Economic Development Commission

Special Meeting
September 18, 2012
Windham Town Hall
Meeting Room
979 Main St., Willimantic, CT

Call to Order- the Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 6:03 PM. Those present were Bill Hettinger-Chairman, Bob Horrocks, John McCommas, and Victor Funderburk. James Finger was present as staff.

Discussion and possible action on recommendations to Town Council.

The Commission reviewed the preliminary budget and projects list, and proposed map for the Main Street Investment Fund (MSIF) grant application. The Chairman summarized the recommendations from the Planner/Business Liaison as follows:

We're not applying for the full $500,000; we're just $900 short of that limit at this time, but he added that maybe we should add any additional money to the Town's parking lot improvements. For projects – we have letters of interest from approximately twenty property owners with solid projects totaling about $354,000 in grant funds requested. Mr. Finger explained that we eliminated about six to eight property owners who had expressed interest, but didn't supply us with the documentation that we needed.

Chairman Hettinger continued. The projects were ranked in according to the following ranking factors: Gateway; community Support; Business in Need; new jobs, community impact; and project readiness. Those are the categories, and you can get one to six points; and everyone on the list has somewhere between two and six points. So we're asking for approximately $354,000 in State grants for them, and the owners are putting up over $500,000. So this is almost $860,000 invested in this Town, if this grant is approved. Then we have the Town's two properties – the Textile Museum with $50,000, and the Town's parking lot at about $95,000. Mr. Finger explained that it was $85,000 for the parking lot (The Town Engineer updated the original estimate from 1998-9 when it was originally prepared). But then we talked about including a bus shelter for about $15,000 or whatever was left over, but as the project estimates came in, we didn't have as much money to put towards the bus shelter; so it was dropped down to $95,000.

The Chairman said that we haven't discussed the bus shelter, and Mr. Finger clarified that the sub-committee did at the previous work session last Friday (Sept. 14th). The Chairman opined that he wasn't sure that we wanted a bus shelter on Main St., and it wasn't part of the motion at the regular meeting to approve the project list. Mr. Finger said it's the Commission's prerogative if you don't want to include the bus shelter.

Commissioner Funderburk arrived, and Mr. Finger reviewed the discussion to inform him of the Commission's place in the meeting – referring to the project summary and preliminary budget.

The Chairman repeated that he understood that the Subcommittee wanted to include a bus shelter at the Town's parking lot, and he asked for confirmation.

Commissioner Funderburk affirmed that this was their recommendation. He then asked if there were any changes in the project list and budget from their last meeting on Friday.

Mr. Finger explained that he had to reduce the bus shelter from $15,000 to $10,000 because of revised figures from the property owners. He explained that there was just a little bid left (below the maximum grant of $500,000) but he felt that it would be better if we don't ask for the entire amount.

The Chairman asked if a bus shelter is going to be eligible, and Mr. Finger replied that it is; one because it is a public amenity, two because it is a permanent fixture, and three because it will help promote transit services.

The Chairman then re-stated that the subcommittee wanted to recommend that we include a bus shelter in your motion for the Town's parking lot improvements, and Commissioner Funderburk confirmed this was correct.

The Chairman accepted the addition of the bus shelter as part of the Town's parking lot improvements along with the other items that were in the press release. (see excerpt below)

> "…The EDC recommended improvements to the Tin Tsin lot that would include paved parking, landscaping, vendor pads, and a mural. Other suggestions for improvements to the space have included a performance platform or band shell on the south side and lighting and electrical improvements for use during performances and events…"

Commissioner Horrocks then where its mentioned, as he wondered if someone might ask where it was going to be placed on the site. The Chairman agreed, and felt that this should probably be left as an additional item of public amenities if funds are available.

Commissioner Funderburk explained that when they met last week they wanted to include the bus shelter, but with all the budget numbers still in flux, they wanted to leave this as a general recommendation, and didn't want to specify it because they didn't know how much it was going to be.

The Chairman commented that as he was driving in that morning, he saw a bus parked in front of this parking lot; so he agreed it was a good idea if we can get it funded. He then asked if the project list was complete.

Mr. Finger commented that we hadn't talked about another item he had been working on with Public Works. Since everyone (community forums) wanted us to do some streetscape work, and we didn't really address that except with the sidewalk project – and no one liked that. So, he explained that he had asked the Public Works Department if they would agree to clean up the existing streetscape downtown as an in-kind match. This would be: removing the plastic grates around the trees, putting in some mulch or stone dust, trimming the trees, and putting in some asphalt in a few areas where the bricks had lifted up and created a trip hazard. This is probably more of a maintenance item, but we're not asking the State to pay for it. The grant doesn't require an in-kind match, but the guidelines say that they will give extra points if there is some additional in-kind match that goes above and beyond the requirements; so hopefully it will increase our ranking among projects. This would add another $20,000 to the Town's share to the overall project.

Several comments focused on the presentation of the information on the project summary report and the need to clean up stray information or missing information.

Commissioner Horrocks asked about the item indicating missing plans from most of the private projects. Mr. Finger responded that this is because many of them are simply replacing windows, or painting other items that are eligible, but these property owners don't have the funds to draw up actual plans that would specify all the details, because they don't know if they are actually going to get any money out of this program; and they are asking contractors to give them a price for work that may not happen, or could be six months away. The bigger projects had plans ready, but the smaller businesses don't have the resources.

The Chairman opined that if you talk with the property owner, they certainly have 'plans' in their mind, but they don't have any physical plans.

In reviewing the final budget, we have some $350,000+ in grant funds to private property owners, and they are contributing over $500,000. The total project is over $1,000,000 including public and private contributions to be invested in the Town.

In wrapping up, Mr. Finger explained that he had presented a resolution for the Town Council to consider delegating authority to the Economic Development Commission as the 'Governing Authority' to submit the completed application to the State because we still have a lot of loose ends to tie up.

Chairman Hettinger asked for clarification on this, and Mr. Finger explained that if we get the grant, then the EDC would work with the individual property owners if there is a problem; so it wouldn't go to the Town Council to be resolved.

Commissioner Horrocks asked about the item on 'completed work'. Mr. Finger answered that this is work that has already been completed and could qualify for reimbursement

under the grant if it was done after October 27, 2011; but in other cases it could simply mean the owners investment and share of expenses related to their grant request.

The Chairman handed out the draft resolution that will be presented to the Council for this project. He then said that for the 'Action' piece – this is what we are submitting; and he asked the Commission if they were all in agreement that the project outline is ready to present to the Council.

Commissioner Funderburk made the motion to approve the project (Governing Authority needs to adopt a resolution for the submission of the final grant), Commissioner McCommas seconded the motion; the motion was unanimously approved.

The Chairman concluded that he's looking forward to completing this project as we have asked a tremendous amount of information from the many property owners and staff in preparing the packet; and if we don't get the grant, we'll be hard pressed to go back to them and ask for information again.

Commissioner Funderburk added that if we get the funds, it will be a boost to the Town and business community, and may draw others to make improvements to their properties.

Commissioner Horrocks asserted that another component is to ask for letters of support from the community, and Eastern (ECSU). He this should probably come from the Chairman.

More discussion ensued but no further action was taken.

The meeting adjourned at 6:29 PM

Respectfully submitted

James Finger

Planner/Business Liaison