

**REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING
JANUARY 23, 2014**

President Niksch called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Recording Secretary Gena Knapp took Roll Call. Members answering the roll call were Doug Niksch, Jim Langen, Greg Shook, and Craig Earley. Tim Cottingham was not in attendance. Phillip Kuiper arrived at the meeting at 6:25 PM. Also present were Building Administrator Tom Trulley, Clerk-Treasurer Judith Walters, and two members of the press.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Langen made a motion to approve the September 26, 2013 regular meeting minutes, seconded by Mr. Earley and carried by voice vote.

NEW BUSINESS

Election of Officers – Mr. Langen made a motion for Doug Niksch to remain President, seconded by Mr. Earley and carried by voice vote. Mr. Earley made a motion for Jim Langen to remain Vice-President, seconded by Mr. Shook and carried by voice vote. Mr. Langen made a motion for Mr. Earley to become the Secretary, but Mr. Earley declined the position. Mr. Niksch made a motion for Mr. Shook to become the Secretary, seconded by Mr. Earley and carried by voice vote.

Discussion of 2014 Goals – Mr. Niksch stated we had a good agenda last year, and we did accomplish a lot of things that we tried to do such as the Downtown District that has seen a lot of participation. He stated his question to the Commission was, what would you like to proceed with? There are a number of things that we have approached and a number of things that are still not complete. He stated he was just looking for an open discussion on which areas the members would like to pursue. We were all at the meeting last night and got a feel for the direction that the Town Council wanted to go in. The Redevelopment Commission's focus needs to be areas of blithe and to find ways to bring more jobs to the area. Mr. Niksch gave a few examples of the areas that were discussed last year that may be able to be revisited, such as Costas and Rieter. Mr. Earley stated that last night Craig Hendrix from SEH made the comment that you can acquire property by eminent domain. Mr. Earley asked if that is something the Commission should look in to for Costas due to the fact that the building is just sitting and deteriorating. Mr. Trulley stated that the person who bought Costas previously made a small payment on the \$140,000 in taxes that is due; therefore it was taken off of the most recent tax sale. He stated he has made a phone call to Lake County and has a meeting set up to see if the Town can acquire it so that we do not have to run it through as an unsafe building because we do not have the funds for it. Mr. Earley stated we could still discuss what we need to do with the property if something like this happens. Mr. Niksch agreed and stated it does need to be discussed in case this can happen with other properties as well. He stated he believed it was discussed before to come up with a plan in case the property came up on the Sheriff's sale. That way we would be able to have conversations to negotiate that type of sale. Mr. Trulley stated that would be on a Commissioner's sale, but we never made plans for the property. Mr. Niksch stated he believed that is what Mr. Hendrix was talking about last night as well, that if you have a plan in place, it is much more likely that the State or County will go your way. Mr. Trulley stated if you condemn it as an unsafe building that is a good enough plan because they know you will tear it down so it is not a safety hazard. Mr. Earley stated that is what he is talking about when he says have a plan because we all know how much it cost to tear the old school down and we do not have that type

of money. He asked if there was some place we could find that money if we get in to this. Mr. Trulley stated the money for the old school came from the County, which came through a Federal grant. Discussion followed.

Mr. Niksch stated there are a number of other areas around that we need to look in to such as Rieter and Ashland. Mr. Langen asked what happened with Ashland. He stated he knew there was a buyer in mind, but they pulled out. Mr. Trulley stated he has not heard anything further. Mr. Earley stated when we had the combined meeting with the Town Council and Annexation Committee, Matt Reardon was here, and he specifically named off three organizations that can advertise your vacant properties; Indiana Forum, NIPSCO, and Loop Net. He stated he believed that NIPSCO did not charge anything to be involved with. Mr. Earley explained that he had a representative from Northwest Indiana Forum at one of the Council meetings to discuss their program. They talked about the Forum having access to a national website where we list these properties with details of what they are and when businesses across the nation start looking, we pop up on these sites for Northwest Indiana. He stated there is a fee involved and he believes it is \$1200 - \$1500 annually, but he would like to get someone from the Forum to one of the Redevelopment Commission meetings to present their company and get a little more specific than they did at the Council meeting. The members agreed that it was a good idea.

Mr. Langen asked if the Town did any sort of abatement for Ashland when they first came in. Mr. Earley stated that he believed there was some sort of water agreement with them. Clerk-Treasurer Judith Walters stated there was an agreement with Ashland. Discussion followed regarding possible abatements for certain businesses that come before the Council. Mr. Niksch stated that Susan Peterson used to get emails from the Indiana Economic Development Group that she would forward to him. He asked who gets those now. Mr. Trulley stated he receives those emails. Mr. Niksch asked if we are on their list of people to consistently receive those emails. Discussion followed regarding getting a hold of someone to make sure that we receive those emails on a regular basis.

Mr. Kuiper stated he has a goal that is somewhat of a revisit goal. If you look in the past two or three years at the businesses that have come in to Lowell, such as the Signature Banquet Hall, the Franciscan Alliance medical center, the nursing home, and Family Dollar, there is no doubt that those are a direct result of the Redevelopment Commission. When we formed this Commission that was our goal, to invite businesses to our area. When we did that, we found the best guru for that, Matt Reardon. He stated he believed he is a stranger to Lowell right now, and we need to get him back here and utilize him. We have two great sites, Rieter and Ashland, that we know are willing to do what needs to be done to get someone in there. The members agreed with Mr. Kuiper.

Mr. Earley stated he would like to discuss the Rieter property. Since it has a right-of-way going along side of it with a railway, what else can we do to sell that property? We had the bait out there, but it fell apart. Mr. Niksch stated that property is currently on a short list, but he does not know anything about the client except it is big. He stated CSX would call him and ask if it is still available and the client may come down and drive around. If it goes further than that, then the CSX will call again and let us know where we are. The only other thing that we can do to it is to look more in to annexation. Mr. Earley asked if that would make it more attractive. Mr. Niksch stated it would. Mr. Earley stated that was one of our goals from last year that we did not even touch. Mr. Kuiper stated he believed that should be recommended to the Annexation Committee. Mr. Niksch agreed.

Mr. Nicksch stated we had started the process with the school creating our website and asked if we had heard anything from them recently. Clerk-Treasurer Walters stated we had a meeting with the kids and we were told that they were going to get back to us with four to five different websites that we could choose from. We had not heard anything from them until this past Tuesday. They had sent in one example of a website and told us that the class is done for the year and that she did not have another design class this semester. She stated she was not sure what we should do next because what was sent was very basic. Mr. Nicksch asked if he could have the link to the website to look at. Mrs. Knapp stated she would forward him the email. Clerk-Treasurer Walters stated at this point, she believed that the Town was ready to look for someone to hire to develop a new website. When we met with the kids and the teacher, it sounded like it would be an ongoing thing, but when we received the email, it stated that the class is done and there was not going to be another one this semester.

Mr. Nicksch paused the meeting so that Clerk-Treasurer Judith Walters could swear in all of the members.

Mr. Nicksch stated he would call Jay Blackman to discuss the website. Clerk-Treasurer Walters stated that would be good because from what we understand, they are done. Mr. Nicksch stated he would like to have someone direct them as to what type of website they should have. Mr. Earley stated that is true because if someone sees this area, the first thing they are going to do is look for our website since everyone has one. It would be nice to have that information on our website, or some sort of link to direct them to a national website, like the Northwest Indiana Forum, that has the information on properties. Discussion followed.

Mr. Nicksch stated there were some discussions regarding the South Shore Railroad looking in to advancing some of their movements to Lowell sometime down the road. If we were to do some planning for that and as a Town come up with some ideas that support that, there may be an avenue to set the stage for having a depot here in Lowell. Mr. Kuiper stated if and when it becomes a reality, there is a lot of planning that needs to happen to be prepared for that. You could never start planning too early. Mr. Langen stated it would be a good idea to reach out to Pete Visclosky since he is the spearhead of that to let him know that we are behind him 100%. Mr. Kuiper stated he would be glad to reach out to Mr. Visclosky to see if maybe someone could come down to talk to us about it. Mr. Nicksch stated that would also be another opportunity for Mr. Reardon. Discussion followed. Mr. Nicksch asked if we knew if the people would even want a train station in Town. Mr. Kuiper stated there was discussion several years ago and he believes it may come down to a fifty/fifty thing. He stated he still believed it could be a highly successful venture if you do your planning well. There is also a huge financial burden. That would be something that would have to be discussed and planned accordingly.

Mr. Nicksch asked if there was anything that we needed to do to help with the preparation of the Illiana toll road. Mr. Earley stated he spoke with Mitch Barloga from NIRPC about incorporating things in the development of that highway including bike and walking paths. We as a community have to start asking or screaming for these things. There will be a meeting here at the end of January with the Fire and EMS and then with the municipality and townships where we need to have a plan. If we are getting this toll road, we should get everything that comes along with it. Mr. Nicksch stated he agreed.

Mr. Nicksch stated that at the meeting the previous night, there were discussions about the retention ponds in Town. He asked what they were planning on doing with all of that dirt. Mr. Earley stated he was not sure if this was for the Redevelopment Commission or not, but there will be some over passes and under passes involved. One will be near Freedom Park on North

Nichols. He stated he was not sure if we could recommend this to Freedom Park or the Town Council, but they do not have a focal point other than the silo. Freedom Park is a nice park, but it could be better. We tried to give some incentives to the townships to refinance the Park Bonds so that there was some extra money to improve the park, but it did not work. He stated there is a low area through the northwest corner where we could dig and make a lake or pond to give the park another focal point. If they are going to dig a hole somewhere, maybe we can get them to dig it there. Mr. Earley stated there is also the sledding hill that we could make larger or higher with the dirt.

Mr. Nicksch stated the Annexation Committee has sent a letter to the Lake County Parks Department in regards to the potential annexation of Buckley Homestead. He stated we might be able to look in to grants to help them develop that property with things like a baseball field, skateboard park, or golf course. These are just ideas, nothing is set in stone. Discussion followed.

Mr. Nicksch stated one of the items from last year was Bonnie Lake. He stated he is not that familiar with it, but asked if there was something that could be done to improve it or make it more attractive. Mr. Earley stated the bike committee road out there and there is a way to get through on a private road, but we have talked to the school and they would be on board with putting in some sort of biking and walking trail around the lake that would come out by the school. He stated he would never want to see that area developed in to a park, but instead as a nature area like it is now with walking paths.

Mr. Langen suggested asking the public what they want to see in Town. There is no audience at these meetings so no one knows what we are talking about trying to do around Town. There needs to be more people involved somehow to see what they want. Discussion followed. Mr. Nicksch stated there is a really good start and this needs to be an ongoing list. Mr. Kuiper stated he had heard that there was some legislation changed on the revitalization area as far as the length of the abatement, and he would like to follow up with Matt Reardon on that as well. Discussion followed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

ADJOURNMENT

With no further questions or comments, Mr. Langen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 PM, seconded by Mr. Kuiper and carried by voice vote.

Doug Nicksch, President

Greg Shook, Secretary