

# **Economic Development Commission**

## **Special Meeting minutes**

**September 4th, 2012**

**Windham Town Hall**

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

Call to Order. The Chairman called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM. Those present were Bill Hettinger-Chairman, Bill Anderson, and Robert Horrocks. Also present was James Finger –staff.

The Chair invited Town Engineer Joe Gardner to speak first on the Town's project for sidewalk improvements along Main St. from Bridge St to Friendly's Restaurant. Mr. Gardner explained that he had designed the project a few years ago in anticipation of another grant, and that he felt that it would qualify for the Main St. Grant program. However, he said that he understood that the Commission wanted to fund a number of other downtown projects, and that the sidewalk may not get full funding, but he would be satisfied with any amount of funding that the Commission chose to allocate; and he thanked the Commission for its consideration.

### **Citizens & delegations comments/questions**

Jorge Hernandez explained that he was working with a few property owners identifying Javier Moya who is in the process of renovating 455 Main St. changing it from a bar to a family friendly restaurant. Some discussion ensued.

Next John Walker explained that he was looking for about \$12,000 to \$14,000 in funding for some awnings, and windows to dress up the façade of his building.

Then Joe Comeau owner of 790-798 Main St. addressed the Commission to advise of his continuing interest to improve his building mentioning the renovation work underway, and that his new tenant 'A cupcake for Later' is thriving. He expressed concern about the Town's vacant lot next door that is used as a parking lot, and that the drainage washes out the driveway on his side. He said he would like to see it improved, and he entertained the idea of having a mural painted on the wall facing the lot.

David Wolner of Willi Brew/Main Street Café indicated that he hoped to qualify for some reimbursement of expenses for recent door replacements on the building, and that he also wanted to install a canopy on the parking lot side of the building as there once had been.

Roger Adams of the Windham Region Chamber of Commerce said that they would like to make some improvements to their property installing a stone façade on the wall, and along the sidewalk, and to install an announcement sign like the one on Jillson Square.

Damian Fox – owner of the property where the Lucky Frog is located said they would like to build out a banquet room and facility on the second floor with a deck to accommodate weddings, etc. They will need to install windows, and fit out the second storey of the building, and dress up the façade.

Karl Nilsen representing Windham Mills explained that they were hoping to apply for funding to finish up the conversion of the old office building in front of the complex into a ‘coffee shop’ – which is their highest priority.

Discussion ensued as to other projects that should be considered.

Jorge Hernandez was allowed to speak to advocate for improvements to the Tin Tsin lot (aka Chapman Block, now Town owned vacant lot). He asserted that he felt that the sidewalk project wouldn’t really help any of the businesses – either along this section of Main St. or anywhere else. He said that if you look at the business next to the Tin Tsin lot, they all benefit from having the parking lot close by for customers. He urged consideration of improving this vacant parcel as a parking lot and public space that could be used for concerts during the third Thursday festivals. He argued that this would have a much more significant effect on downtown businesses than any other public project.

Next under discussion and possible action, the Chairman outlined the items he intended to discuss with the Council later in the evening.

**A. Review and preliminary recommendation to Town Council on the Town's application for the Main Street Investment Fund (MSIF) grant.** These were as follows:

- **Town Center Commercial area Plan** – He asserted that we should focus on enhancing the gateways of the Downtown commercial area, and promote business expansion that will result in new jobs.
- **Town projects** – With respect to the sidewalk improvements along Main St. from Bridge St to Friendly's, he said he didn't think this would result in a significant improvement to these goals, but he said he agreed with the idea of fixing up the Tin Tsin lot. He said he also felt that the restoration and painting of historic Windham Textile Museum would enhance the gateway. Commissioner Horrocks opined that we need to balance out the funding split between the public and private projects. He said he was not eager to support improvements to the Tin Tsin lot, but that we should focus on façade improvements for the business.

Chairman Hettinger agreed with the focus on façade improvements, but urged that the Commission weigh the benefits of public improvements to the Tin Tsin lot along with improvements to the gateways, and the Textile Museum. Bill Anderson agreed as he works at the Savings Institute across from the Tin Tsin lot and sees a lot of activity and use of the lot.

- Review of various letters of interest from private property owners. James Finger explained that he was in the process of assisting property owners and collecting various letters of interest. He asked if a subcommittee of the Commission would be willing to have a special meeting to review this material and rank the various proposals. Commission members agreed to have a special meeting on September 7<sup>th</sup> to review these and make a report for action at the September 10<sup>th</sup> meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:40 PM

Respectfully submitted

James Finger, Business Liaison