

Willington Economic Development Commission

Thursday, October 20, 2022

Special Meeting. 6:00 p.m.

1) Call to Order

In absence of a Chairman, EDC Member Matt Clark called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m. In attendance were Matt Clark, Bill Rankin, Samantha Hills, and Cheryl Mitchell. Also in attendance were EDC staff members Mike D'Amato and John Guskowski, First Selectman Erika Wiczenski, and several members of the public.

2) Public Participation

Joanne Taraskiewicz of Liska Road spoke about her interest in a "Welcome to Willington" signage program, and suggested that the Town Seal needed to be tweaked in a way that promoted both the history of thread mills but also button factories in Willington. She shared a draft revision to the seal that she believed better reflected this history, and suggested that the Commission consider this revision.

James Marshall from Fisher Hill Road followed up on a letter of complaint that he submitted to the EDC. He had not been aware that his application to the Planning & Zoning Commission was going to be discussed at the EDC meeting last month. He believes that the EDC's conduct was inappropriate to discuss a PZC application without having informed the applicant nor familiarized themselves with the content of the application. He spoke at some length about the topic of economic development in Willington and his concerns about logistics centers and large-scale industrial development in West Willington. He believed that the smaller-scale mixed-use economic development should be the focus for the EDC and the Town. Finally, he noted that the minutes from September should reflect that the business discussed was not formally his application to PZC.

Nick Tella from Mirtl Road stated that a hybrid meeting should be held to facilitate virtual participation. He also expressed concern that the EDC was pushing larger scale development like logistics centers or data centers. He believed that the Town should be focused on small business development. He also stated that believed that Tyche Planning & Policy Group has a conflict of interest because of their participation with the Planning & Zoning Commission.

3) Minutes of September 14, 2022

The minutes of the past meeting were not available. The former Chairman, Rick Maloney had not submitted his notes prior to his resignation last week. Matt Clark spoke of the need to obtain clerical assistance going forward.

4) Commission Business

- a. **Election of a Chair.** *Cheryl Mitchell moved that Bill Rankin be elected as Chairman, and Samantha Hills seconded. Bill Rankin stated that he appreciated the nomination but respectfully declined.* He invited James Marshall to consider joining the EDC. Matt

Clark called for other nominations. He also spoke to the interest in having a liaison to the Planning & Zoning Commission. First Selectman Wiecenski stated that the Commission needed to have a Chairman for procedural purposes. ***Samantha Hills moved to appoint Matt Clark interim chairman, and Cheryl Mitchell seconded. The motion carried 3-1, with Matt Clark voting in opposition.***

Bill Rankin spoke up for the EDC and their staff, stating that there was no grounds to question ethics or professionalism of the group who had the best interests of the Town in mind. James Marshall stated he merely had concerns about Tyche Planning & Policy Group's service to both EDC and P&Z and the EDC's agenda due diligence.

- b. **PZC Application Review/Discussion.** Mike D'Amato provided a brief update of activity on Planning & Zoning applications: Attorney Joe Williams submitted an application to clarify how the Zoning Regulations calculated lot coverage in order to facilitate some vehicle parking expansion of an existing industrial use; There is a proposed development of a commercial/retail pad site and solar array on Ruby Road that needs to have some non-solar uses; There is an application for a cannabis retailer at 11 Phelps Way. This would be in the Phelps Plaza location where Key Bank used to be; There is also a pending text amendment submitted by James Marshall to modify the Strategic Development Zone.

Sam Hills sought to summarize and understand the text amendment proposal regarding the Strategic Development Zone. She suggested that there would be need to consider adjusting the regulations, and there was a need to retain the rural element of Town as an economic advantage. James Marshall stated that a potential moratorium may be put in place and the EDC's input could be sought on future changes. Matt Clark would like to have more information about the economic/grand list impact of pending development projects. Mike D'Amato noted that aside from the requirement in the SDZ regulations, the Town generally doesn't get a fiscal note on proposed development projects. He stated that we could work with the Assessor to get some estimates. Sam Hills stated that a straightforward economic impact analysis is neither simple nor accurate. Bill Rankin read the EDC mission statement and talked about development that are appropriate for the Town's character and future. There was a general discussion about business promotion and finances. First Selectman Wiecenski suggested in having conversations between EDC, Finance, Board of Education, and Planning & Zoning about the balance between development and community character. The Commission had a general discussion about engaging more voices in the conversation. Bill Rankin talked about looking 5-10 years down the road and understanding costs of development to town and developers.

- c. **ARPA Update.** John Guskowski reported to the EDC that the Town was going through the contracting phase with seventeen businesses and nonprofits, pushing out a total of \$230,000 in business resilience support. At this point, nine of the seventeen contracts are fully executed. Once all contracts are executed, checks will

begin to be cut in early November, and staff will work with the First Selectman's office on promotion and publicity for the business grants.

Sam Hills discussed the potential of returning to the ARPA committee to consider another request from EDC. There could be additional consideration of a public water utility study or focus on rural broadband access. John Guskowski talked about the potential for broadband funding through other channels. Mike D'Amato discussed preliminary estimates of running public water from Route 195 in Mansfield up into South Willington and River Road Park. Mike D'Amato stated that a consideration of a strategic economic growth plan may also be appropriate. Sam Hills talked about supporting small businesses from a strategic standpoint. Matt Clark discussed the concept of a financial and economic projection for the Town.

Sam Hills made a motion to submit an application to ARPA for the information regarding the development of a Strategic Economic Development Plan, seconded by Matt Clark. Matt Clark stated that the EDC could be the convening body for other Town Commissions as part of this study. This would include economic projections, grand list growth, development build out scenarios, and alternatives analysis. **Motion carried unanimously.** John Guskowski will prepare a proposal for the ARPA committee, and will seek to keep the request less than the \$70,000 planned to be returned to the ARPA committee.

- d. **Welcome to Willington Signage.** Matt Clark stated that the signage discussion would be tabled until the next meeting. He will convene with Mike D'Amato about scoping the signage discussion.

5) **Reports/Correspondence**

- a. **J. Marshall – September 17, 2022.** The correspondence was discussed earlier in the agenda

6) **Adjournment**

Agenda items for next meeting will include ARPA status and proposal for economic strategy plan, EDC recruitment, and business support discussion. PZC updates will remain on the agenda. Mike D'Amato stated that the PZC would be interested in having a workshop with EDC to discuss potential changes to the Strategic Development Zone. The EDC, by consensus, was interested in discussion of the topic. **Motion to adjourn by Bill Rankin, seconded by Matt Clark.** Meeting was adjourned at 7:59.

Respectfully submitted,


John Guskowski, AICP
Consultant to EDC