

Economic Development Commission
September 9, 2013 minutes
Windham Town Hall
Meeting Room
979 Main St., Willimantic, CT

Call to Order: the Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:40 PM. Those present were Bill Hettinger, Chairman; Victor Funderburk; Robert Horrocks, and John McCommas; also James Finger-staff.

Citizens& delegations comments/questions - None

Review/approval of Minute – August 5, 2013. Moved by Commissioner McCommas, Seconded by Commissioner Horrocks to approve the minutes of the August 5, 2013 meeting. Motion Carried.

New Business – Mr. Finger brought presented correspondence that had been received since the last meeting. The Connecticut Casket Company requested a zoning change, from residential to commercial, for a property on Jordan Lane in North Windham to allow for expansion of the business. After discussion of CT Casket Company, it was suggested that the chairman write a letter of support for expansion of CT Casket Company. It was decided that the commission would wait until the company has presented to the PZC which should be sometime in October.

Another letter brought to the board's attention was from United Abrasives, addressed to Mayor Eldridge. United Abrasives is requesting permission from the State Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to install and operate mixing and blending units at their site. Mr. Finger pointed out that the letter has given the town notice of work United Abrasives has planned to do, and this has opened the door for communication between the Town and United Abrasives.

Also presented to the board, was copy of a letter from the State to Windham Historic Preservation Commission. The Windham Mills property owner is seeking designation to the National Register of Historic Places. Listing on the National Register would give the property owner federal tax credits up to 9%. The property owner is enlisting the town's help to get this designation, and the Town Manager has asked for comments and recommendations from this commission. After discussion, it was moved by Commissioner Funderburk and Seconded by Commissioner Horrocks to support Windham Mills application for designation on the National Register of Historic Places. Motion carried.

Mr. Finger reported to the commission that the owners of the YMCA building on Main Street are hoping to find funding to restore/replace the current façade of the building. Commission discussed funding possibilities and supports efforts to improve the building.

Commissioner Funderburk MOVED that the Windham Economic Development Commission establish a Windham Planning Committee for 2025 for the purpose of

identifying major changes that are needed to be made in the Town of Windham and to identify a vision of what the town would be like 2025. The Windham Planning Committee will meet bi-weekly, and after a year will report proposed changes and suggested projects. In the second year, the Windham Planning Committee will conduct a public forum on the changes and develop specific proposals for governmental approval and funding. The Windham Planning Committee for 2025 will seek funding, in the third year, for an office and a staff for the planning and implementation for the vision for 2025. Commissioner McCommas SECONDED the motion for the purpose of discussion.

Mr. Finger suggested a name change for the committee since it may cause confusion between the committee and the Windham Planning Commission.

Commissioner Funderburk stressed the need to plan for a different and better community in the future. There was much discussion about the proposed committee and how it would be formed and how its purpose would be met. Commissioner Funderburk said he didn't expect the Economic Development Commission to create this committee right away, but would like the issue to be on the agendas for future meetings so a plan for the community's future.

Chairman Hettinger asked Commissioner Funderburk to contact the town in Indiana that he had visited to learn how they began the process to develop their town into the theater/entertainment draw it is today. The Chairman also suggested that the town of Mansfield should also be contacted and perhaps this commission could meet with them to learn their beginning processes for creation of Storrs Center.

Given the need for further discussion of this issue, Commissioner McCommas withdrew his second of the motion.

Next Commissioner Funderburk MOVED to add the Windham Planning Committee for 2025 to future agenda for exploration; SECONDED by Commissioner Horrocks. Motion Carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Report – zoning changes for signage and lighting: Zoning changes for signage and lighting were discussed. Some prior objections to zoning changes were clarified by the town Zoning Commission and objections were settled. Other objections were again discussed but since the Zoning Commission had already passed the new regulations, Chairman Hettinger suggested monitoring to see how the new regulations work.

Business Signage – follow up on design: The idea for business signage was to ask Thread City Development (TCD) to design the proposed signs. Since TCD has not had a meeting since the suggestion to have them design signs, the idea now is to ask June Bizantz to design a sign which can be presented to local businesses to determine interest.

Business Calling: Commissioner Funderburk reported on late night visits to Storrs Center. Many of the businesses are open 24 hours and are being patronized during those late night hours. Commissioner Horrocks reported that the Sidewalk Sales in Willimantic are off to a good start. Karen Gilbranson organized the event on behalf of Thread City Development, and hopes to have another sidewalk sale in October.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chairman Hettinger reminded the commission of the CEDAS meeting scheduled in Storrs on October 19, 2013, and recommended commissioners register and attend. He also reported that DECD Commissioner Catherine Smith will be coming to Willimantic. On October 7, 2013 at ECSU she will discuss Small Business projects; Small Business Express Program, Subsidized Job Training and Employment, and Job Expansion Tax Credits.

Chairman Hettinger also reported on meeting with the gentleman who is in the process of buying the Quilt Shop on Main Street in Willimantic. The gentleman is hoping to open his insurance office and a yogurt shop. Mr. Finger said he had recently with a group interested in opening a yogurt shop next to Cafèmantic. They were hoping to get some funding from the town. Mr. Finger had to tell them there were no funds available, but he explained that there is a tax credit for opening a business in the Entertainment District.

Chairman Hettinger reported that he, Mayor Eldridge, Mr. Finger and Town Engineer Joe Gardner met with Wyoming and Genesee Railroad, who now own the New England Central Railroad. They discussed potential rail serve sites in town.

Mr. Finger reported on ECSU groundbreaking of their new fine arts building – which is scheduled to open in October 2014.

Chairman Hettinger asked about Main Street grant funds. Mr. Finger said he has now received a letter stating that the town did not get the grant funds and to apply again next time – but that future funding has yet to be announced. The Chairman asked whether there's an advantage to keeping this "alive". The consensus was, yes.

Adjournment: Commissioner Funderburk, by Commissioner McCommas
SECONDED to adjourn the meeting. Motion Carried. MOVED Meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Janet Laukaitis
for James Finger, Planner/Business Liaison