

**City of Merrill
Redevelopment Authority (RDA) – Informal Discussion**

**Tuesday, November 11th, 2014 at 8:00 A.M.
City Hall Council Chambers**

RDA Present: Bill Bialecki, Ryan Schwartzman, and Amanda Kostman

RDA Absent: Jill Laufenberg, David Hayes, Karen Karow and Wally Smith

Others: Alderperson Chris Malm, City Administrator Dave Johnson, City Attorney Tom Hayden, Finance Director Kathy Unertl, Mary Rajek from Redevelopment Resources, City Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Darin Pagel, and Community Development Program Administrator Shari Wicke. Mike Morrissey from Morrissey Consulting participated via phone.

Call to Order: Since no RDA quorum, the group began informal meeting at 8:10 a.m.

Update and discussion of Downtown Revitalization Program:

Morrissey emphasized primary City/RDA objectives have been building tax base and job creation. Key program components will need to include continued “blight” elimination and building façade financing.

Downtowns are all about people – place to live, shop, and gather for events. Having a plan with action items is critical, as is implementation strategies. There are potential different levels of impact:

- Small scale – such as benches, bike racks, and destination businesses.
- Impact scale – such as public parking and other infrastructure improvements.
- Transformative scale – investments that inspire change.

Bialecki strongly recommended making reinvestment in the Courthouse block. Pagel advised on current plan to remove about thirteen trees from this site. Rajek commented that one of the highest traffic count locations is the area by Lincoln Community Bank (i.e. Hwy 64/Stuyvesant St.). This location has one of the best views of the Lincoln County Courthouse clock tower.

The importance of programming was mentioned, including potential relocation of farmer’s market to downtown instead of Normal Park. Kostman requested consideration of outdoor seating at restaurants and near the bookstore if public open space were created. These are the type of gathering/social amenities that a younger demographic is looking for.

Unertl noted existing downtown business group events such as chili cook-off. Unertl also advised that Laufenberg had suggested some type of broader linkage to the City's historical logging past. There is currently a log on the east side of the Courthouse. Morrissey suggested considering potential statute in the round-a-bout.

Unertl reported that the mid-October walking tour participants highlighted recent positive City investments, such as the black metal fences constructed by the Street Department and the Highway 64 decorative retaining wall across from ACE Hardware. A potential new retaining wall could replace some of the asphalt paving on the backside of Nienow Law Office parcel.

Seeing an area during daylight and night makes a difference. Unertl reported that there is only one streetlight on River Street between Park Street on the east to the Courtview access street area. No lighting under the Center Avenue Bridge. Although the graffiti has been painted over, perhaps some type of public art might be appropriate. Morrissey also suggested including expanded holiday lighting on the Center Avenue bridge railing.

How to connect the Park Street end of River Bend Trail to the downtown was discussed. Massive numbers of trucks are often parked everywhere in this area. River Street is the only legal connection since the path is on the south side of the railroad tracks.

Both Schwartzman and Rajek noted that the common downtown issue is the hours that businesses are open. Having businesses to go to after 5:00 p.m. or on weekends is important to vitality of downtown area.

Malm noted importance of physical appearance of properties (especially in summer months), including negative impression of weeds growing through sidewalks or along buildings. Johnson reported that one option is City spraying sidewalks to kill weeds although that comes with a taxpayer cost.

Looking for additional input from Redevelopment Authority Commissioners, Alderpersons, and City departments. The City's team will continue to meet with ideas and develop some conceptual sketches of potential improvements.

Next RDA meeting: Tuesday, December 2nd at 8:00 a.m.

Adjournment: Meeting informally adjourned at 8:57 a.m.

Discussion Summary prepared by RDA Secretary Kathy Unertl