Windham/Eastern Community Action Network (W/E CAN)
Town and Gown Minutes
Thursday, September 16th 2010
5:00PM-6:00PM

Eastern Attendees: Mr. Ken Bedini, Mr. Kyle Puzacke, Chief Jeff Garewski, Mr. Angelo Simoni, Dr. Walter Diaz, Mr. Dennis Hannon, Mr. Alexander Cross, Mr. Scott Nolan, Ms. Geralyn Laut, and Dr. Elsa Nuñez

Community Attendees: Ms. Shirley C. Mustard, Mr. Dick Grillo, Ms. Winnie Chase, Capt. Cliff Spinner, Chief Lisa Maruzo-Bolduc, Mr. Harrison Judd, Mr. Kevin Hoxie, Mr. Bernard D’Auteuil, Ms. Bethany Morris, Ms. Lynne Poulos, Mr. Matthew Vertefeuille, Ms. Patty Szcysz, Mr. Neal Beats, Ms. Christel K. Donahue, Ms. Diane Bartlett, and Mr. Jeffrey Craig

Agenda items in review:

1. Community Concerns
   - Dr. Elsa Nuñez, President of Eastern Connecticut State University, opened the meeting with a sincere apology to all the residents affected by the negative behavior exhibited by some Eastern students in local Willimantic neighborhoods. She explained that on behalf of the University, she feels ashamed and embarrassed with regard to the behavior. She hopes that with cooperation and dialogue this problem can be resolved as quickly as possible.

   - Mr. Kevin Hoxie explained that the current police budget for the Willimantic Police Department is not large enough to deal with multiple and on-going college parties. The cost incurred due to extra police enforcement needed for handling the parties is placed on the Willimantic residents, not the students or the University. The students show no respect for the police or their neighbors, which is a real issue. Mr. Hoxie suggested that stronger punishments are needed to encourage students to stay out of trouble. Mr. Hoxie also mentioned that he has witnessed several students driving recklessly in certain areas in town, particularly High Street. He feared that it will only be a matter of time until a severe accident occurs or a pedestrian is injured.

   - Mr. Ken Bedini, Vice President for Student Affairs, stated that this summer, Eastern initiated a mailing to all off-campus students to inform them of their duty to be good neighbors and provided information on services offered at the University for off-campus students. Also included in the mailing was information on local laws and statutes as they pertain to underage drinking and noise ordinances. Additionally, the Director of Judicial Affairs along with some student leaders hand delivered these packets to the local houses around campus where students were known to rent from. Overall, this initiative was successful and will continue in the future.

   - Mr. Scott Nolan, Senator for the Student Government Association at Eastern, stated that they are in the process of revamping the “R U One” campaign, which is a movement to educate Eastern students about being good, responsible neighbors in the local Willimantic community. More information on this effort at the next Town and Gown meeting.

   - Mr. Dick Grillo expressed concern that Eastern students block his driveway with their cars and park wherever they wish, with little fear of receiving tickets. Mr. Grillo suggested that the students be given a map which would show acceptable parking areas for their cars. Additionally, Mr. Grillo expressed disappointment that an Eastern student who vandalized his property was not processed through the University Judicial System at
Eastern. It was explained to Mr. Grillo that the student in question withdrew from Eastern and will not be returning to the University until the student has a meeting with the Judicial Affairs Office. Additionally, Mr. Grillo was also reimbursed $150.00 for the damage done to his property by the University prior to the Town and Gown meeting.

- Mr. Harrison Judd thanked President Nuñez, the Willimantic Police Department, and the Eastern Police Department for all their hard work dealing with the current problem. Mr. Judd insisted that Eastern is a very successful University and has the capability to solve the party problem efficiently. In terms of this, he suggested that a brainstorming session or possibility of professional help could be used in order to instill change.

- One resident recommended that the campus should consider changing to a wet campus in order to try to contain the students to Eastern’s campus. Mr. Bedini explained that would be highly unlikely because less than 20% of Eastern’s students living on-campus are of legal drinking age.

- Mr. Bedini also said that Eastern has received funds from a DMHAS (Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services) grant that will be allocated toward solving the party problem. A coalition will be formed including members from both Eastern and Willimantic with the objective to work together to solve the party problem.

- Mr. Matthew Vertefeuille recognized that Vice President Bedini, Dean Diaz, and Mr. Simoni are a great team and are doing their best to address the negative off-campus behavior exhibited by some Eastern students. Matt also mentioned that the Town of Windham and the University have a great working relationship and have a mutual respect for one another.

- Mr. Judd suggested that a list of possible ideas and solutions should be created and compiled by Eastern staff and the community.

- Any resident whose property is littered by Eastern students can contact Angelo Simoni, the Director of Judicial Affairs, and he will coordinate to have it cleaned up.

- The University will provide a list of all initiatives it has in place to combat negative student behavior and will provide that prior to the next Town and Gown meeting (see attachment).

*The next Town and Gown meeting will be on-campus in the Johnson Room Thursday, 10/14/10 from 6:30pm-8:00pm*
Proactive Measures to Address Negative Behavior Exhibited by Eastern Students:

1. All entering students participate in an on-line alcohol and drug education course:

   www.mystudentbody.com (Click on the link and then click on the icon “Take a Tour”)

2. All incoming students participate in orientation programs where discussions relating to University rules and regulations, use of alcohol and drugs, and behavior in the town of Windham/Willimantic are emphasized. Additionally, similar discussions occur for students living on campus each and every year they do so.

3. The Vice President for Student Affairs sends a notice to all students prior to the start of each academic year to remind them of their responsibility to the residents of Windham/Willimantic and the consequences related to not being a “good neighbor.” This year an additional such notice, one more severe in its tone, was sent on September 19th.

4. The Student Government Association launched an “R U ONE” marketing campaign last year asking our students the question: are you a good neighbor? The campaign was a multifaceted approach to raise awareness of student responsibility to behave properly off-campus.

5. University offices and student organizations sponsor hundreds of events and activities on campus each year specifically designed to be alternatives to using alcohol and drugs. These events are attended by thousands of students.

6. This past summer, the Director of Judicial Affairs and the Wellness Promotion Coordinator used the names and addresses of all full-time students not living on campus to develop a distribution list of those students who were most likely living in the local community. They then initiated an informational mailing that was sent to their permanent home address before school started this fall. The mailing informed them of their responsibility of living in Windham/Willimantic, their rights as a tenant living in rented property, state laws related to the serving and use of alcohol, and other related items.

7. This fall, University staff walked around the town and dropped off “welcome packets” to houses we knew to be occupied by students. Packets included all of the above mentioned information.

8. We established a relationship with the Town’s Code Enforcement Officer and have been working with him for a couple of years. He addresses the landlords of the properties our students live in and we address the students when they behave inappropriately.

9. This summer the University sponsored the Town’s Code Enforcement Officer to accompany our Dean of Students and Director of Judicial Affairs to attend a regional town and gown conference in Boston, Massachusetts on the topic of dealing with college student behavior in local towns.
10. For the last two years the Dean of Students and/or the Vice President for Student Affairs has contacted and met with every Eastern student ticketed or arrested by Willimantic Police. These meetings contributed to less than 5% of the students repeating the negative behavior that led to their arrests. We are continuing this practice this year.

11. In recent years, we have heard from the Town about their inability to fund Willimantic Police overtime related to enforcement when called upon to respond to parties involving our students. The University listened and responded by securing a 300k grant this past summer from the State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DHMAS) to establish a response to underage drinking and high risk behavior of Eastern’s students on and off campus. The grant calls for a coalition between the University and the Town which has just been secured. The terms of the grant require we conduct a needs assessment and then develop a strategic plan based upon the findings. A consultant is currently conducting the needs assessment with the University, the Town’s Board of Education, and the Town’s existing data as its basis for findings. The coalition will have its first meeting in October, and consists of the following people:

- Lisa Maruzo-Bolduc, Willimantic Chief of Police
- Marc Scrivener, Willimantic Fire Chief
- Matt Vertefeuille, Willimantic Code Enforcement Officer
- Ray Ortiz, Willimantic Drug Free Committee
- Patricia Calvo, Windham Youth Services Bureau
- Jeff Garewski, Eastern Chief of Police
- Angelo Simoni, Eastern Director of Judicial Affairs
- Aliza Makuch, Eastern Wellness Promotion Coordinator
- Mercy Arias, Eastern Director of Counseling and Psychological Services
- Patricia Szczys, Eastern Biology Professor and Willimantic Resident
- Kenneth Bedini, Eastern Vice President for Student Affairs