

**REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING  
SEPTEMBER 26, 2013**

President Niksch called the meeting to order at 6:07 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Recording Secretary Gena Knapp took Roll Call. Members answering the roll call were Doug Niksch, Jim Langen, Phillip Kuiper, and Tim Cottingham. Anthony Muscari and Craig Earley were not in attendance. Also present were Building Administrator Tom Trulley, Clerk-Treasurer Judith Walters, Town Administrator Susan Peterson, one press and three citizens.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Langen made a motion to approve the June 27, 2013 regular meeting minutes, seconded by Mr. Kuiper and carried by voice vote.

**NEW BUSINESS**

Discussion on the Development and Organization of the Town's Web Page – Jay Blackman – Director of Information and Educational Technology – Mr. Niksch stated he would like to have a discussion regarding the Town's web page, and introduced Jay Blackman and Marcia Skurka who are teachers at the Lowell High School. He stated we have a web page right now, but we would like to work closer with the school to come up with some different ideas for marketing and promoting the Town. If a business would want to come to Lowell, we would want them to be able to look up this web page and find things that they are looking for. Mr. Niksch gave an example of Chesterton's web page and how much information it had. He stated he had invited Clerk-Treasurer Judith Walters and Town Administrator Susan Peterson since they work closely with the site to get their opinion on the project.

Jay Blackman stated we have had a discussion with Mr. Niksch regarding students developing a website for the Town. He stated that he invited Ms. Skurka along with him because she is currently teaching the marketing courses for the high school students, and she has experience with teaching web page courses as well. When the discussion started about some of the ideas we have for involving students, we began the discussion in our business department and there were ideas beyond just developing a website. We discussed how we would like to market the Town, and how we would like to differentiate ourselves from other places. Ms. Skurka stated she had spoke with Robyn Leslie, who is teaching web design at the high school, and she does a similar project with her students at the end of each semester, and this project would probably fulfill the Town's needs. After reviewing some projects, her students would be more than qualified to give you what you are looking for. She stated she was hoping to talk to whatever group of people it may be to get some parameters regarding the website. Ms. Skurka described the courses that she teaches at the high school. She stated the driving question in the marketing course is, "Can increasing pedestrian traffic improve commerce and vitality in downtown Lowell?" We started with this question because we are looking at the foot traffic coming through

and we do not just want to make it a one-stop town. The students have been concentrating on promoting Lowell as a destination where you would spend several hours, not just drive through. Ms. Skurka explained how the marketing class and web design class are working together on projects to make it more of a real-life experience for the students and how she would love to involve the marketing class in to this project for the Town as well. She gave a brief explanation of some of the projects that her marketing class is working on. Mr. Cottingham stated he believed this would fulfill needs for both training the students, and providing the Town with what they need in a website. This is a great way to promote our young people and the Town itself. Mr. Blackman stated the new tech courses at the high school are trying to go in the direction of having a project-based learning environment and a big piece of that is the students interacting with stakeholders and subject matter experts. They need to learn how to interact with professionals and experts so they can get the answers that are needed.

Mr. Niksch stated he is very impressed with everything that has been said, but he is even more impressed with the students learning how to promote our Town. He asked Mrs. Peterson who handles the web page now. Mrs. Peterson stated that Clerk-Treasurer Walters and herself have input on what needs to be on there, but the Park does also. Staff member Cassie Smith also does some things with the page, and anything that she cannot do, we have Gigahertz do for us. Mr. Blackman stated Sean Davis from Gigahertz is one of the instructors at the high school so there may be some opportunities there already built in. Ms. Skurka stated her students are also looking at incorporating other classes in to the marketing classes and possibly starting to maintain some of the planter boxes in the downtown area or the river-scaping at the creek.

Mr. Blackman stated since there are small groups within the class, we will be able to provide five or six different proposals rather than just one option to go with. Ms. Skurka stated her students come up with widely different ideas so there will be some good things to choose from. She stated there is also cost involved and we are looking at public funding, grants, private investors, and angel investors for redevelopment. Mr. Cottingham suggested maybe going to the Legacy Foundation since it would be a partnership between the Town and school system. Mr. Kuiper asked if this was something we could go to NIRPC with. Clerk-Treasurer Walters stated she was not sure, but her and Mr. Trulley talked about going through the Northwest Indiana Forum as well. Mr. Kuiper stated to keep in mind that this needs to promote the entire Town, not just the downtown area because most of our merchants are not downtown. Mr. Blackman stated all of the project pieces that they have come up with up to this point have been without any notice that this part of the project is going on.

Mr. Langen stated one of the unique things that Lowell has to offer is that it has one school district. When you travel to other neighboring towns they have three or four different school districts. Mr. Langen gave the example of other areas that go by the school district that you live in because that will determine your value. He stated we have unification and this is a great place to raise a family. Mr. Niksch stated when the Redevelopment Commission started; we named our school system as one of the assets of our community. We are not just looking at downtown Lowell, we are looking at

everyone that has a Lowell address. Ms. Skurka stated we would love to expand the downtown culture because our community is tight. We are looking at ways of drawing from our own community and then bringing people from outside communities in.

Mr. Niksch asked if they could come back to everyone and give some of their ideas. Ms. Skurka stated we would do more than just that. We can come back with about six or seven different marketing plans. Mr. Kuiper stated if you came back with however many, would there be some recommendations in there. Ms. Skurka stated absolutely. These students are so excited to do this and so many times they have done projects where they have not had the community or true stakeholders behind it. Mr. Kuiper stated when you are to that point of making presentations, we could have a work session where the kids could come to discuss it all, and then they could stay for our meeting. Ms. Skurka stated they have already started making a list of questions to get a better idea of what you will need. Mr. Cottingham stated the best thing would be to have a contact person for the Town to work with. Mr. Blackman stated a big part of the process would be questioning. They need to find out how they would want to drive their recommendations to you. Mr. Kuiper stated that would not be a problem. Ms. Skurka stated these are still students that are in class during the day, but with technology, we can set up Skype or anything else to help. Discussion followed about when the best time to meet would be. Everyone decided that during the day would be a good time. Mrs. Walters asked if the students could come here and start with what the staff thinks we need. Ms. Skurka stated that would be possible. She stated she would like to set it up where the Town would be the customer, the marketing class would be the company who you contract with, and the marketing company would then inter-phase with all of the support areas. She stated she would like for her marketing students to come out and meet with the staff as well to get ideas of what you need. Discussion followed.

Mr. Kuiper stated it would also be important for the students to know about the TIF areas and revitalization areas of the Town as well. Mr. Langen stated this is a lot more than what he expected. Mr. Niksch stated funding was mentioned and asked what type of funding they were talking about. Mr. Cottingham stated there might be some soft costs involved. Mr. Blackman stated the web software is provided for the students as part of the curriculum, so that will be covered. Ms. Skurka stated there might be some postage fees involved or something along those lines. Mr. Blackman stated those things would be included in the recommendations that the students make. Discussion followed.

Mr. Kuiper asked what the next step would be. Ms. Skurka stated she would go back to her students and let them know you are eager to move forward, have them put together their questions, make appointments with the staff, and start working with Ms. Leslie's students to coordinate schedules. The Commission agreed to move forward with the project. Discussion followed on who the contact person could be for the Town. Clerk-Treasurer Walters stated they could start with her and go from there. Town Council President Edgar Corns stated he believed this was a very good idea. Everyone agreed.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Clerk-Treasurer Walters stated the Redevelopment Commission has to file a report with the DLGF by October 1<sup>st</sup>, which she had completed. The 2012 Redevelopment Commission had no revenue or disbursements. Mr. Niksch asked if we had received any revenue. Mrs. Walters stated you did receive \$3.82. She stated HSA, for the St. Anthony's project, has had two drawdowns on their Economic Development Bonds, just to make you aware. We have acknowledged that they have made those drawdowns. We are not approving the work, just acknowledging that they are doing the work.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

With no further questions or comments, Mr. Langen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:40 PM, seconded by Mr. Kuiper and carried by voice vote.

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Doug Niksch, President

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Anthony Muscari, Secretary