

**WINDHAM PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION  
WINDHAM, CT  
MINUTES  
July 22, 2010**

The Windham Planning & Zoning Commission held it's meeting on July 22, 2010 in the Meeting Room, Town Hall. Chair Paula Stahl called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M. Members present were Jean Chaine, Juan Montalvo, Dawn Niles, Victor Rayhall, Dan Lein, Claire Lary and Paula Stahl. Also present was Town Planner James Finger.

I) Approval of Minutes

The minutes of June 24, 2010 were amended as follows: : pg 1, item 1 ...Voting in favor of the motion were Dawn Niles, Dan Lein, Claire Lary, Juan Montalvo. Pg 1, item 2 ...Voting in favor of the motion were Jean Chaine, Juan Montalvo, Dawn Niles, Dan Lein, and Claire Lary. Pg 2, 4a - Margaret Manning, 75 South Windham **Road**, Pg 7, para 2...The big Plan of Conservation & Development zoomed in on the **Willimantic** part of Windham.

Juan Montalvo made a motion to approve the minutes of June 24, 2010 as amended and Dan Lein seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

II) Public Hearing

**a) Kingdom Life Christian Outreach Church, 116 Union Street, Willimantic** – seeking a Special Permit to establish a Church with related accessory uses such as a private non-profit school.

Planner Finger's staff report explained that this is an application for a Special Permit to establish a Church in the former Stick Screw factory building on Union Street. The property is located in an NPR-2 District, and the Church use would be a special use. The proposal includes converting the former industrial building into a Church and a private school. They plan to include an outreach program for engaging youth in the neighborhood in productive activities, and counseling them on how to be prepared for a job, and arranging for job shadowing.

The building, which was originally used as a manufacturing facility, also included an office. Planner Finger stated that the Church does not plan to make any major changes to the building, other than to clean it up and add a handicapped access to the rear of the building, which will be accessible through the municipal parking lot.

Pastor Daryn Ortiz presented certificates of mailing that were mailed to abutting property owners. He said we are moving forward. We have everything in place and are ready to open immediately. We are ready to start cleaning up the property and are ready to start doing some beautification, but this all depends on what the commission says tonight.

Chair Paula Stahl referred to a drawing and identified the location of the building. She asked how they plan to gain access since there is a chain link fence across the back of the parking lot. Pastor Ortiz said the fence belongs to the owner of the property, and he has given us permission to take it down. We will have to block off the house, but we will take care of that with the property owner. The part of the fence that corresponds to the building will be coming down, he added. We plan to add some landscaping in the front portion of the property. There is a 3-foot space before the parking lot and building that is just dirt. We plan to remove the weeds and add some landscaping.

Chair Stahl asked about the entrance to the building. Pastor Ortiz said there would be two entrances; and they will be handicapped accessible.

Chair Stahl asked if the Fire Marshall has reviewed the plan. Pastor Ortiz said he has spoken to the Fire Marshall, and pending approval of our application before this commission, he will be coming to the building to tell us what we need to do to meet code.

Chair Stahl asked about capacity. Pastor Ortiz said according to the size of the building, and the activities we will be doing there, we will probably have a capacity of no more than 100, but the Fire Marshall will determine that when he inspects the building. Chair Stahl asked if the capacity of 100 will be sufficient to meet their needs. Pastor Ortiz said we are not expecting more than that. We will be very wise as to how we will schedule our programming.

Chair Stahl then asked about the loading dock. Pastor Ortiz said the owner is still going to use that area to park some of his vehicles, but we are going to fix the driveway that is there. He said we do want to clean that up because we have found some undesirable things in that area. We want to make it pleasing to the people that walk and drive by that area of town. We have also spoken with the people who live next door because they usually park their cars there. We plan to speak to them again and ask them if they could park their vehicles elsewhere when we have activities. We will also leave them access providing that they help us to take care of the area. Chair Stahl asked if they plan to use that area as parking for Church members or for staff. Pastor Ortiz said that area would be used for staff. Most of the kids coming to the center will either walk to the center or be dropped off. The owner of the property, John Hazen, has also given us access to his parking area in the back. We will be using some of his space back there, said Pastor Ortiz. They have been parking 10 vehicles there, he said. Commissioner Claire Lary asked when you have Church services, where will you park. Pastor Ortiz said an abutting neighbor, John Walker, said that on days that he doesn't have anything going on there, the Church could use his 20, or so, parking spaces. Pastor Ortiz added that using these 20 spaces, plus our 10 spaces, plus the three spaces in the back should cover our needs.

Pastor Ortiz said we are entertaining the notion of purchasing that property in the future because we definitely will need a building of our own. We have ambitious thoughts, especially with the youth. Our goal is to reach out to the youth by offering different programs, he said. We are working to get the kids off the streets. We will also be working with the youth recently out of high school and struggling to get jobs. In addition to teaching life skills, we will teach skills such as how to interview with a prospective employer, and how to dress appropriately.

We will be using the building as a chapel, said Pastor Ortiz, but that is not our first mission. Our first mission is to operate a community youth center, he said.

Commissioner Jean Chaine said initially this was presented to us as Christian Outreach Church, although most of the activity that you have described would be used as a youth center. Does that set the tone in the future for the building owner to attempt to carve out a portion of the square footage of this building and save it as exempt from taxes because it is a Church activity? Chair Stahl said as long as the property is a rental property it will stay on the tax rolls.

Audience comments: 1) Beverly Lanare, 29 Kathleen Drive said she presently works at the Windham Middle School. She said I know the needs of the kids, and we just want to provide a place for the kids to go to when their parents are not at home. She said she will be at the Church after school trying to help some of students with homework etc. She said the amazing thing about this Church is that the majority of adults in the Church are all service-oriented and community-oriented people. 2) Tyson Miller, a professor at UConn, said he has been a member of this Church for the last three years. He said he and his wife have been blessed by this Church not only by the vision and leadership of Pastor Daryn, but also by the collective energy of this Church. It is amazing because the focus is on the kids. He said in this Church of approximately 100, we have 8 full time teachers for the children's ministry and 4 or 5 substitutes. These people are committed to make sure that the class sizes stay small; perhaps 7 or 8 kids for one teacher. The commitment is high. The engagement is high. As an educator of college students, it is very encouraging to watch them grow in this very intimate, and much fostered environment. This is not just about religion; this has to do with character and discipline. He said this activity is already on going in the Church, and the same infrastructure that has been committed to it in the Church setting is equally ready to jump in for the outreach element, he concluded. 3) Bill Martin, 32 Moulton court, Willimantic, CT said he is very much in support of the outreach program. He said he has seen a lot of kids in the back path behind his building with nothing to do. I came here tonight to give my support to Pastor Ortiz and to help those kids behind my building. 4) Sandra LeDuc, 209 Mansfield Avenue, Willimantic, CT said she has 3 children, and if it wasn't for this Church my children would be in the street learning God knows what. Living in the heart of Willimantic, our children need this Church. 5) Janelle, the youth leader for the Church said he has been a member of the Church for 2 years. He says he has worked with the young community, and also networks with a national youth ministry, which deals with kids nationwide. He spoke to the need of having the youth community center. Our children need people to be there for them to show them love, as well as to teach skills that will help them to succeed in life. We are seeing 13 and 14-year-olds that are dealing with substance abuses, and they really want to change their life around. 6) Edwin Rexach said he is a State Certified Substance Abuse Counselor and has been working in this community for many years. He said he has been working with Perceptions programs. He said they received a grant to go into the Middle School and target the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders who might have potential problems. We also went into the high school and targeted the 9<sup>th</sup> graders. He said during a semester they might work with about 47 kids that are labeled "at risk youth". He explained that during the sessions, teachers would leave the room, and the kids felt more comfortable asking questions etc. In those discussions a lot of things came up. With the

youth center, kids will be able to come and have these types of discussion. Prevention must be put in place to avoid not being “at risk” for catching sexually transmitted diseases, or being addicted to drugs. Having the Church will allow the youth to have a place to go to. Having the Church will make a difference, he concluded. 7) Jason Diaz, Memorial Drive, Willimantic, CT said the Church will definitely help the community in several ways such as helping the kids to have something to do. Kids do get bored and the Church will give them a place to go to discuss problems. The Church will give courage and support to the youth. He encouraged the commission to approve this request to build the church. 8) Andres Badillo, 36 Gem Drive, said we are just waiting to get into the building. I am working two jobs and plan to go to QVCC part-time. It is going to be hard, but I am committed. 9) Elaine Ortiz said when working with the youth of this community, I ask them what do you want to do, or how do you see yourself? They say, Oh, I see myself as a lawyer or a businessman. She asked do you see yourself staying in Willimantic and they say yes. They have never been out of the city. They have never been out of the state. Pastor Ortiz had a successful youth group and the majority of them have traveled the world. We are trying to give them a vision that there is a lot to see in the world. There is something greater out there, and not what the people of the streets have told them. 10) Pedro Johnson, 228 Jackson Street, Willimantic, CT. said he came to Willimantic in 2004. He said he did drugs for over 20 years and knows firsthand what drugs can do. When I came to Willimantic I met Pastor Daryn Ortiz and my life changed. It is a privilege to serve this community. I know that we need this building as soon as possible. That way we can do something for the youth, especially 7-year-olds thru 13-years-olds. By 14 years, they can have HIV. I don't want to see any kid with HIV. We need to reach out to our youth, and this is what we will do in Willimantic.

That concluded audience comments.

Commissioner Dan Lien said he came to Willimantic in 1967. He went to a football game and witnessed the involvement of the community. He determined at that point that he wanted to live in this community. He said he chose this community, and he cherishes it. You all demonstrate the same thing, he said. You cherish where you are, who you are and what you want to accomplish. I have a very strong sense that you all feel proud to be a part of Willimantic, and if my vote will help get you there you certainly have it. I applaud you in so many different ways. I appreciate where you are and I wish you the best.

Commissioner Dawn Niles said this is the best meeting I have been to. It has been positive. Congratulations. I feel very optimistic after listening to all of you. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Commissioner Jean Chaine said he agreed with commissioner Lein. The more I listened to the testimony this evening it seemed to be like what it was back in 1950's and 60's. I see this activity of the Church as a combination of what used to be: CYO, YMCA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, etc. - the whole gamut. If that is what it is, and I think it is, I think it is a great renewal of the direction of what this community was in the 1950's and 1960's. My vote is to grant the Special Permit as long as they are able to overcome all the other factors. If a motion is made I will support it, he said.

Chair Stahl closed the public hearing.

Jean Chaine made a motion to grant the Special Permit for Kingdom Life Christian Outreach Church at 116 Union Street to use the facility as they have indicated in their application. Dan Lien seconded the motion. Voting in favor of the motion were Jean Chaine, Dan Lien, Dawn Niles, Claire Lary, Vic Rayhall and Juan Montalvo. The motion carried.

Planner Finger added that they will need to meet with the Building Official and the Fire Marshall.

### **III) New Business**

#### **a) Zoning Regulation Revision: Review of current zoning map**

Chair Paula Stahl introduced a set of maps of the town. She said we will use these maps when we start working on the Zoning Regulations. She said the first work session to work on revisions to the Zoning Regulations will be held on the second Thursday of August. She then went on to review the different maps.

She said we are writing a grant in hopes to secure funding to help us re-write the Zoning Regulations.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45.

Respectfully submitted,

Lillian Murray, Clerk