

City of Isanti
Economic Development Authority
Regular Meeting Minutes of February 23, 2010
Isanti City Hall

1. Call To Order The meeting was called to order by Chair Kuechle at 7:00 p.m.

a. Pledge of Allegiance

b. Roll Call

Members Present: Keith Dragisich, Jim Kennedy, Zachary Knudson (Youth Representative) Larry Kuechle, and George Wimmer

Members Absent: Brandon Apitz

Staff Present: City Administrator Don Lorsung

c. Agenda Modifications Motion by Kennedy, second by Dragisich, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

2. Approve Minutes of January 26, 2010 Regular Economic Development Authority Meeting

Motion by Dragisich, second by Kennedy to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

4. Discussion on Downtown Planning Meeting – Rusty Fifield, Northland Securities

Rusty Fifield, Northland Securities, distributed a summary sheet on Downtown Planning in consideration and initiated discussion with the EDA on a public meeting on the downtown. He also distributed copies of downtown plans that he had worked on in various communities. He then discussed his experience and understanding of challenges that downtowns were facing. He related experiences with public meetings on this topic and his opinion that having a plan or vision makes it easier to engage people in such meetings. He would be happy to assist with such an effort.

Chair Kuechle indicated that his concern with development on Hwy 65 and the need to keep the downtown both complementary and competitive as part of the business community.

Wimmer shared that the City Council identified this need in Goal Setting and one idea was creating a commercial loop that would route traffic from Hwy 65 to CSAH 5 then loop through the downtown back out to Hwy. 65. As a part of this concept an HRA could be created to assist in funding redevelopment of residential properties in the downtown district to commercial uses over time. This would draw people into the downtown and create a consistent commercial area in the downtown.

Fifield discussed the routing traffic by or through downtown areas; he gave examples of communities where major traffic routes (highways) have been a detriment to downtowns.

Downtowns are destinations, people want to congregate there. With planning, there is the need to knit uses together. Example of coffee shop, need to tie in to the downtown area and create a self supporting business district. Establish a plan and vision, and then allow people to invest over time and allow businesses to move forward because they know the community is committed to downtown development.

Chair Kuechle inquired if there has been a response from business owners on the ideas discussed.

Wimmer shared that a group of business owners have been involved in the discussion and the business owners are supportive of the concept, the idea of tying businesses, such as the strip mall, to the downtown, not leaving that area as a commercial island. You could park in one place and then access a number of businesses in the district.

Fifield commented that it makes sense to acquire properties and assemble the parcels. You need to be proactive in today's world to do so. All the more reason to have a good plan to direct investment.

Wimmer commented that the project would have to cash flow. The numbers would have to work to not burden the City, as we do not have additional funding for such a program.

Fifield concurred without such a program you will continue to have bleeding of businesses out to the town's edge. Need to encourage businesses to be in the downtown.

Wimmer inquired on Main Street traffic in Cambridge and the wisdom of running more traffic in the downtown in Cambridge.

Fifield indicated it was not wise to bring in more traffic, downtowns are like a shopping mall. Need to be walkable and safe, to tie businesses together to make it a destination where people want to go. Isanti's downtown is well situated for gateways and access to create a destination. He shared Lakeville's downtown efforts as such an example. You need a variety of businesses to bring people downtown.

Wimmer discussed his preference for a downtown plan / concepts be developed. Do you start with a blank slate?

Fifield shared that Isanti has the building blocks already in place for a downtown plan. Need support of downtown businesses and needs public support to move forward. His opinion is that we do not have a blank slate to start with.

Wimmer shared that the City Council has approved a Farmer's Market, with as many as 45 vendors, a good opportunity to have people in the downtown. Look at ways to leverage other activities, bring in concept of downtown, discussed need for a theme.

Fifield discussed the district and need for design standards and streetscape. Such are complementary to what is already in place here. Regarding downtown themes, he shared Stillwater does not have a theme, yet a very successful downtown.

Dragisich indicated Stillwater has a variety of stores, restaurants, etc. to draw people. Discussed need for funding programs.

Fifield discussed downtown programs, such as tax abatement and TIF to encourage downtown redevelopment.

Wimmer expressed concerns that in a commercial market where values are dropping, how would that affect TIF?

Fifield indicated that a strong economy is needed or the discussion on downtown development is academic. Need to look at a broader planning perspective for the community; otherwise you leave the downtown to develop on its own.

Discussion was had on downtown themes and building types, in the past a western theme and now a railroad theme is being worked on. Discussion on past downtown themes and branding of downtown. Another question is why do anything in the downtown? To date downtown development has moved forward without a lot of City assistance. Do we need to pick a course for the downtown?

Fifield indicated that downtown plans are not set in stone; provide a guide and vision, to achieve how we are going to get there. Discussion on the need for themes and plans, reliance on such can depend on the strength of the downtown area.

Wimmer indicated that the idea is not to let downtown businesses cycle up or down. The downtown is the commercial heart beat of the community, need to be successful for the long term of the community.

Fifield shared how Northfield worked to insure development in their downtown and the choices they had to make on businesses in the downtown versus outside commercial area.

Wimmer commented that making the businesses feel appreciated has been the best investment for the City. Businesses need to support any plan that would be proposed.

Knudson asked if Hwy 65 would have a role in this planning.

Wimmer commented that certain businesses would go to certain areas. Discussed need for planning, the joining of complementary businesses. This would further create a destination in the downtown and that policy direction could encourage this.

Kuechle discussed whether a downtown meeting should have some direction.

Discussion on the need to have information for such a meeting. Could existing plans be used and information obtained on where monies would come from. Without money, it would be difficult to do anything.

Wimmer commented that downtown programs must be self supportive. Public needs to be educated that City has various funds and that projects can move forward based on availability of such funding.

There was additional discussion on the need to review the concept, and that downtown projects and programs would need to cash flow. Need to build the commercial tax base for the future of the community. Discussion on where they want this to go next.

Fifield offered that ideas need to be defined and then, as a first group, engage business community in discussion.

Discussion was had on how to move forward from here, with the EDA as a working group or some other mechanism. Staff could assist by putting ideas together. Possibly using DAC to work on this and bring ideas back to the EDA.

After discussion on the next step, a motion was made by Kennedy, seconded by Dragisich, to have Chair Kuechle work with the Development Advisory Committee on Downtown Planning. It is anticipated this would be a 60 day task, with a report at the April EDA meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Other Business / Updates

- a. Hiring of Economic Development Director – City Administrator Lorsung reported that Mr. Sean Sullivan was hired as Economic Development Director. He gave a brief presentation on Mr. Sullivan's background. He will start on Thursday, March 4, 2010.
- b. Approval of Rail Industrial Park Concept and WWTP Facility Plan – City Administrator Lorsung reported that the City Council has approved the proposals and that the project is moving forward under the guidance of City Engineer DeWolf.

6. Adjournment

Kennedy motioned, seconded by Dragisich to adjourn at 8:00 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Dated at Isanti, Minnesota, this 24th day of February, 2010.

Respectively Submitted,

Donald C. Lorsung, City Administrator