

**REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING  
FEBRUARY 21, 2012  
6:00 PM**

The meeting was called to order by President Niksch at 6:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Roll Call was taken. Members answering the roll call were Philip Kuiper, Doug Niksch, Craig Earley, and Tony Muscari. Absent was Jim Langen. Also present were School Board President Doug Ward, Attorney Greg Sobkowski, Matt Reardon Consultant SEH and Recording Secretary Chris Marbach. Also present were many citizens and 3 media.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Mr. Kuiper moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Earley and carried by voice vote.

**Old Business:**

President Niksch stated he was moving the agenda items to have the update of HSA Medical office project as the first item.

**1. Update of HSA Medical Office Project (Franciscan Alliance).** Matt Reardon explained that there was representatives present from HSA and gave the commission an updated timetable from Ice Miller and a copy of the proposed project finance provided by Financial Solutions Group, the Town's financial consultant. John Wilson, President of HSA Primecare explained that HSA Primecare is a regional real estate company, which focuses on health care real estate development. They are partnered with the Sisters of St. Francis who are now known as the Franciscan Alliance of Crown Point Hospital to have an outpatient facility on Route 2. The program has started and they are looking at something in the range of 12,000 sq. ft. that will bring the Sister's Medical Facility to Lowell to have outpatient care. They are looking at Dr. Hile to move his practice to the building along with other services by the Franciscan Alliance. That program has not been finalized, but will keep the commission up to date on that progress. Jon Boley of HSA stated they were starting their programming on the building; they are starting on the design and re-platting the site that will take them through July or August of 2012 with a ground break potentially in the fall. Matt Reardon stated the time line provided by the Bond Council shows a potential closing date of April 17, 2012.

**2. Presentation and discussion of grants for downtown Lowell.** President Niksch explained the reason for this meeting is because the commission is looking for input from the businesses and owners in the Downtown District to revitalize the downtown area. Mr. Kuiper asked the attorney to explain the Tax Abatement Legislation. Attorney Sobkowski explained there was an addition to the Tax Abatement Statute, which would apply to deduction applications filed by a developer or a business after June 30<sup>th</sup> of 2011. It provides some enhanced Tax Abatement Benefits under certain circumstances: a vacant building with at least 50,000 sq. feet (provided the applicant agrees to use the

building for industrial or commercial purposes); an applicant who agrees to invest at least ten million dollars in property that is eligible for a tax abatement deduction; a proposed rehabilitation of property located in a “designated downtown area”. The statute provides that the Town Council by ordinance can designate a portion of the town as a designated downtown area and under the statute the areas that are eligible to be included in this downtown area include the Central Business District of the Town or any commercial or mixed use area within a neighborhood that is traditionally served as the retail service and communal focal point. Mr. Kuiper wanted to know if this would include any business in the downtown area would qualify for this tax abatement. Attorney Sobkowski answered any business that is either going to build a new building, is going to rehabilitate an existing building or is going to install manufacturing or other equipment that’s eligible for tax abatement under the statute could come and file an application and would be entitled to the enhanced deduction that could be up to 100% of the gross assessed value for the first three years and would pay no taxes for the first year for new equipment that’s been installed or the new construction that’s been done and after that it is a sliding scale so by the end of the abatement, they are back to paying 100% taxes, so in year two they will have some tax responsibility both for the personal property and the property abatement. Mr. Kuiper asked what the qualifications were for an existing building; such as do they have to have so many employees. Attorney Sobkowski stated this was up to the Council to decide whether the investment in the community and if the jobs will be retained as a result of the investment or new jobs that will be created will justify granting the tax abatement application. Mr. Earley asked if the designated area could be anywhere or does it have to be contiguous. Attorney Sobkowski stated it would be one designated area which either consists of a Central Business District or it can be a little bigger than the Central Business District as long as it is an area that traditionally served as a retail service or the communal focal point and it would be one contiguous area. The Council would constitute the designated downtown area for purposes of the enhanced deduction. President Niksch wanted to know if the Council could use the Economic Development area. Attorney Sobkowski asked if they really want to use the Economic Development Area and give up the tax increment for people that might apply for this enhanced deduction. Mr. Earley wanted to know if the designation of the downtown district was the Council’s decision only. Attorney Sobkowski stated the Town Council controls tax abatement. He further stated all of the downtown district would also have to be a part of the economic revitalization area and in order for a company to get this tax abatement, their project has to be located in this economic revitalization area. President Niksch said then any structure that is in the downtown area now would fall under the 3<sup>rd</sup> category and not have to meet the 50,000 sq. ft. or ten million dollar requirement for the tax abatement to apply. Matt Reardon explained that if the Council chose the downtown area they could create a revitalization area around it and would enable the downtown business owners to request a relief from taxes to do enhancements on vacant structures and create an incentive to attract people to make an investment and not have vacant structures.

President Niksch opened the meeting to the public. Sara Pierce, 111 E. Main St., asked if the building owners would still have to abide by the ordinance to hire a contractor to do the work on their buildings. Attorney Sobkowski stated this does not change that process. Sara Pierce stated when the businesses file the enhancement application, these

applications are reviewed solely by the Town Council and if they are upset with a business, it could be rejected. Attorney Sobkowski stated the Town Council, by statute has the discretion whether a deduction gets approved or not. Ken Floyd, 257 W. Commercial asked if its new construction can they automatically get the abatement. Attorney Sobkowski stated they would qualify to apply. Ken Floyd asked what if they tear down a building and re-build, can they still get the abatement. Attorney Sobkowski stated they would get the abatement only for the cost of the building and not the demolition. Mr. Earley stated there are historic guidelines that have to be followed in that area and he wasn't sure that any of these buildings could be demolished. President Niksch explained they passed out some copies of the guidelines but the original was available at the Town Hall. Carrie Austgen asked about the designated area and was there a certain amount that needs to be invested. Attorney Sobkowski stated it didn't matter and it was up to the Council. President Niksch asked doesn't it have to increase the assessed value of the facility to get the abatement. Attorney Sobkowski stated if the project does not increase the assessed value, there is nothing to get the abatement on. Scott Koehler asked for clarification, because he heard things phrased two ways, the available tax abatement would be only on the additional taxes of the enhancement of the property, so whatever the base taxes were would remain the same. Attorney Sobkowski stated this is correct.

President Niksch asked for suggestions from the public. Marilyn Diller, 129 Parkview Ave said that the south side of the street downtown looks pretty good, but the north side looks bad with the exception of Lowell Carpet. She wanted to know if the town could make the owners of the buildings clean the windows.

Carl Ferro, 410 E. Commercial said he is a property owner in downtown Lowell, he used to have six buildings but had to get rid of them and has also reduced his rent just to keep tenants in his buildings and wanted to know if the Town Council could help because he is keeping the business and tenants in the building. He also stated that he is not making money because he has to put too much money in his building. He suggested that the town ease off on the \$100 occupancy that is charged to the new businesses that come in. Mr. Earley explained this fee is a fire fee and not an occupancy permit fee.

Martha Burger-Farrellbegg, 515 Illinois wanted to know if there was any way that a by pass route could be done to eliminate truck and heavy traffic on Rt. 2 going through the downtown district. Mr. Earley stated Rt. 2 was a State Road and not a Town Road and it would be very difficult to eliminate the truck traffic going down the street but sometime in the future there might be some possibilities to do something about this.

Rena Helton, 302 E. Commercial stated she has a business downtown and the parking is a major issue with all the businesses. She suggests tenants of the buildings should park in the parking lots so that customers can park in the street. She understands that there is a fee for the tenants to park in the parking lot and feels this is why they park in the street because they do not want to pay the fee. She recommended a sign should be placed to let people know about the parking in the back of the buildings. She also recommended that the Police enforce the two-hour parking limit.

Jim Sickinger, 314 E. Commercial stated he wanted to thank the Development Commission for inviting them to this meeting. He continued by listing the problems and suggestions he had; Issue One is parking and being able to park close to the store they are shopping at. The two hour parking limit is a good thing, but is being used by the tenants in the buildings and this two hour parking should be pursued to use the parking lot behind the downtown buildings. He stated the Town of Lowell has seen this problem as a moneymaking opportunity and decided to pass an ordinance prohibiting over night parking in the rear parking lot so they can sell over night parking permits to the residents that live in the apartments. This causes the tenants to park in the street and he has seen cars parked for at least three days without being moved. He felt the town should have discussed this problem with the downtown merchants. Issue Two, the Lowell Street Department has done a wonderful job cleaning the street of Lowell, however when plowing the snow gets pushed onto the sidewalks then the merchants try to shovel the sidewalks and the snow ends up at the curb. When a customer parks it is difficult for them to get over the piles of snow at the curb and cannot open the passenger side of their cars or exit on the passenger side. His suggestion is that the town should remove the snow from the curbs. Issue Three, Nuisance Ordinance, customers complain about the business climate in Lowell and the unfriendliness of the Town by issuing jay-walking tickets in the downtown area and he also had complaints of customers using the parking lot and have been ticketed for parking over the painted parking line. His final issue was trash blowing on Commercial Ave and it has become worse since the Town removed all the public trash containers in the downtown area. He stated that those containers were actually purchased by the merchants. He suggested the Town supply trash containers in the downtown area.

Connie Shrombeck, Lowell Tribune asked where St. Anthony's medical center. Mr. Reardon stated it would be east of the Speedway gas station on Rt. 2 and Holtz Road.

Lori Clark, 316 Commercial also has concerns regarding the trash on Commercial Ave and the sidewalks could use some work. She suggested looking at other towns such as Hebron to see what they have to offer and even talking to them and get ideas.

Lynn Scheeringa, 201 E. Commercial suggested that the Town come up with some small incentives to have someone open a business in Lowell. She cited Griffith as an example and how they snow blow the sidewalks as a service to the merchants. She also suggested that the parking lots get cleaned up, especially the north parking lot, and put more lighting in them.

Rena Helton, 302 E. Commercial suggested activities to get community interest and bring people together as a community. Mr. Earley stated he has spoken to some people about getting the farmer's market back and asked if she had any other ideas.

Sara Pierce, 111 E. Main suggested the Friends of the Library and the many activities they have, Buckley Homestead has activities and some other activities are also posted on the web. She suggested that they need to find out how to get the information out to let people know what activities are out there.

President Niksch suggested a Community Board to announce any activities coming up.

Connie Schrombeck, suggested if the Lowell Tribune gets the information on upcoming activities, it could be advertised in the newspaper.

Martha Burger-Farrellbegg suggested putting upcoming functions on the Town of Lowell website.

Mona Kuechenberg, Lowell Downtown Merchants Association stated because of lack of involvement, the Lowell Mainstreet Association is no longer in existence and there will not be a Taste of Lowell or a Christmas Walk this year. The Lowell Chamber of Commerce, the Lowell Downtown Merchants Association and the Lowell Mainstreet Association have been bringing activities to the downtown area for the last 15 years. She suggested that the businesses need to be more supportive when it comes to events and activities; communication with the Town, the businesses, the community and the organizations needs to be improved. She has heard that the Town of Lowell is not business friendly. Mr. Kelley asked if she had an example of this. Ms. Kuechenberg stated that putting a sign in the downtown historic district is a major ordeal. She suggested the apartment dwellers be restricted in using street parking and have it only for the clientele and also restrict them from using any trash containers in the downtown area. The apartment owners should supply dumpsters for their tenants. A speaker system is installed in the downtown area with music playing. Owners of vacant buildings and apartment dwellers should keep the snow clean in front of their buildings. Make the entrance to the South Parking lot look better and put more lighting in the walkway from Commercial Ave to the south parking lot possibly with archways on both sides of the walkway.

Richard Kelley stated the tenants parking is an easy one to solve, the proprietor calls the Police, the Police call a towing company and they tow the car. After this is done a few times the message would get out and the tenants won't park in the street anymore.

Angie Fletcher, Lowell Tribune suggested using students from the school, and next year there will be a program for them to do 40 hours of community service to graduate and if someone would put together a list, it could be given to them so they would know what to do.

Doug Ward, School Board President stated they are going to organize this and right now the students are deciding what they want to do and he thought a list was a good idea.

Carrie Austgen asked if there was a time limit to apply for the grant. Attorney Sobkowski stated there was not a deadline.

Cassandra Bustamante, 302 E. Commercial also suggested that Rt. 2 be re-routed, Lowell should have a focal point in the downtown area, the Town Hall should be on Commercial Ave with a community center and the Jay walking ordinance should be repealed between Mill St. and Fremont St.

Mark Todd, 108 W. Commercial suggested the building on the corner of Mill St. and Rt. W be demolished and make a parking lot with meters and bring the car show back to Mill St. Mr. Kuiper stated they plan on bringing the car show back to Mill St. and it will be discuss at the February 27<sup>th</sup> Town Council meeting.

Rena Helton, 302 E. Commercial wanted to know if there was any grant money available for the business and property owners. Matt Reardon stated there are other towns that have been able to help business owners through the Redevelopment Commission; the issue with the Town is not the willingness to provide the grant but the money to give to the businesses. There has been no assessment collected in the TIF district, so there are not any funds available to distribute.

Mr. Kuiper moved to adjourn at 7:40 P.M.

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Doug Niksch, Chairman

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Philip Kuiper, Secretary

Note: The above-proposed minutes are submitted for review and approval as the official minutes by the Redevelopment Commission.

Christine Marbach – Recording Secretary