

***Pulaski County
Economic Development Commission***

Thursday, 29 February 2024
Winamac Municipal Utilities Complex
Winamac, Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, 4 January 2024
Winamac Municipal Utilities Complex
Winamac, Indiana

Members present: Blake Kasten (Council), Claude LeMere (Winamac Town Council), Christian Smith (Board of Commissioners). Department of Community Development (D.C.D.) Executive Director Nathan P. Origer, D.C.D. Assistant Taylor Bailey.

Members absent: None.

Guests present: None.

Call to Order and Introductions

Director Origer called the meeting to order at 5:01 *p.m.* and introduced the members, reviewing their nominating bodies and term lengths and thanking them for agreeing to serve on the commission.

Election of Officers

The director provided a brief report on the reorganization and restructuring of community-development operations and governance that led to the establishment of the commission before calling for nominations for the offices of president, vice-president, and secretary. Whoever would be elected president would be by virtue thereof appointed to a concurrent term on the reorganized Community Development Commission (C.D.C.); the secretary would be required to review meeting minutes drafted by staff prior to full dissemination, but would not be asked to draft them.

Mr. LeMere volunteered to serve as president, Mr. Kasten volunteered to serve as vice-president, and Mr. Smith agreed to serve as secretary.

Motion: Mr. Smith; second: Mr. LeMere; no discussion; approval: all.

New Business

General responsibilities: The Economic Development Commission (E.D.C.) has the power to issue bonds to finance economic-development projects within the county, as well as to acquire real property.

Pulaski County Revolving Loan Fund: Proposed changes to the program's rules had been sent to County's attorney for review and approval; once the attorney had approved the revised guidelines, the Board of Commissioners (Board) would be asked to approve them and to reactivate the program. Pursuant to a 2023 Board resolution, the E.D.C. serves as the review-and-recommendation body for the program, while the Board will continue to make final determinations. Loan requests greater than \$20,000 are reviewed by Regional Development Company (R.D.C.) in Valparaiso: the R.D.C. underwrites all such requests, providing a credit memo and risk-rating worksheet to the E.D.C. for each loan.

Tax-abatement review: Historically, tax-abatement requests have gone through the D.C.D., with Director Origer responsible for both guiding applicants through the process and, with the exception of solar-energy projects (in which cases an *ad hoc* committee had been established), unilaterally making recommendations to the County Council (Council) or Winamac Town Council (W.T.C.); pursuant to the E.D.C.'s enabling ordinance, the E.D.C. now serves as the review-and-recommendation body for these requests at the County level (with the four Towns having the option to seek the E.D.C.'s assistance), giving the director governing-body input to present to the Council.

The first order of business regarding tax abatements would be the development of a scoring rubric based on investment, number of jobs created, and other relevant criteria; this would allow the E.D.C. to make recommendations to the Council based on consistent metrics. Director Origer noted that he has a few examples of similar rubrics and would be disseminating these documents.

Future meetings: For 2024, the E.D.C. does not have its own budget; members' meeting-attendance pay had been included in the C.D.C./D.C.D. budget, along with any operational funds that might be used to further the E.D.C.'s mission. This would likely change in 2025. Director Origer advised that the members may want to consider meeting again in May, if not before then, or both,

with the May meeting will be devoted at least partly to the 2025 budget. All members agreed to meet again in March, with the day to be determined later. Director Origer would send out possible meeting date and time options as March drew nearer.

Other Pertinent Business

Willow Creek Villas housing project: Director Origer noted that a proposed housing project could potentially require the engagement of the E.D.C., for tax-abatement purposes, were the W.T.C. inclined to ask for assistance. The project would be built east of the Winamac Plaza on land owned by a Galbreth Family company adjacent to the platted Willow Creek Subdivision. Carmel-based Sullivan Development would be submitting an application to the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority for low-income-housing tax credits (LIHTC) to fund a 34-unit multi-family development here. The target demographic would be toward the low end of the workforce-housing spectrum; this would not be voucher housing, but would have tenancy and rental tiers based on income levels.

Discussion ensued as to why development had not previously occurred at the location; President LeMere expressed skepticism regarding the development, arguing that the focus should not be on adding more rental housing to the area, but on increasing the stock of owner-occupied single-family housing. Director Origer noted that this would be an \$8–10 million investment, investment the likes of which Pulaski County has rarely seen in any sector. The vice-president expressed some agreement with the president; the director explained that the LIHTC program has employment requirements for residency in a funded project.

Vice-President Kasten inquired about the proposed multi-family project adjacent to Hickory Creek; Director Origer noted that he was unsure of the project's status.

County Farm property southwest of Winamac remained the targeted site for a larger, phased-in residential development as proposed by the Pulaski County Housing Taskforce; the Redevelopment Commission would likely need to partner with the E.D.C. to finance the project.

Member compensation: Members would be receiving a W-9 to fill out; Director Origer intended to confer with the Auditor's Office on the frequency of pay and how it would be distributed to each member. President LeMere requested to serve on the E.D.C. without pay, and the director agreed to look into different possibilities for honoring the request..

Downtown redevelopment: President LeMere asked about the amount of interaction between the County and the Town of Winamac concerning downtown buildings and businesses and if any discretionary funds had been designated to promote the downtown area. Director Origer noted that the County and Town maintain a working relationship, but that he was not sure of any regular engagement regarding this specific matter beyond his work with the Town, and that no discretionary funds existed for this purpose. However, within the D.C.D.'s budget there are funds for promoting tourism that could indirectly benefit downtown. Director Origer explained that any downtown-focused promotion would come from the Town or Main Street Winamac. A potential role for the Chamber of Commerce was discussed.

President LeMere added that he believes that downtown can still be saved, but it is close to the edge; a beautiful downtown area draws in new people. The president insisted that it is critical to work on the downtown area, as it is the heart of Winamac.

Reflection: President LeMere noted that this had been a very good meeting, and that we are at a very critical point in the growth of the community. Vice-President Kasten added that slow and steady development may be best for the community.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Motion: President LeMere; second: Secretary Smith; no discussion; approval: all.
6:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Taylor Bailey, Assistant/Recording Secretary
Christian Smith, Secretary