

Willington Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes – August 11, 2021

In Attendance: John Guskowski, Richard Maloney, Bill Rankin, Cheryl Mitchell & local residents

Richard Maloney called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM.

Approval of Minutes

Cheryl Mitchell made a Motion to Approve the Minutes of the July 14th meeting as written; Richard Maloney seconded – Motion carried

South Willington Village Regulation

The amendment has been done to the regulations and zoning is in favor. We are ready to have a zoning hearing and has been referred to zoning commission. A few proposals to have properties used differently than what is currently zoned. John is unsure where it has landed currently and was asked to be the applicant. Planning & Zoning wants Mike to propose an amendment to the regulation for Phelps Crossing and the surrounding area. Possibly looking at a brewery in the old barn but is not regulated for that as of yet as well as loosening up on the regulations to property business north of Dunkin Donuts. Mike shared the proposed regulation that would allow for this through the amendments. This could be taken up at the next zoning meeting which should be on September 21st. Have discussion with the commission on the 74/32 corridor. Phelps Plaza now has new use. We would like to see development in this area. This would impact the old River and Rail and the old lumber yard. Unsure how far up Route 32 this would go. Per John it is a small area in the core of 74/32 intersection. The change is to eliminate the prohibition on alcohol and loosen up the allowable uses. The EDC would be happy to take a look at the proposal. John will let us know when we have a solid date for the hearing.

Railroad Project Update

Bill likes the sketch that was drawn on conceptual rail yard development. Bill has a conversation with Ed Foley at the NECR. There is a prospect looking for land to develop on rail in the Northeast. The market for development on the rails is very hot right now. There is a stand-alone big box provider that is looking to house their own product. The same drivers service the area every day. Looking for a 100,000 square foot warehouse. The next step would be the NECR visiting the site to optimize the rail layout. There has been a lot of progress happening in the last few weeks just on the interest driven by demand. The other prospect, the aluminum manufacturer would use as a cornerstone account. Rick asked if we would try to tackle the regulations and what would the scope of that review look like? John asked if the big box supplier would want to own the property and if they would want the whole site? Too early at this point it seems to provide further detail. Bill indicates the average age of a driver now is 56 and there is a shortage of drivers right now. He also mentioned again that the aluminum prospect is not a stand-alone project and feels that the more tenants you have the better and mentioned that the lumber market is hot right now.

It was asked how it would be handled with Mr. Desiato; should we let him know. Need to answer how Mr. Desiato would like to handle the current interests for development to get project off the ground.

John indicated he would reach out to Mr. Desiato to share the layout and then circle back with Bill.

Incentives for Small Business Start Ups

There has been a lot of discussion and thoughts about this. What is the appropriate process? There was discussion and Cheryl asked could the town offer new businesses a tax break? Rick explained the process that an application would need to be created and the proposal could be brought to the Board of Finance and ask for tax abatement or have funds given to them to come into town (two separate items). A pool of money for them or a tax abatement for a few years. Bill asked what guidelines are there for this incentive and to disburse on these funds? The American Recovery Act supplied towns with funds for small business relief; we can define as we wish; The Town of Willington received \$1.7 million. Use for existing businesses in town. Board of Selectmen set up a committee and member of the EDC is on that committee. John and Mike have been asked to work on application and we should put on the agenda for the next meeting; what is this requirement criteria – then present to Board of Selectmen to give to their ad Hoc committee. (Identifies the businesses that need the funds). John indicated that a lot of towns are still deciding what to do with these funds from the ARAFU. Need to develop a nexus between why it was set up and how to disburse the funds. (Businesses affected by COVID – should be simple criteria) Mike and John will work on criteria/program for next meeting. Rick made a Motion that John and Mike create an application for the scope on the American Recovery Act Funding Uses. Cheryl seconded; Motion carried

We will continue to work on the incentives for small businesses – Bill wants to think about this and Matt indicated the same thing at our last meeting.

No questions from the town residents attending the meeting.

Bill spoke with Joe Courtney at a wedding recently and explained the rail project to him. Joe said he would like to sit with us and discuss.

Bill made a Motion to Adjourn at 7:16 PM; Rick seconded; Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted:

Cheryl Mitchell

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