

City of Merrill  
Redevelopment Authority (RDA)

Tuesday, March 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: Alderpersons Dave Sukow and Pete Lokemoen, City Administrator  
Dave Johnson, City Attorney Tom Hayden, Finance Director Kathy Unertl,  
Mary Rajek and Mike Morrissey from Redevelopment Resources,  
Scott Meitus from The Windward Group, City Building Inspector/Zoning  
Administrator Darin Pagel, and Community Development Program  
Administrator Shari Wicke

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

**Public Comment:** None.

**Approval of meeting minutes from February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015:**

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

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

Mike Morrissey highlighted the downtown as key economic development area based upon property tax values, wages generated, and about 400 jobs. The Downtown Plan has identified four districts: Gateway (from east), alley/riverfront, E. Main St., and E. 1<sup>st</sup> St. There is a historical picture from about 1930s that shows some of the features the plan is proposing be restored – angle parking and street trees. Laufenberg recommended signage as key to link the downtown to Highway 51.

Karow asked about the west side. Morrissey emphasized that Merrill has three business districts – east side, downtown, and west side. Bialecki reported that City staff, Housing Authority, and property owners are planning various west side redevelopment.

Next steps include presentation to the RDA (on Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>), potential cable broadcast program on the plan, and meeting with downtown property and business owners. Laufenberg suggested involving the River Bend Trail group.

**Status Update on Idle Sites Grant Application to WEDC:** Apparently WEDC will be awarding grants sometime in March 2015.

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**Follow-up to Personnel & Finance Committee February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015 review/discussion of facilitating redevelopment of tax delinquent properties with demolition special charges:**

Unertl reported that City and Lincoln County representatives will be meeting on the three identified delinquent tax parcels which have had raze orders issued and City-contractor demolitions. It will be possible for delinquent tax foreclosure process for 416 Grand Ave. after the August 2015 tax settlement.

Neither the property owner nor any mortgage holder is likely to pay the delinquent property taxes or the demolition special charges. Consensus at Personnel & Finance Committee was for City of Merrill to seek delinquent tax foreclosure by Lincoln County, obtain transfer of ownership from Lincoln County to the City, and then seek bids for sale to get the property back on tax roll.

RDA Commissioners discussed potential interest of S&S Bar in the 416 Grand Ave. parcel. Bialecki commented that 1008 E. 7<sup>th</sup> St. could be desirable residential lot. Since 310 Blaine St. is a non-conforming/unbuildable lot, the option is limited to either of the adjacent residential parcels (i.e. both are rental properties).

**Review and discuss proposed Redevelopment Resources scope of work for Housing Study (in response to City Strategic Plan Issue #1 – How can Merrill city government help grow the city's tax base?):**

Mary Rajek and Mike Morrissey from Redevelopment Resources provided overview of proposed Housing Study. Rajek emphasized that the existing housing stock is not meeting the existing real estate market. There was extensive discussion of existing housing stock (both smaller two bedroom homes and larger subdivided rental properties). Morrissey noted that about 65% of the City's property tax is being paid by residential properties.

Aldersperson Pete Lokemoen asked what information coming from the proposed Housing Study would be actionable. Rajek responded that implementation strategies would be key plan component to assist in repositioning the City's housing stock.

City Administrator Dave Johnson commented that the proposed Housing Study would be tool to assist. Johnson noted that several recent housing subdivisions had not been totally successful with either vacant lots remaining unsold or auctions of vacant lots.

Kostman reported on her house hunting experiences and lack of open-concept homes. Karow suggested that there were local contractors that could be involved in repositioning the housing stock. Building Inspector Darin Pagel advised that one challenge is the "blighted" conditions of some properties.

Lokemoen reemphasized need for actionable planning activities and need for more information. Laufenberg recommended that broader perspective is needed rather than just continuing on property-by-property basis. Smith observed that the housing situation cannot be fixed overnight. Rajek added that the study would provide a strategic framework to move the community forward.

**Next RDA meeting:** Due to the Tuesday, April 7<sup>th</sup> election, the RDA meeting is being moved up a week to Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015 at 8:00 a.m.

**Adjournment:** Motion (Schwartzman/Smith) to adjourn. Carried at 8:55 a.m.

Minutes prepared by RDA Secretary Kathy Unertl