

***Pulaski County
Community Development Commission***

Tuesday, 19 November 2024
Winamac Municipal Utilities Complex
Winamac, Indiana

Minutes

Tuesday, 6 August 2024
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Members present: President Sheila Jimenez (County Council (Council)), Vice-President Bill Champion (Advisory Commission on Industrial Development (ACID)), Secretary Brian Ledley (Redevelopment Commission (R.C.)); Maurice Loehmer (Board of Commissioners (Board)), Claude LeMere (Economic Development Commission (E.D.C.)). Department of Community Development (D.C.D.) Executive Director Nathan P. Origer.

Members absent: David Scott (Tourism Advisory Council (TAC)) [personal]. D.C.D. Assistant Taylor Bailey [personal].

Guests present: Lee Lewellen, Connie Neininger, Herman the Turtle.

Call to Order

President Jimenez called the meeting to order at 6:03 *p.m.*

Consent Agenda

With no requests for extraction having been made, the consent agenda was adopted.

Motion: Vice-President Champion; second: Mr. LeMere; no discussion: approval: all.

Financial Report

The director provided an overview of the D.C.D. budget, the County's Local Income Tax – Economic Development (LIT – E.D.) Fund, and the D.C.D.'s non-tax-based funds, highlighting that the courthouse bond had reimbursed the LIT – E.D. Fund; that the fund had an anticipated year-end balance of more than \$2.8-million; that the donation fund had a healthy balance; and that the Revolving Loan Fund's balance had climbed above \$190,000, with all active borrowers in good standing, save one nearing payoff but late with the final payment due to a miscommunication.

The financial report was approved as presented.

Motion: Vice-President Champion; second: Mr. LeMere; no discussion; approval: all.

Guest Presentation

Regional ag-strategy project: Director Origer introduced Lee Lewellen and Connie Neininger, who had been consulting with the director and his regional colleagues on the implementation — funded in large part by a grant from the State's READI program through the Northwest Indiana Forum — of the regional agricultural economic-development strategy that had been developed with the assistance of Mrs. Neininger and others and funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration through KIRPC.

Mr. Lewellen and Mrs. Neininger provided background on their interest in agriculture-focused rural development, highlighting a statewide dearth of industrial-development projects in rural counties and an apparent lack of strategy for promoting rural growth, with the latter relaying the story of her efforts at the Indiana State Department of Agriculture to develop a dairy strategy and, then, to secure the construction of a Walmart dairy plant near Fort Wayne. They emphasized the importance of approaching a project of this nature at the regional level. Mrs. Neininger provided additional information about the process of forming a regional coalition, with the director adding some context about regional relationships in the KIRPC area.

Mrs. Neininger then provided an overview of the plan-development process, highlighting interviews with farmers and ag.-related businesses in the region and explaining the data-collection

and -analysis processes, and then led the members through a handout revealing some of the planning process's key findings, emphasizing the key focus areas of the plan: regional food systems, food supply chain, agricultural workforce, and regulatory streamlining, with a particular interest in agricultural entrepreneurship underlying the first two.

As Mr. Lewellen and Mrs. Neininger dived deeper into the regional vision, significant discussion ensued regarding such matters as the types of projects that might be pursued, the scale of development appropriate for the region, the relationship between agricultural and renewable-energy development (including agri-voltaic projects).

Strategic Plan Implementation Report

C.D.C. restructuring: One seat on the commission, earmarked for someone representing the agricultural sector, remained open. The director expressed interest in convening the Advisory Commission on Industrial Development before having an updated appraisal of the County's remaining industrial-park land conducted. The Economic Development Commission had prepared a comprehensive set of tax-abatement application rules, which the County Council had then adopted. The Redevelopment Commission had met once, but had had little business thus far. The Tourism Strategic Plan Committee would be reconvened before the director called a meeting of the full Tourism Advisory Council.

Community Foundation partnership projects: Main Street Winamac had begun showing signs of revival — a few more members, a forthcoming triathlon paired with a tenderloin-eating competition, and an amplified social-media presence. The Willow Creek Villas housing project proposed for Galbreath Drive had been awarded tax credits by the State, the Board of Commissioners and Council had been working with the director on plans for a loan, and pre-construction work had begun; the proposed catalyst-site housing project for the County farm had been moving slowly, but the director expected to be able to speed things up in the near future. Providers seeking State-grant funding for broadband buildout in Pulaski County had been largely unsuccessful, but the Broadband Taskforce continued working toward supporting providers looking at other programs and developing a broadband-readiness plan.

Implementation, other: The director reported that he had been appointed to chair the Northwest Indiana Forum's Economic Development Committee and to serve on the Forum's Executive Committee. A fourth-quarter coffee-hour or after-hours event was proposed.

Purdue Manufacturing Extension Partnership had provided workforce-readiness training free of charge to inmates in the Pulaski County Jail; the Pulaski County Industrial Forum had heard about the new JAG and welding programs at Winamac Community High School at its April meeting.

Crane + Grey had recently finished the final regional strategy for rural entrepreneurship, a program funded by the State's READI program through the Northwest Indiana Forum.

The director briefly noted the significant amount of construction happening and potentially planned for downtown Winamac.

Old Business

Revolving Loan Fund matters — general updates: Olson Auctions had opened the online auction of the blow-molding machine at the I.B.C. Thermoplastics facility on County Road 200 South, with the sale set to close on 14 August; the director reported that he had been informed that several parties had viewed the listing, and four had requested bidder numbers. The real property would be sold at a live, on-site auction in mid-September.

Revolving Loan Fund matters — program review: The director gave an update on the proposed changes to the program guidelines, and discussion ensued, particularly regarding the application process; lending to property owners who would be generating passive income from tenants; and the County attorney's role in the process. Commissioner Loehmer highlighted that the program was originated with grant funds, and not local-tax revenue, so, while being good stewards of the funds is important, the County has more flexibility to take some risks, and the community would benefit from re-opening the program.

Solar-energy development: The Indiana Supreme Court had declined to hear appeals of the Court of Appeals' two tax-abatement-case rulings in favor of the County, and the La Porte County judge in the third case had also upheld the County Council's granting of a tax abatement. Projects had been moving slowly, and the County's attorney would be presenting amendments to the

Mammoth and Moss Creek projects' economic-development agreements; the director expected to receive payments from both projects' developers before year's end.

2025 budget: The director reported that the 2025 draft budget submitted to the Council reflected an increase of 37 percent from C.D.C.–office-expenses 2024 budget, much attributable to requesting a third person in the office, and some tied to increases in professional-services costs for potential work related to proposed projects.

New Business

November meeting date: Director Origer noted that the Commission had agreed to hold meetings on the second Tuesday of the second month of each quarter in part to avoid conflicts with the May and November Election-Day holidays, but that he had failed to realize that Veterans Day would be falling on a Monday this year, pushing the County Council's meeting back one day, creating a conflict for himself and President Jimenez. Members agreed to delay the November meetings — an executive session and the regular meeting — one week, to 19 November.

Other Pertinent Business

Pulaski Memorial Hospital pharmacy: Secretary Ledley reported that, while growth had still been slow at the Francesville location, the in-house pharmacy at the hospital had already exceeded expected weekly prescriptions.

Director Origer: Mr. LeMere expressed his appreciation for the director's work.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Motion: Mr. LeMere; second: Vice-President Champion; no discussion; approval: all 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Ledley, Secretary

Nathan P. Origer, Executive Director/Recording Secretary *pro tempore*