps businesses owners would provide discounts or coupons for the students.

Commissioner McCommas reported that he noticed the tire shop in North Windham has closed, across from WalMart. Mr. Finger said that David Rose is looking into taking over the location with a similar business.

Commissioner Horrocks said he noticed a Victorian home located on Prospect Street, across from Kramer School that had fallen into disrepair in recent years is being renovated. Mr. Finger explained that he had heard that a Willimantic Police Officer bought it as an investment – and is fixing it up.

Commissioner Funderburk reported on his recent attendance at the national convention of the American Association of Community Theaters, in Carmel, Indiana. He explained that - thirty years ago, Carmel was a corn field and today it's a city of 80,000

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carmel, Indiana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carmel,_Indiana)

They have attracted corporation headquarters and other businesses. They had \$185 million community development project that the town built - and residents paid for this out of their taxes. The town has improved, with bike paths throughout the town and a new community theater called the Palladium. Community spirit and economic development were great. Carmel is an example of what can be accomplished when government, business, and community members work together toward the common goal of economic development <http://www.carmelartsanddesign.com/home.html>

Commissioner Funderburk stressed the need to develop the arts and entertainment district of our community. He said he would volunteer to be on a committee that would work on the development of the arts. Commissioner Funderburk said that this group is more of a catalyst, not the type of committee he is talking about forming. He would like to see this commission play a role in making this happen.

Commissioner Horrocks asked for clarification of the Arts and Entertainment District. Mr. Finger described it as being from the Mills to West Main Street. However, the Arts & Entertainment District is geared more toward production and manufacturing rather than bars and theater groups. Unless you have a *for-profit* theater group that pays taxes, then they wouldn't have the benefits of the tax abatement features. The entertainment district is a tax incentive program with specific state requirements geared to manufacturing. The town does have a program that would freeze tax increases for recently purchased and improved properties in the district. Taxes would gradually increase over a seven year period instead of immediately raising taxes upon improved properties.

Commissioner Funderburk cited another example of a town in the mid-west that had received grant funds from various sources, used to develop the arts in their town. He stressed the need for government, business, and community cooperation with a common goal of economic development.

Commissioner Horrocks suggested that this matter should not be dropped; but, we should get a group together to revisit the idea of arts as an economic engine. Windham Arts Collaborative was discussed and Commissioner Horrocks asks Commissioner Funderburk what he sees as the next step. Commissioner Funderburk would like the commission to focus on one of the items in the annual report whether its arts & entertainment, or housing, or some other item. The commission could concentrate on that one item, educate the public about the issue and accomplish something. Commissioner Funderburk stated that the most difficult challenge - is choosing one of the assets.

MSIF Grant - Mr. Finger said he had hoped to hear from the State about the town's Main Street Investment grant application. He said that reliable sources have indicated that we may be receiving some money from that program. However, he cautioned that there were 64 applications totaling 25

million dollars for a 5 million dollar pot of money. If we do receive the grant it would be about 1/5th of the amount we had hoped for. So, we will have to wait to find out how much money is awarded and then re-prioritize the projects to determine which ones could be completed with the funding available.

New Business: Water Forum – July 29–The commission had discussed the possibility of having a forum to educate the public about water issues in Windham and the chance that U-Conn may be tapping Windham’s water sources. There was much discussion of water supplies in Windham. Now it seems that U-Conn is more likely to go to another source for their water.

Zoning changes for signage and lighting – Commissioner McCommas attended the most recent meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting to hear their thoughts on the proposed signage and believes they are being pro-business and they have good intentions but, they go into too many minute details. This commission again discussed the proposed signage regulations changes. The public hearing on these zoning changes is still open and the proposed changes are available on-line. Commissioner McCommas will notify commission members when the zoning commission will meet next.

OLD BUSINESS:

Business calling program –Mr. Finger said he has not made any calls to businesses; but he said that the owner of Edible Arrangements came in to apply for his permits to move the business to its new location on Watson Street. Their previous building was purchased by Medical Pharmacy and will be used for internet sales and as storage.

Annual Report – Commissioner Funderburk reminded the commission that the board needed to vote on the annual report that was presented at the June 2013 meeting.

On the last page on the report there is a list of future goals and Commissioner Funderburk would suggest that the commission picks item #4, business signage. Business signage design and collaboration with Thread City Development. Commissioner McCommas moved to approve the annual report and Commissioner Funderburk seconded motion, and all voted in favor.

Business Signage - Many questions still remain on the design and placement of the signs. Commissioner Funderburk moved to set-up a meeting with Thread City Development to discuss design of business signs, McCommas seconded it; the motion carried. Details of when and where to have the meeting was discussed with no decision.

Adjournment –Commissioner McCommas made a motion to adjourn, and Commissioner Funderburk seconded the motion; the meeting was adjourned at 9:05.

Respectfully submitted by:

Janet Laukaitis for

James Finger, Planner/Business Liaison

Revised copy submitted for consideration