

City of Merrill
Redevelopment Authority (RDA)

Tuesday, July 7th, 2015 at 8:00 A.M.
City Hall Council Chambers

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

RDA Absent: None

Others: Alderpersons Dave Sukow, City Administrator Dave Johnson, City Attorney Tom Hayden, Finance Director Kathy Unertl, Street Commissioner Dick Lupton, Ken Maule from Lincoln County Economic Development Corp., Mike Morrissey and Mary Rajek from Redevelopment Resources, City Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Darin Pagel, Linda Berlin from Trophy Bar, and Kari Kufahl

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

Public Comment: None.

Approval of meeting minutes from June 2nd, 2015:

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

Update regarding delinquent tax properties and City Administrator meeting with Lincoln County representatives:

City Administrator Johnson advised that he and Ken Maule from Lincoln County Economic Development Corp. (LCEDC) met with Lincoln County Clerk Chris Marlowe and Lincoln County Finance Director Dan Leydet. Maule and Johnson noted that an issue for Lincoln County is writing off some delinquent taxes. Johnson emphasized that the City is requesting that delinquent tax properties be foreclosed upon as soon as three-year delinquent so that the City can facilitate sale and return to tax-paying status.

Johnson indicated that the City is interested in four properties that are five or more year's tax delinquent. These include 1102 Van Buren St. (i.e. vacant home for about six years), 718-720 East 2nd St. (Merrill Glass), 202 East 1st St. (owner occupied home), and 501 East 2nd St. (City will be razing during July).

Discussion focused upon need for timely delinquent tax foreclosure process so that possible to rehabilitate instead of demo. City of Merrill is ending up mowing and snow shoveling sidewalks for many tax delinquent properties.

Update on 500 Block of East 2nd Street and implication for residential properties:

Unertl reported that three homes will be razed – all are tax delinquent properties and one has been vacant for number of years. These homes include: 501 East 2nd St., 509 E. 2nd St., and 104 Hendricks St. Given non-conforming lots, these sites will either remain vacant or potentially new garages might be constructed.

There are two homes on this block being rehabilitated and flipped after a mortgage foreclosure. Two additional homes are owned by an estate and are tax delinquent.

The majority of CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) low-interest residential loan applicants are being turned down due to lack of owner equity. Key to protecting City residential properties start with roofs. Unertl reported that City staff will continue discussions with TIF consultants on potential new TIF-funded forgivable loan program for reroofing of owner-occupied homes.

West side renewal planning meeting – Monday, July 13th at 6:00 p.m.:

Property and business owners on the west side have been invited to participate in west side renewal planning meeting. Mike Morrissey and Mary Rajek from Redevelopment Resources will be facilitating the input session.

This planning meeting will be posted as RDA meeting in case a quorum of the Authority's Commissioners are interested in attending.

Follow-up on Downtown Vision Plan potential implementation:

a. Update on former Guy's Shop vacant lot and engineering cost estimates for potential pocket park development:

There may be interest from some alderpersons to reconsider the potential purchase of the former Guy's Shop site from Lincoln Community Bank for \$20,000. In response to requests for more information on potential development costs, City Administrator Johnson requested assistance from engineering contractor Rod Akey. A design concept and potential construction cost estimates (about \$120,000) were distributed.

There would be two retaining walls on the south side of the property with proposed 8' terraces between the walls. Steps would be on the east side. ADA handicapped access would be from East Main Street (i.e. north side).

The majority of the site would be flat event/gathering space with potential small water fountain nozzle area. After discussion with Merrill Federal Savings & Loan representatives, it would be possible to use their adjacent lot as grass area in return for City mowing of the site and provision of liability insurance coverage.

Johnson emphasized that Merrill Federal Savings & Loan wants to retain ownership of their vacant lot for potential future use. Additional work is needed on their exposed wall before the site can be backfilled with dirt. Their landscaping plan is to dump rock on their property to eliminate need for grass mowing.

b. Discussion of additional potential implementation steps and budget requests:

Street Commissioner Dick Lupton reported that the Street Department's new striping truck will be operational shortly. Angle parking will be implemented the three blocks extending from Courtside Furniture to past the Cosmo Theatre. City Administrator Johnson advised that the bituminous paving should be done by mid-July. Wi-Fi equipment has been ordered, including additional units to extend coverage to proposed S. Park St. pavilion/trailhead for the River Bend Trail.

Unertl emphasized that the critical next step for implementation is Wisconsin Public Service shift of overhead electrical lines to underground. Other utilities (such as telephone and Cable TV) are also likely involved. City Administrator Johnson will again contract WPS for price quote. The City-owned parking lot south of River Street is going to need reconstruction after utilities installed underground. Unertl suggested that potential reconstruction of East Main Street and installation of new decorative streetlighting was probably a couple years out.

The City of Merrill has over \$150,000 in potential low-interest façade loan funding available. Unertl will send information to property and business owners on availability of potential loan and TIF façade funding.

Status update on Idle Sites grant activities (Tax Increment District No. 9):

City of Merrill has received the signed Idle Site grant agreement from Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. (WEDC). The grant period extends through December 31st, 2017.

The River Bend Trail Foundation has funded the \$29,560 purchase of land and metal storage building just east of the Center Avenue bridge from Wisconsin Public Service. Information on their trailhead and future trail development plans were included in the RDA agenda packet.

Next RDA meeting: Tuesday, August 4th at 8:00 a.m. When a potential TIF public hearing at 6:00 p.m. is needed, RDA Commissioners suggested a Wednesday meeting preference.

Adjournment: Motion (Schwartzman/Smith) to adjourn. Carried at 8:38 a.m.

Minutes prepared by RDA Secretary Kathy Unertl