

City of Merrill Joint Meeting of
Committee of Whole (COW), Redevelopment Authority (RDA)
and Community Development

Tuesday, August 8th, 2017 at 6:15 p.m.
City Hall Common Council Chambers

RDA Present: Bill Bialecki, Ryan Schwartzman, Tim Haight, Jill Laufenberg,
Tony Kusserow, Clyde Nelson and Karen Karow

RDA Absent: None

COW Present: Bill Bialecki, Ryan Schwartzman, Kandy Peterson, Mary Ball,
Paul Russell, Pete Lokemoen, Rob Norton, and Tim Meehean

COW Absent: John Burgener (Excused)

Community Development Present: Ron Peterson and Mary Ball

Others: City Clerk Bill Heideman, City Administrator Dave Johnson,
City Attorney Tom Hayden, Finance Director Kathy Unertl,
Public Works Director Rod Akey, City Building Inspector Darin
Pagel, Ken Maule from Lincoln County Economic Development
Corp. (LCEDC), Dewey Pfister, and Lori Anderson Malm

Call to Order: Bialecki called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

Public Comment: None.

**Review and discussion of Merrill housing report prepared by Art Lersch from UW
Extension and incentives used in other Wisconsin communities:**

Lersch emphasized the following key findings related to housing focusing upon single-family homes:

- Need for transitional housing
- Low inventory of quality homes for sale
- Professionals are looking for higher value homes with amenities and two-car (or more) garage spaces

Some of the perceptions issues related to housing include:

- Lack of available vacant land
 - Potential higher City of Merrill property taxes
 - Need to promote City of Merrill
 - Potential need for down payment assistance financial support
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Review and discussion of Merrill housing report (Continued):

Lokemoen reported that he had checked with three employers and they indicated that housing issues not preventing employee hires. Bialecki emphasized that many Merrill employers have been communicating the need for adequate housing to assist with workforce recruitment. Meehean noted that business community potentially losing out of local dollars related to individuals commuting to Merrill for work.

Bialecki and Unertl advised that TID could be used for housing under current Wisconsin Statutes. At the end of the twenty-year lifecycle of TID No. 3 (East Side Area), it will be possible to keep the TID open one additional year - 2027 revenues - for community-wide housing-related expenditures.

Ball asked about building new homes on non-conforming lots. Pagel reported that Zoning Board of Appeals has never denied a new housing request. The importance of flippers investing in making home improvements was noted by Bialecki and Ball. There was clarification that CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) loan funds could be obtained by landlords as low as their rental tenants met income criteria.

Nelson questioned potential down payment assistance. For a \$40,000 residential property, a 3-5% down payment would be about \$1,200. The ability of potential homeowners to save down payment is perceived by financial lenders as indication of ability to handle home-ownership financial requirements.

There was discussion of interest of both younger and older populations in renting vs. home ownership. Lokemoen commented that there are lots available; however, no one is building spec homes and construction contractors were hit hard by the housing recession starting in 2008.

Akey emphasized that even if flippers are investing in some existing homes, the overall housing stock age is old. Russell cited a housing assessment conducted for the Merrill Area Housing Authority (MAHA). About 58% of Merrill homes are over sixty (60) years old. It is estimated that 50% have some level of disrepair.

Bialecki suggested that the expanding amenities in the Merrill community were important. Karow emphasized the importance of the River Bend Trail and recommended future downtown apartment development.

Lersch commented on the expanding need for transitional housing options. The Merrill population aged sixty (60) and over will double by 2035. Individuals are looking for ground-level residences for accessibility.

Mayor Bialecki thanked Lersch for his assistance and everyone for participation in this housing meeting. Unertl suggested continued discussion related to housing by the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) and Community Development Committee.

Adjournment: Motion (Schwartzman/Karow) to adjourn at 6:55 p.m. Carried.

Minutes prepared by RDA Secretary Kathy Unertl