



Economic Development Commission

Monday, April 28, 2025 | 6:30p.m.

This meeting be held at Willington Town Hall, Lower Level, 40 Old Farms Rd and via Zoom

MEETING MINUTES

I. Call to Order

Interim Chairman Matt Clark called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. In attendance for the meeting were EDC Members Bill Rankin and Mike Johansen, Land Use Officer Mike D'Amato and EDC Consultant John Guskowski.

II. Public Participation

There were no comments from the public.

III. Commission Business

a. Review Correspondence from Central Corridor Passenger Rail Coalition, Inc.

Matt Clark reviewed the letter from Central Corridor Passenger Rail, which sought the endorsement of the Willington EDC on a proposed passenger rail service traveling through Willington and connecting Brattleboro, VT and New London, CT. The Commission discussed the value of a passenger rail station, including one tentatively selected in Palmer, MA to be an east-west station. The CCPRC sought a station at the approximate junction of the mentioned east-west line and the Genessee and Wyoming Line, running through Willington. The Commission opted not to take a stance on this matter yet, but stated that they would like a bit more information, and perhaps a member of EDC would be able to attend the informational meeting on May 7th. Bill Rankin stated that he would attend that meeting. Mike Johansen spoke to the value of a Willington station location based on a higher highway traffic count and convenience.

b. Commission work session: Review and Discussion of [Economic Development Strategic Plan](#) Draft, Executive Summary and Feedback

Matt Clark opened the discussion, and John Guskowski presented the latest Executive Summary of the Strategic Plan. He divided up the Summary into three major areas: 1) What is

Willington's Situation; 2) What are the Best Areas of Opportunity for Willington; and 3) What are the key action items to undertake? The Commission thanked staff for the summary. Matt Clark stated that the full ten sectors were still too many, and the Commission needed to focus its attention on fewer items. Joan Taraskiewicz stated that the implementation needed to be careful in its approach to avoid politicizing the matter, and appreciated the recommendation to leverage the academic ecosystem.

Matt Clark then turned the discussion over to Kathy Demers from the Conservation Commission regarding the correspondence she sent the Commission. She discussed in brief the comments on the agriculture and agritourism sections of the Strategic Plan presented by the Conservation Commission. Matt Clark discussed the potential of a Willington-based farmer's market. He also noted that "lakes" should be more properly referred to as "ponds," and well as recommending the creation of an Agriculture Commission and a "right to farm" ordinance. Joan Taraskiewicz discussed some of the prior efforts engaging the farmland community and suggested that revisiting this topic would be useful.

Matt Clark and the Commission discussed the Executive Summary and presented editorial suggestions. Bill Rankin discussed the shrinking population and limitations on developable land presented some opportunity for urgency. He stated that tight grand list growth also presented some urgency. There was some discussion about revisiting the Strategic Development Zone process and having an established "landing spot" for developers looking at Willington. Part of this discussion needs to be an active conversation between EDC and PZC. Mike D'Amato discussed the DECD's "Certified Sites" program, which aggregates these pre-approved sites across the state. The EDC believes that moving forward on these sites is a top priority. The Commission discussed the approach and efforts to undertake community outreach and coordination with PZC. Members of the public discussed challenges with residential development densities and cluster housing. Matt Clark stated that the next two steps should be meeting with the PZC to discuss the Executive Summary and then have a public meeting at the library. Mike Johansen discussed interest in having some comparative income data for surrounding towns.

Matt Clark proposed some additional edits on the recommendation sections of the Executive Summary. Bill Rankin discussed the idea of building consensus among stakeholders about Willington being "open for business" and targeted development opportunities. Matt Clark discussed taking the targeted development schemes to the next level by identifying potential host properties for these schemes. He also suggested moving the fiscal benchmark recommendation to the end and promoting some of the other actions, particularly identifying key parcels and doing additional outreach to gather support. The Commission and public also discussed the success of the "Welcome to Willington" signage and the hope to add additional gateway signs in future years.

Matt Clark discussed spending money in promoting the Town, not only through signage, but also advertising development opportunities on commercial real estate sites, etc. He stated that visibility was key, and Bill Rankin concurred, stating that efficiency and preparedness is also critical.

The Commission discussed next steps, which will include final edits on the Executive Summary and then getting on the agendas of the PZC and Board of Finance.

IV. Approval of Minutes

a. March 24, 2025

Motion to approve minutes of March 24, 2025 by Matt Clark, seconded by Bill Rankin.

Motion carried unanimously.

V. Public Participation

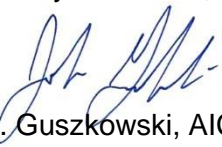
Kathy Demers discussed the revaluation process on the Assessor's web page and how property assessment changed and how the burden is shifting slightly more to residential properties. She suggested that poverty rate data and median income may be skewed by the student population in the town's apartment complexes. She also suggested that the Town population wasn't necessarily uniformly against economic development, but the scale of development was key.

VI. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Bill Rankin, seconded by Mike Johansen. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


John P. Guskowski, AICP, CZEO
EDC Consultant