



Economic Development Commission

SPECIAL MEETING

Wednesday, September 27, 2023 | 6:30p.m.

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

DRAFT MINUTES

I. Call to Order

Interim Chairman Matt Clark called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. In attendance for the meeting were Bill Rankin, Samantha Hills, and Cheryl Mitchell. Also in attendance were Land Use Official Mike D'Amato and EDC Consultant John Guskowski.

II. Public Participation

James Marshall stated that he was interested in learning more about the River Road Rail Progress, and remained concerned about potential intensive industrial uses that might create disruptions in Willington. Candidate for First Selectman Stuart Fisher introduced himself and expressed his support for the work of the EDC.

III. Approval of Minutes

a. July 26, 2023

Motion to approve the minutes of July 26th by Matt Clark, seconded by Bill Rankin. Motion carried unanimously.

IV. Commission Business

- a. Welcome Signage – Mike D'Amato provided an update on the signage, which are currently being fabricated, as well as the staff's outreach to the owners of the two proposed locations, one in South Willington and one at the Dollar General intersection. The property owner in South Willington along River Road has already approved the use of his land for the placement of the sign. The Town is waiting to hear back from the other owner.
- b. Business Outreach/Interviews – Matt Clark discussed the overall purpose behind business outreach, and commended Bill Rankin for his excellent documentation of interviews with

business owners. Some of the findings of the interviews including general satisfaction with the Town's business friendliness and tax rates. There was a discussion about business owners who do not live in town being able to participate in town decision-making, as well as not being able to use the transfer station. The Commission agreed that business owners should have an opportunity for a more official "voice" in town decision-making. They also discussed the provision of security at Willington businesses, and potential growth of residential population, as well as relative home ownership rates.

- c. River Road Rail Project – Bill Rankin discussed the former Desiato excavation operation, which was sold to F&F Concrete from Plantsville, CT last year, who will be keeping the business name and branding. They are looking for growth and expansion of the operation because of a strategic location and positioning. The new owner has some interest in developing the site along River Road in the long term, but the excavation operation is working well now and they are continuing with that business for the foreseeable future. In a longer view, there may be development opportunities.
- d. Town-wide Strategic Plan – Matt Clark discussed the recent RFP seeking consulting assistance for both projecting needs/revenues/tax rates and creating an economic growth model for meeting those needs. Three proposals were received, and the EDC had reached out to BOS, BOF, PZC and others about participating in the overall process. PZC expressed willingness to contribute. Matt Clark discussed the proposals submitted, which included one that was dramatically out of range of the available budget. The other two plans were strongly focused on the economic development component and were very light on revenue projections and town needs analysis. He suggested that it might make sense to take a pause and reconsider the issue. Mike D'Amato stated that the EDC was not obliged to decide, and could opt to re-scope the project. Sam Hills discussed a more intensive business survey and data acquisition, to do a deeper dive into town needs based on business and resident discussions. Mike D'Amato discussed the breadth of different analytical and outreach skills that would be necessary to undertake the overall task. He also noted the work of an economic development impact analyst called Strategy 5 Consulting that could assist with some of the financial considerations, and offered to have him visit with the Commission. The Commission agreed that revisiting the scope of the RFP may be in order. Matt Clark will look into Strategy 5 and make a recommendation about inviting him to discuss with the Commission. Stuart Fisher reinforced the idea of building consensus for the Town overall. Bill Rankin and Sam Hills discussed the different potential goals of an economic development strategy and agreed with the idea of re-thinking the scope and focus of the RFP. Mike D'Amato stated that staff will

be reaching out to the current bidders and state that the Commission is considering the process. He also noted that the ARPA funds needed to be spent no later than 2026.

- e. Future Commission Initiatives – Matt Clark discussed a number of successful initiatives, including business outreach, grants, survey, revised zoning regulations, signage, and sidewalk/pedestrian work. He asked the Commission what other initiatives they were interested in pursuing. Ralph Tulis, joining the discussion, asked the Commission to consider multiple-property projects and looking at projects in a broader context of traffic, access, and how properties affected each other. He provided a few examples of different multi-property opportunities in South Willington, Phelps Crossing, and other areas. Bill Rankin and Mike D’Amato discussed the status of the Strategic Development Zone, which has been largely put on hold by a recent text amendment. Mike D’Amato also discussed developers working with town on tax abatements and tax stabilization agreements for large developments. Bill Rankin stated that the majority of people he talked with acknowledged that there are rural and inconvenient elements of living or working in Willington, but the character of the town provided an upside for that trade-off.

V. Reports/Correspondence

- a. LOTICIP Update – Mike D’Amato provided an update of the LOTICIP sidewalk and intersection improvements in South Willington from the mill complex to the Elementary School. The goal is to complete design and easement acquisition over the winter and undergoing bidding and construction during the next summer after the conclusion of the school year.
- b. ARPA/BRIG – Mike D’Amato reported that the ARPA Commission is interested in following up with BRIG grant recipients to find out about expenditure of funds and to do an update of the positive impacts of the manner in which ARPA funds improved business operations and resilience. The Commission is interested in a report in December. Sam Hills discussed the argument to doing self-reporting instead of a more intrusive reporting or audit process. John Guskowski proposed to structure a voluntary “success story” solicitation to the recipients to tell a positive Economic Development message to the business community. The Commission agreed with this approach and John Guskowski will draft a solicitation to share with the Commission. The Commission discussed the status of ARPA funds generally. Mike D’Amato stated that there was approximately \$75,000 of unallocated and contingency funds, and approximately \$102,000 of returned funds.

- c. Upcoming Meeting Date: 10/25 – The Commission determined that the next meeting would be on the fourth Wednesday of October.

VI. Public Participation

There was no additional public participation.

VII. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Matt Clark, seconded by Sam Hills. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


John P. Guskowski
EDC Consultant