

***Pulaski County
Community Development Commission***

Tuesday, 16 January 2024

Winamac Municipal Utilities Complex
Winamac, Indiana

Executive Board Minutes

Tuesday, 1 August 2023

Winamac Municipal Utilities Complex
Winamac, Indiana

Members present: Vice-President Maurice Loehmer (Commissioners), Secretary Brandon DeLorenzo, board member Bill Champion. Executive Director Nathan P. Origer, Assistant Taylor Bailey. President Sheila Jimenez (Winamac) arrived at 5:46 *p.m.*

Members absent: Membership Officer Kelsie Zellers [personal].

Guests: None.

Call to Order

Vice-President Loehmer called the meeting to order at 5:30 *p.m.*

Consent Agenda

With no requests for extraction having been made, the Consent Agenda was adopted.

Strategic Plan Implementation Report

Restructuring and reorganization: The commissioners had approved the ordinances and resolutions establishing the Redevelopment Commission (R.C.) and Tourism Advisory Council (TAC). The County Council had tabled the Economic Development Commission (E.D.C.) ordinance, with Councilor Brad Bonnell having requested more time to review the information; Director Origer had then sent relevant information to each member of the council. The matter would be revisited by the Council at its August meeting. Due to the delay in establishing E.D.C., the director had delayed asking the commissioners to approve the resolutions restructuring the Community Development Commission (C.D.C.) and assigning the Revolving Loan Fund responsibilities to E.D.C.

Director Origer expressed his hope to keep as many existing C.D.C members as are willing engaged in the new commissions to ensure a smooth transition. Mr. Champion and the director had discussed Mr. Champion's involvement on the Advisory Commission for Industrial Development, while Brian Ledley had expressed interest in serving on the R.C., and Blake Kasten had volunteered to serve on the E.D.C. Mrs. Zellers serves on the Main Street Winamac (M.S.W.) board and would be representing them on the Tourism Advisory Council; Vice-President Loehmer had agreed to continue representing the commissioners on the C.D.C. The director provided further information on other potential candidates.

Community Foundation partnership projects: M.S.W. had added two more board members, would be revisiting the possibility of hiring an intern to help with developing a downtown-business/-building inventory, and had been preparing to apply for the first-tier status with Indiana Main Street.

The UPTOWN Project had been refocusing on community perceptions of downtown businesses and what is missing: the survey and roundtable discussion had been completed, and Director Origer noted that there were a lot of comments about the town parks; members would be following up with the business community to hold more focused conversations about what other businesses they would like to see brought to town if viable and other improvements are most important.

Funding for housing-development pre-development costs had been committed by the Town of Winamac and other partners; the director had been working on a memorandum of understanding that would be executed by the Town, the County, and the consulting firm.

The request for proposals or quotations for a broadband plan had been put on hold while the Broadband Taskforce awaited word on a grant application submitted for funding to use in place of County American Rescue Plan money.

Implementation, other: The director had held a joint coffee hour at the Francesville Market in had not been as strong as he had hoped, but he would continue to hold such meetings in the future.

Documentation for the Rural Regional Ag Strategy project's READI approval had been being prepared; this project would be an ambitious short-term effort to implement the programs and projects in the regional strategic plan; the budget had been drafted to include funds for a full-time, term-limited contract employee to implement the plan during the READI-grant period. There would also be money in the budget for rent and utilities for an office if a centralized location could be found. Director Origer questioned if an Agriculture Advisory Committee should be created moving forward; board member Bill Champion voiced he does not think it is necessary.

The budget project scope for the rural-entrepreneurship-initiative READI project had been approved; focusing primarily on Pulaski, Newton, Starke, and Jasper counties, this would support and connect the entrepreneurs with the right resources. A separate agriculture-entrepreneurship handbook with guides on State programs, specialty-crop grants, and other resources would also be developed as part of the Ag Strategy project.. Director Origer had recently met with a local man who had begun growing strawberries commercially.

Old Commission Business

2024 Budget: The director would be having his budget appointment with the Council on the following Monday. Director Origer had not expected the wage-study pay adjustments to be implemented just yet for most departments, as the Council had been focusing on the two large departments that had been hemorrhaging the most staff; comprehensive efforts to overhaul the wage-and-salary matrix would likely take place in 2024 for 2025 implementation. This would allow the Council to make wage adjustments based on job descriptions and regional pay rather than continuing with the one-size fits all matrix currently in place.

Director Origer noted that the receipt of first payments from solar developers would be an indicator of long-term wage-adjustments sustainability for the County and would likely give the Council greater confidence in making this financial commitment. Discussion then ensued regarding solar-energy projects.

Revolving Loan Fund matters — general updates: Two borrowers had become noticeably behind on their payments; Director Origer would be sending warnings to get caught up. President Jimenez asked how far behind they had become, and the director replied that they both had lapsed by five or six months. Vice-President Loehmer asked which two borrowers were behind; Director Origer advised that Meadow Springs Manor and Casey Williams had been failing to make payments timely. The vice-president suggested the need for invoices to be sent out as a reminder; the director said that he would work on this.

The County's attorney had moved forward with foreclosure on I.B.C.T.; the legal notices had been published. Director Origer noted that at least four or five parties had expressed interested in acquiring some or all of the property once the foreclosure had been completed.

Revolving Loan Fund matters — program review: Director Origer reported that he had spoken with two new potentially interested borrowers and acknowledged that resuming conversations regarding the program's overhaul would be important. The director had reached out to the Committee, and Mr. Kasten had provided feedback on the notes that had been distributed. The director would attempt to schedule a committee meeting soon.

Solar-energy development: The Council had approved the tax abatement for and the \$10MM economic-development agreement with Invenergy for the Bottlebrush Project by a five-to-two vote; a legal challenge had been filed. The Indiana Court of Appeals had not yet issued rulings on the challenges to trial-court decisions upholding the Council's approval of abatements on the Mammoth and Moss Creek projects.

New Business

County-website update: Director Origer had received a proposal from Crane + Grey for an update to the County's website; improvements would include user-friendliness, lower-cost accessibility software, and enhanced marketing tools. The budget would be \$43,300 to \$50,800 depending on a few add-ons; Mr. Champion added that it is a good price. Director Origer noted that some county governments had transitioned to State-hosted websites and expressed concern that this option does not provide adequate marketing capabilities for economic and tourism development. The

director would be following up with Crane + Grey before presenting to the commissioners. The Executive Board agreed that Director Origer should move forward with this project.

Other Pertinent Business

2024 meeting schedule: Due to the restructuring, the 2024 meeting schedule would probably be adopted in January 2024, rather than at the November meeting. Director Origer expressed hope that each of the new commissions would have only one or two regularly scheduled meetings annually, with special meetings to be called as needed, while the restructured C.D.C. would meet a little more often due to its supervisory role — perhaps quarterly, with one-on-one meetings with members filling in the gaps. The director hopes to have at least one meeting per commission in October or November for onboarding, introduction, and initial organization.

Adjournment

Motion: Mr. Champion; second: President Jimenez; no discussion; approval: all. 6:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Taylor Bailey, Assistant/Recording Secretary
Brandon DeLorenzo, Secretary