

**PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION**  
**WINDHAM, CT**

**MINUTES**

**January 28, 2010**

The Windham Planning & Zoning Commission held its meeting on January 28, 2010 in the Meeting Room, Town Hall. The meeting was called to order at 7:15 P.M. by Mayor Ernest Eldridge. Members present were Victor Rayhall, Dawn Niles, Paula Stahl and Curtis Ehler. Also present were Town Planner James Finger and Code Enforcement Officer Matthew Vertefeuille.

- 1) Town Manager Neal Beets addressed the board and reviewed the goals and potential goals of the Windham Town Council. These goals and potential goals will hopefully be realized through the efforts of the Economic Development Commission, as well as Administration, Finance, Public Health, Human Services Council Sub-Committee, and Public Safety, Public Works, and Recreation Council Sub-Committee.

**Economic Development** – a) Redevelop vacant downtown buildings, b) help create jobs and support job training programs, c) stimulate development along the Route 6 Windham Airport Corridor, d) enable and assist small entrepreneurs, e) stay on top of Town of Windham infrastructure such as roads, water, and sewer, f) be a business-friendly Town Council and Town Staff, g) develop a downtown parking garage.

**Education Improvement** – Work on a) Magnet School, b) Charter School, c) Teacher retention, d) Language barriers, e) State Advocacy and f) Community involvement.

**Quality Life Measures** – Work on a) Noise Pollution, b) Graffiti Abatement, c) Bulky Waste Pick-up, d) Beautification and e) Housing Stock.

**Reducing the Cost of Government** – Work on a) Shared services between the Town and Windham Public Schools, b) Regionalized services with other Towns, & WINCOG, c) Police Services d) Equalize the Tax Base.

**Volunteers** – All American City Designation.

**Festivals, Celebrations** – Work to expand venues.

**2) Election of Officers**

Chairman – Paula Stahl nominated by Dawn Niles, seconded by Paula Stahl.  
Curtis Ehler nominated by Victor Rayhall, seconded by Curtis Ehler.

Since voting ended in a 2-2 tie the Commission will defer elections of officers to the next meeting.

### 3) **New Business** – Discussion & Possible Action

#### **a) Windham Hospital, Mansfield Avenue, Willimantic, CT.**

Planner Finger's staff report dated January 21, 2010 explained that Windham, Hospital would make a preliminary presentation on a proposed new private physicians office building to be located just north of the upper parking lot. Mr. Finger said the Planning Commission recently adopted new regulations, which direct applicants to meet with the Commission on a preliminary or conceptual basis prior to submitting a formal application. This allows the Commission to see the proposal before all of the engineering and design work is completed, and promotes interaction between the Commission and applicant. Therefore, the plans presented tonight will show a preliminary layout, and will show a plan that the former Zoning Commission approved in the early 1990's.

Ed Bussierre, Director of Facilities & Construction at Windham Hospital, distributed a Fact Sheet pertaining to the proposed building. Over the last year there has been an identified need by the Hospital and a number of physicians for updated and convenient medical office building space next to the hospital campus.

He said the project is dependent upon regulatory approvals and letters of intent from future tenants. The regulatory approvals are anticipated in spring 2010. Groundbreaking would occur this summer (2010) and substantial completion is anticipated for the summer of 2011.

Mr. William Mogensen, an associate with Casle Corporation, from Avon, CT, gave a description of what Casle Corp. does. He said their specialty is building medical office buildings generally for hospitals. They have developed more than 20 buildings in the last 5 years, he said. Mr. Mogensen said Casle Corp. has been invited to consult with the hospital to address their needs and design a building to meet those needs. He said they are starting the process and would like some direction from the Town. He said we have done a lot of physician marketing to know that there is a demand for this space, and we are working through the issues to make sure that all our buildings are full, or nearly full, before we break ground. We do not build buildings that ultimately are vacant and result in a problem to the community, he said. We build buildings that are occupied, and are a credit to the community, he added.

Philip Doyle, a landscape architect from LADA, PC of Simsbury, CT reviewed the site plan and proposed buildings. He referred to drawings showing the preliminary elevations. This is a rendering of the front of the building showing what you would see as you drive up the main driveway off Mansfield Avenue, he said. The office building that we are initially proposing is a 2-story office building, between 14,000 and 15,000 square feet. Because of the topography on the site, the building is going to be built into the hillside. He then referred to an aerial photo, which showed the general property lines. The hospital has 37+- acres of property. There are 2 sections of the property to the north and to the west that would appear from an air photo to be somewhat undeveloped. He said Datum Engineering has been hired to do the survey & engineering work for the project. They will confirm all the topographies and the size of the storm basin located down below, near Valley Street.

He referred to an old plan that was approved by the Zoning Commission in 1992 for a similar type development. He reviewed the storm water drainage system, the access way with a possible future connection out to Quarry Street as outlined on the old plan. The new plan calls for a main entrance off Mansfield Avenue with a secondary entrance (emergency area) off the lower section of Mansfield Avenue. There will be a visitor and employee access-way that comes up from Valley Street. We have out parcels that somewhat restrict and encapsulate the Hospital campus, he said. We have an out parcel for the office building near the main entrance at Mansfield Avenue. The hospital will probably want to reserve the land immediately around the building for future expansion needs, he said.

He then identified the utility core that is where all the utilities come in and out of the site, and where you have a lot of underground connections. There is a storm water basin located on the south and western portion of the site. The lower section of the property behind the storm basin is flat. We need to reserve some land for storm water management, he added. The area left for development is the land that was looked at in the early 1990's. It is a 9-acre section at the top of the site which backs up to the Kingdom Hall Church and 90 Quarry Street, a medical office building.

The advantages of that particular location are that it is immediately up the main driveway, and has great access and visibility into the front of the hospital. It has tremendous views depending how you situate the buildings. A Soils Scientist has confirmed that there are no wetlands issues, he said. When we started this process, the first thing we looked at was the density study to see what we could do, how much development could physically fit in that area. Our long-range plan might possibly be to add more than just one building. We are also considering future hospital buildings, he said.

The present plan is to put the first building on the lower portion of the site relatively in close proximity to the main entrance of the building. We are also considering making sure that all the buildings start to align with, and have a relationship to the front entrance of the hospital. We also want to start creating some spaces so that when you are out in this parking lot it doesn't feel like you are walking away to the middle of nowhere. The parking lot should have some sense of enclosure, he said.

We will be reviewing the 1990's plans, as well as doing testing to see what the depth of the bedrock is in the area where we propose to build. We will be using some low impact development drainage techniques in the parking lot, probably looking at what is called the rain garden, in order to help the underground storm water in that area. He said we are in the middle of the planning process and hope to be under construction this summer. He listed the professional who would be working on various parts of the plan. Kevin Clark will be working with Doyle on the site plan and the civil engineering, and John Manners is the project architect.

Commissioner Paula Stahl said we are very lucky to have such a fine hospital located in our town, and added that she is thrilled that the hospital is looking to do an expansion. She also applauded the project planners for thinking about the entire site. She said the former

Planning Commission always recommended looking at the entire site so that the developer would be able to utilize the land to its best advantage long-term. She voiced some concerns with parking. Mr. Doyle said the hospital's current parking lot is full most of the time, but he believes the proposed 150 spaces will be adequate. He did add that another driveway out to Quarry Street would be beneficial. Ms. Stahl said she didn't think there would be a problem with adding one building, but voiced concern with access if the two future buildings are added.

She said the Commission will next meet on February 25, 2010. Mr. Doyle said they will work to complete the plans during the months of February and March and be back before the Commission the end of March. We could then go to public hearing in April. He said the architect did an exceptional job showing a steel and masonry Class-A medical office building, which would be an asset to any major hospital campus anywhere. The new building will elevate the perception of the campus to its physician community, and to the community itself. Windham needs new physician blood coming into its system, and Windham Hospital needs a new building to help it grow and attract new physicians.

Planner Finger said there is a hazy point in the RPO District. It is not clear whether this application will require a Special Permit, which would require a public hearing, or whether it falls under other uses on the hospital property which only requires Site Plan approval.

Mr. Doyle said the hospital owns an amalgam of parcels. It owns 3 or 4 parcels on the site, and this development will be on one of those parcels. These buildings will all be independently financed from the main Hospital building. The decision will also have to be made as to how the ownership will work because the doctors may own a portion of these buildings. We want to make sure that we are in the right category, and that we have designed this correctly, he said. This may not be entirely owned by the Hospital. There may be private ownership as well. We may, in fact, take these buildings and make them condominiums. We have to make sure that we do this project correctly so that there is no question when we get to financing.

Mr. Doyle said he would continue meeting with the Town Planner, as well as the Code Enforcement Officer, to review this and to make sure they are pursuing this correctly.

Planner Finger expressed some concern regarding access, parking, traffic and congestion. Curtis Ehler said there was mention on the fact sheet submitted by the Hospital that the office spaces would be occupied by market demand. Does the Hospital have interested tenants at this time?

Bill Mogensen said a number of physicians have made commitments. He went on to explain that the first building will hold a combination of out-patient services taken out of the main hospital building. This will free up space within the hospital, he said. A portion of the first building will have hospital services, as well as patient services. These out-patient, or physician services, will be staffed by existing Hospital staff or by new physicians who are hired by the Hospital. He said the other half of the building, we expect, will be rented by area private physicians that are interested in relocating to the new building. We are doing space planning for them right now. So, it appears that the building is substantially

committed. Mr. Mogensen said the Hospital will return with a completed set of plans in March.

Paula Stahl made a motion to amend the agenda to add under New Business #2 an Update from Jana Butts, a Planner with WINCOG. Dawn Niles seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

b) Jana Butts, Planner with WINCOG, gave an update on some of the projects that the Windham Region Council of Government is working on. We have created a new center called the Windham Region GIS and Cadastral Data Center. GIS stands for Geographic Information System and Cadastral Data Center is another name for tax maps and all the assessment information in town. WINCOG received a grant to create this center, she said. We have some powerful software and good hardware and a GIS analyst who is helping us prepare maps for the region including tax parcel maps. This was created using surveys as a base and includes all the tax parcels in town in a digital GIS format which has extensive applications. This data layer can be used for all kinds of planning and economic development projects. All the mapping data is going to go on a website. The website will list all sorts of important information available to land use boards such as yourselves, town employees, people researching the tax records and really the general public. We are also hoping that in town halls such as this, you will equip meeting spaces with internet access and a projection system so that you can make use of this website during your meetings as you review new applications.

Commissioner Paula Stahl asked if soil data maps would be available as a layer document so that we can turn on and off soils. Ms. Butts referred to aerial photographs of wetlands and watercourses, zoning map, water and sewer lines.

We are going to build it as we go, she said. We are going to start with the tax parcel layer that shows the property boundaries. That soil layer is found in the basic maps that we would like to get up and running as soon as possible.

She went on to explain another project that WINCOG is going to be embarking on with the Town of Windham. The town received a grant to create something called an incentive housing zone. The Office of Policy and Management is encouraging towns to locate affordable housing in areas that are capable of supporting high density development. This is part of the State Smart Growth Strategy as envisioned in the State Plan of Conservation & Development.

A large part of Willimantic meets their criteria for an Incentive Housing Zone because there is public water and sewer, and regular bus service. These are the qualities of areas that they are looking for to intensify housing. As part of this program they have provided grants to conduct studies and to show what an Incentive Housing Zone could look like. She reviewed some of the requirements to qualify for this housing zone.

The goals of the program is to study the housing market of this area to find out what are some of the impediments of creating good quality housing in this area. If the housing stock is declining what can we do with the zoning regulations to create an incentive for people to

build good quality housing. She said she will be working with town staff, and perhaps with a sub-committee of this board, or with the whole board, on this project in hopes of crafting something that addresses some of the market forces in play today; something that the developers are going to see as an incentive to create some quality housing.

She said the second step of this proposal that the State put forth was to actually give the town monetary bonuses for every building permit issued and every house that is created. She said we are hoping to start work next month, and will have a proposal before this board by the end of June. Planner Finger said you will be looking at our regulations to make recommendations of what needs to be changed to promote affordable housing and meet the guidelines that the State has outlined. You could also provide some design guidelines. The boundaries of the zone and the language of the zone are for this board to decide. You are driving this effort, and I am here to assist you in it, she said.

She distributed a pamphlet, which explained the primary objectives of the GIS; which is to assist member towns in the ongoing development of their digital tax Parcel maps and databases and to develop a regional website to host geographic information online in an easy-to-use format. The overall goal is to facilitate coordinated planning across disciplines and municipal boundaries by increasing access to municipal mapping information through an online interface.

#### **4) Other Business**

##### **a) Overview of current Regulations.**

Planner Finger said we have new books that include design guidelines, as well as Subdivision Regulations. It was decided to continue discussion on the regulations to another meeting when more board members are available.

##### **b) Correspondence**

Code Enforcement Officer Matthew Vertefeuille referred to a letter from Tom DeVivo regarding the Windham Hospital plan. Mr. DeVivo asked that the board work with the hospital as much as possible because the community needs to have quality healthcare and quality healthcare specialists.

As there was no further business to come before the board, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Lillian Murray, Clerk