

**City of Merrill  
Redevelopment Authority (RDA)**

**Tuesday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 at 8:00 A.M.  
City Hall Council Chambers**

RDA Present: Bill Bialecki, Ryan Schwartzman, Karen Karow, Wally Smith,  
Jill Laufenberg, and Amanda Kostman

RDA Absent: David Hayes

Others: Alderperson Dave Sukow, City Administrator Dave Johnson, City Attorney Tom Hayden, Finance Director Kathy Unertl, Ken Maule from Lincoln County Economic Development Corp., Kristen Fish and Mary Rajek from Redevelopment Resources, City Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Darin Pagel, Tonia Speener from Clark-Dietz, and Christine Vorpagel, Dynamo Creative Marketing

**Call to Order:** Chair Bialecki called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

**Approval of meeting minutes from January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015:**

**Motion (Kostman/Schwartzman) to approve the meeting minutes.** Carried.

**Status Update and Continued Discussion on Downtown Revitalization Planning:**

Mary Rajek from Redevelopment Resources reported that the planning session was well attended and that there was positive feedback. Individuals at the meeting strongly supported the concept of pocket park at the former Guy's Shop site. Unertl commented that the former Thelma's building has huge amount of space available.

Ken Maule from Lincoln County Economic Development Corp. emphasized the need for visual welcome at the Lincoln Community Bank corner that could attract individuals to continue straight downtown instead of following State Highway 64.

Mayor Bialecki advised that the Merrill Common Council action on proposed acquisition of former Guy's Shop site was "not at this time". Karow commented that just having a grass area available for people to use to relax would be positive for the downtown area. Fish advised that a conceptual sketch is being prepared for green-space development.

Alderperson Dave Sukow noted that RDA Commissioners Wally Smith and David Hayes asked why hurrying to acquire the site at the last RDA meeting. Sukow emphasized that why take off the tax roll if nothing is being planned. Sukow also did not feel that the view of the WPS hydro dam was aesthetically pleasing.

Redevelopment Resources representatives will continue drafting of the Downtown Revitalization Plan with some conceptual drawings being prepared. Some minimal expensive items include planters, bike racks, benches, and potential angle parking.

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**Status Update on Idle Sites Grant Application to WEDC:** There has been no notice to the City/RDA on grant application status. WEDC staff has indicated to City representatives that it was a strong grant application.

**Update and discussion on potential inclusion of Lincoln County Fairgrounds within Tax Increment District No. 3 (East Side):**

Bialecki, Johnson, and Unertl highlighted the economic impact coming from the limited events at the Lincoln County Fairgrounds. The importance of the property is as a community amenity with events keeping dollars here. Bialecki noted that not all restroom facilities would need to be reconstructed at one time. As seen in the Lambeau Field parking lots, port-a-potties are an option for event sponsors.

Next step is discussing potential management and ownership plans/proposals between Lincoln County and the City of Merrill. Kostman noted need for leadership for the future.

Mary Rajek asked about future master plan? Construction of new grandstand is critical for finances of all events occurring on the property. City Building Inspector Pagel suggested that restroom/concession stand, as well as electrical mechanicals could be constructed under new grandstand.

Christine Vorpagel of Dynamo Creative Marketing suggested reviewing the model from Chippewa Falls. Johnson and Bialecki advised that they have background information.

**Next RDA meeting:** Tuesday, March 3rd, 2015 at 8:00 a.m.

**Public Comment:** Dave Sukow emphasized the need to be careful regarding potential future costs related to the Lincoln County Fairgrounds. Sukow reported that supporters of the Smith Center had sold the project as “paying for itself”. The Fairgrounds is a community amenity that brings in people and business to restaurants, gas stations, hotels, and other local retail businesses.

Christine Vorpagel of Dynamo Creative Marketing recommended the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation’s connecting community program for ideas on bringing in events and volunteer management.

**Closed Session:** Bialecki read the following notice:

The RDA may convene in closed session per Wis. Stats. Sec.19.85(1)(e) - deliberating or negotiating the purchasing of public properties, the investing of public funds, or conducting other specified public business, whenever competitive or bargaining reasons require a closed session to consider: Potential property acquisitions to facilitate redevelopment opportunities in Tax Increment District No. 6 (Downtown) and No. 9 (Wisconsin River area).

**Motion (Schwartzman/Kostman) to move into closed session.** Carried on roll call vote 8:30 a.m. City staff provided updates on various potential redevelopment projects and properties for potential acquisitions.

Unertl distributed summary of delinquent tax information for 900 East 1<sup>st</sup> Street with over \$15,000 owed. There is now six years of delinquent real estate taxes. The last \$200 payment by the property owner was receipted by the Lincoln County Treasurer on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

Unertl emphasized that almost 20% of the base taxes/specials are for City of Merrill snow removal services provided by the City Street Department. At the end of January 2015, Fire Chief Dave Savone also issued \$4,150 fire reinspection fee/penalties.

City Building Inspector Darin Pagel reported that a raze order has been issued for the structure with February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015 deadline. Based upon structural engineering review, the potential cost to rehabilitate the existing building would exceed 50% of the \$47,500 improved assessment valuation.

**Lincoln County officials are requesting formal City of Merrill interest in acquiring the property before completing the delinquent tax foreclosure process.** Both potential redevelopment as public parking lot or new building construction were discussed for future directions of this highly visible site. Commercial design standards would apply for any potential new building construction.

**Reconvened in Session and Action on 900 East 1<sup>st</sup> Street:**

**Motion (Schwartzman/Kostman) to reconvene in open session.** Carried at 8:47 a.m.

**Motion (Schwartzman/Smith) to pursue acquisition of 900 East 1<sup>st</sup> Street through Lincoln County delinquent tax foreclosure process with the City/RDA assuming fiscal responsibility for razing the existing structure.** Carried.

**Adjournment: Motion (Schwartzman/Smith) to adjourn.** Carried at 8:48 a.m.

Minutes prepared by RDA Secretary Kathy Unertl