

# **Economic Development Commission**

## **Regular Meeting**

**July 2, 2012**

**Windham Town Hall**

**Meeting Room**

**979 Main St., Willimantic, CT**

**Call to Order:** the Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:33 PM. Those present were Bill Hettinger-Chairman, Bob Horrocks, John McCommas, and Victor Funderburk. James Finger was present as staff.

**Citizens & Delegation:** The Chairman acknowledged Town Council member Crystel Donohue to talk about the Sister City program. He also acknowledged Andrew Gutt and Karen Gilbransen, and said he wanted to hear from them about the Main Street Investment Fund grant – when it comes up on the agenda - as he offered to help. He asked if they were also going to speak about Thread City Development- yes.

**Minutes:** Moved by Robert Horrocks, Seconded by John McCommas to defer approval of the minutes of the May 7<sup>th</sup>, and June 4, 2013 meeting. Motion carried.

**Sister City Program -** Windham Town Council referred the consideration of a Sister City agreement between Windham and the town of Bad Soden Germany, to this commission. Chairman Hettinger described the Sister Cities Program. The program is meant to develop and promote friendship, economic development, arts and culture, and tourism for both towns. Crystel Donohue has met with the mayor of Bad Soden, Germany who has invited a delegation from Windham to his town to discuss Windham becoming a sister city to his town. The idea was well received by Windham Town Council and they are looking for a recommendation from this commission.

Victor Funderburk commented that the State Office of Culture and Tourism which is part of the Department of Economic & Community Development has been promoting place making in their offering of grants. The Chairman agreed that this aligns very closely Arts, Culture & tourism. Commissioner Horrocks commented that it supports community development and tourism – as an example, they may come here and ask how do you get 7,000 people to come downtown for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday Street Festival; or how do you organize a Boom Box Parade. These may not bring in a lot of money; but it brings in a lot of people, and they may decide to live here or start a business here – he felt that there is the potential benefit to having a Sister City program.

There was much discussion of the potential benefits and possible drawbacks of entering into such an agreement with Bad Soden. This commission feels there are many benefits to Windham and few if any drawbacks. Commissioners spoke of the possible benefits including cultural awareness, art exhibit exchange, and student exchange. The group agreed that a Sister City Agreement between Bad Soden Germany and the Town of Windham would be a positive public relations opportunity. John McCommas agreed that there may be some benefit, but he didn't see a direct economic benefit; and he was concerned about the Town paying the expense

– especially for Town staff. Chrystal Donohue asserted that the one person who should go – is the Town Manager. A round trip flight is approximately \$1,200. Some discussion ensued about sponsoring the German contingent. Chrystal said she didn't talk with them about accommodations – certainly not about hotels; but maybe some could stay in some of the homes. Another thought was to develop a Student exchange, and Chairman Hettinger commented that President Nunez of ECSU has been very positive on getting students involved. Chrystal pointed out that it is Bad Soden is am Taunus – as there is another Bad Soden.

Bill Anderson MOVED to recommend that the Town Council put together a delegation to travel to Bad Soden (am Taunus), Germany and explore the potential economic development of a sister city agreement with them; and assemble an ad-hoc committee of volunteers work on this idea. , Victor Funderburk SECONDED the motion. A general discussion ensued as to the details. The Chairman called for action on the motion. The motion carried with four commissioners in favor with one - John McCommas against.

**Main Street Investment Fund Grant** – James Finger drew the board's attention to the hand-out. Chairman Hettinger reported that this board has been asked, by the Town Council, to review the Main Street Investment Fund Grant. The \$500,000.00 grant is for a Town Commercial Center Grant. The grant requires the town to, 1.) develop or approve a commercial town center to attract small businesses; 2.) promote commercial viability, and 3.) improve aesthetic and pedestrian access. The grant also asks for evidence of local and regional support and evidence of positive activities.

In addition, the application requires a municipally approved plan for the chosen project. It is not clear if one or more existing downtown plan, such as the 2007 Plan of Conservation and Development or, the 2009 Community Revitalization Strategy will meet the criteria or if we need a new plan.

The grant could be used for town-owned property or private property owner. The application requests a list of specific information on private property owners, who would have to commit to a 100% local match in order to receive the grant. Windham has sent a letter to local businesses and received a couple of responses showing interest.

James Finger has contacted the state DECD to ask if either the town's POCD or the Revitalization Strategy could be used for this grant but, has not yet heard back from them. Mr. Finger believes we may be able to make use of the Revitalization Strategy - although it's not a perfect fit. Andrew Gutt from Thread City Development volunteered to help us communicate with businesses and perhaps we should have a public information meeting to identify goals and projects that would be of interest.

There was much discussion of different plans, one for sidewalks along Main Street, from Bridge Street to Stop & Shop; another for façade improvements which would require the local match from local businesses; and a streetscape along Main Street. The streetscape was described by Mr. Finger and he points out that the streetscape would not require local businesses to commit a local match because it would be on town-owned property and the streetscape would include sidewalks.

The Chairman asked about possibly paving a parking lot. He explained that he would be in favor of paving the Tin Tsin lot, as it's used for parking by a lot of people and businesses that surround it; and it would be better if it were paved.

Andrew Gutt said that Thread City Development can help with many things the Commission has discussed here tonight including grant writing and they would be able to move things along quickly.

Chairman Hettinger asks what we are proposing as a project. Mr. Finger replies that we do not have to decide tonight but, a decision must be made by August, which would require a special meeting. A special meeting will be scheduled for July 25, 2012, at 10:00 at the town hall, with an optional date of July 21, 2012 at 6:00 p.m.; if the first date is not available.

And, a public forum is necessary – we must get the public's opinion. Have the public forum between now and this committee's regularly scheduled meeting in August. We must report to the Town Council in September.

Also, a letter will be sent to small businesses on the streets that are highlighted in yellow on the map in the Community Revitalization Strategy; Thread City Development will provide the mailing list for these businesses. Notice will be published in the Chronicle and Thread City Development will handle outreach and press releases.

**Old Business** – Tabled by Chairman Hettinger

**Other Reports/correspondence/announcements/activities** – Commissioner Funderbunk (?) reports that he had an opportunity to meet with the Chamber of Commerce to discuss business's opinions of the façade program. It would be difficult to get businesses to commit to the façade program; they would need proof of its success.

Commissioner Funderbunk reported that businesses are taking a long time to warm up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday Festival. He suggests inviting the Chamber to a future meeting to report on issues that local businesses have. We need to make Main Street clean, safe, and friendly; light-up dark allies, and provide public restrooms.

**Citizen & delegations comments/questions** – None

**Adjourn** – Moved by Commissioner Funderbunk, Seconded by Commissioner McCommas to adjourn the meeting. Motion Carried. Meeting adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Janet Laukaitis for

James Finger, Planner/Business Liaison