

Economic Development Commission

Windham Town Hall Meeting Room

August 5, 2013 - Minutes

Call to Order: the Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:40 PM. Those present were Bill Hettinger, Robert Horrocks, and John McCommas. Also in attendance, Louisa Owen Sonstroem from the Chronicle and James Finger as staff.

Citizens& delegations - None

Review/approval of July 1, 2013 Minutes –. Commissioner McCommas requested that the July 1, 2013 minutes be amended to say: "... the PZC was "trying to be pro-business" - regarding the proposed zoning changes to signage and lighting regulations. Commissioner Horrocks moved to approve the minutes of the July 1, 2013 meeting, with the requested amendment, and Commissioner McCommas seconded the motion; motion carried with Commissioner Hettinger abstaining as he was not present for that meeting.

New Business – None

Old Business

- **Reports – zoning changes for signage and lighting.** Commissioner Hettinger asked Commissioner McCommas if, when he attended the PZC public hearing regarding the signage and lighting regulations changes, did get the impression that the commission had reached out to the local business community? There was discussion about how this commission and local businesses members could have and should have been involved in the process of changing regulations. Commissioner Hettinger asked Mr. Finger, who is staff to the PZC as well as this commission, to report to this commission about how this commission could have helped in this process and how it can help in the future. Mr. Finger reported that the PZC has been and is in the process of updating the Planning and Zoning regulations.

The new sign regulation was discussed further. Commissioners stated their concerns with the regulations. Commissioner Hettinger suggested that it may be time to meet with the Planning and Zoning Commission again, to discuss how this commission could be more involved in their processes. Mr. Finger suggested that this commission may wish to be present, or present a letter to the PZC at the next public hearing on sign regulations and, express the commissions wish to be more involved in the process.

- **Business Signage –** Since Commissioner Funderburk was not at the meeting – the Chairman reported that he said he had not contacted businesses yet.
- **Business Calling Program -** Commissioner Horrocks reported that his tenants have relocated to Mystic, and reported that the YMCA building is being donated to a group that is going to open a school. While a school will take the property off the tax rolls, it will bring students and teachers to Main Street to potentially support shops and restaurants in town. Commissioner McCommas reported that "Quilter Dream "has closed. Mr. Finger reported that "Peking House" is still recovering from having a car drive into their restaurant. He also reported that ECSU is building a new theater arts building on High Street - a 138,000

sq. ft. building across from Windham High School. Commissioner Horrocks pointed out that this will be one more support of arts and entertainment in the area.

- **Downtown subcommittee activities/reports** -Commissioner Horrocks says he had nothing to report. He discussed the need for a business council. He suggested that the EDC, Thread City Development, and the Chamber of Commerce are three groups focused on economic development; but do not seem to be working together. We need to have a strategic plan; we need to do something new to stimulate economic development. Commissioner Hettinger agreed with the need for a strategic plan.
- Commissioner Hettinger reported that Windham's application for the Main Street Grant funds was rejected. He expressed his disappointment with the decisions makers and their process. The decision makers seem to have ignored two of the three requirements listed for the grant.

Chairman's report – Water forum – held July 29 – The water forum was held at the Elk's Club rather than a town building. It was sponsored by the CT Institute for Water Studies, and the League of Women Voters of Northeastern CT. Commissioner Hettinger reported on the well-attended forum.

Also, Commissioner Hettinger described and discussed business accelerators. He met Kevin Bouley of NERAC. NERAC is a research and advisory firm for companies developing innovative products and technologies. Commissioner Hettinger and was impressed with the accelerator Mr. Bouley runs in Tolland and plans to stay in touch with Mr. Bouley in hopes of creating a business accelerator here in Windham.

Another idea that Commissioner Hettinger has is to bring a school into downtown. Maybe ECSU can bring their business school downtown, or Windham Tech can move downtown. This should be discussed when the strategic plan is discussed at a future meeting.

Commissioner Hettinger asked about the WRTD buses being moved to the commuter lot in Mansfield. He suggested the previous WRTD bus lot is now available and he has an idea for how the property could be used. He asked Mr. Finger to have Matt Vertefeuille contact Shilberg's who was looking for more space last year.

Mr. Finger reported that he has sent a letter to DECD asking for an expansion of the enterprise zone. Enterprise zone is now between east of Jackson Street to the Natchaug River and from the Mansfield town line to the mills. He explained that we would like it extended along the entertainment district to Route 6. This change would have Willimantic Waste and General Cable included in the enterprise zone.

Other reports/correspondence/announcements –None

Citizens U& delegations comments/questions - None

Commissioner McCommas Moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:55and Commissioner Horrocks Seconded the motion.

Respectfully submitted by Janet Laukaitis for

James Finger, Planner/Business Liaison