

**DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
REGULAR MEETING  
JANUARY 23, 2018  
121 N. 4TH ST., WEST BRANCH, MI 48661**

The Downtown Development Authority meeting was opened by Chairperson Jayson Stroebel at 12:02 pm.

**ROLL CALL:**

Present - Jayson Stroebel, Samantha Fabbri, Joe Clark, Autumn Hunter, Sandy Rabidue, Joanne Bennett, Mayor Lawrence.

Absent - Rusty Showalter, Tracy Williams, Dora Zapczynski.

Others Present - GPSCR Coordinator, Kelli Collins, City Manager, Heather Grace, EDC Director, Mandi Chasey, City Attorney, Gabby Dantzer.

**Motion by Stroebel to excuse Showalter's absence. Second by Bennett.**

**Yes - Jayson Stroebel, Joanne Bennett, Joe Clark, Autumn Hunter, Sandy Rabidue, Mayor Lawrence, Samantha Fabbri.**

**No - None.**

**Absent - Rusty Showalter, Tracy Williams, Dora Zapczynski.**

**ADDITIONS TO AGENDA -**

City Attorney, Gabby Dantzer, advised she has drafted By-Laws for the DDA. A copy of the proposed By-Laws was given to each member for review. Dantzer also detailed and gave guidance on being in compliance with legal expenditures of DDA funds. She explained that because the DDA uses Public Funds we have to make sure they are used for a Public Purpose. She stated the DDA must know what the funds are spent on prior to expenditures and a clear accounting of these disbursements. A Public Purpose is limited to what a municipality is authorized to exercise and must have a direct benefit to the public. Dantzer stated the DDA Act outlines the DDA's purpose is to "correct or prevent deterioration in the business district, encourage historical preservation, also related to acquiring interest in real and personal property, to create and implement development plans and to promote economic growth". Dantzer stated that if funds are spent on these things they would clearly be authorized by statute. Stroebel questioned the \$7500 contracted to the Merchants to be used for events to promote the City. Dantzer asserted that if the Merchants report where those funds are to be used ahead of time and the DDA knows it is an authorized purpose, it will be fine. Stroebel emphasized it is used for events downtown, promoting downtown and all of the purposes she mentioned. Clark stated the Merchants prepare a budget to the DDA for these funds. Dantzer explained as long as it is a service promoting the downtown the DDA needs to have a level of control and the entity receiving the funds are responsible to the DDA making sure the money is spent on what the DDA agreed to prior to the disbursement. She put emphasis on accountability to the DDA for the funds spent - preferably through a contract. Clark stated the DDA funds to the Merchants have existed for many years and a member of the DDA has always been a member of the Downtown Merchants. Dantzer stressed "gifting" is prohibited using Public Funds.

**DDA By-Laws -**

Stroebel informed the proposed By Laws for the DDA given to each member will be tabled until the next DDA meeting. This will give sufficient time for members to review and put on the Agenda for the next meeting for discussion. Some questioned if the DDA has past By Laws. All agreed they do not.

**Pocket Park -**

Fabbri informed the Pocket Park is still open and they agreed it should be closed the 1st of the year. The fountains have been winterized.

**Motion by Stroebel to shut down the bathrooms and be re-opened (weather permitting) by April 15, 2018. Second by Clark.**

**Yes - Jayson Stroebel, Joanne Bennett, Joe Clark, Autumn Hunter, Sandy Rabidue, Mayor Lawrence, Samantha Fabbri.**

**No - None.**

**Absent - Rusty Showalter, Tracy Williams, Dora Zapczynski.**

Manager Grace agreed to contact DPW and advise.

**EDC-**

Mandi Chasey presented members A Strategic Plan for the Ogemaw County EDC and Ogemaw County 2018-2022. Chasey informed they went to different Townships and Cities and asked what they wanted EDC to be working on and this is the results from that. Strengths of the County and A Plan for an Improved Economy in Ogemaw County are detailed in the Plan. Chasey stated they are in the running for the Rising Tide Program between Ogemaw and Roscommon Counties. Rising Tide is for communities that are struggling - if chosen they collaborate and advise on what to work on to be better positioned for redevelopment opportunities. Chasey stated she hopes to hear in the next couple of weeks if our county is chosen for this program. Discussion was made on creating a standard form for entities requesting contractual contributions in the future. Chasey stated the EDC mailed a fundraiser letter several months ago but has had no response. They hope to do another mailing and hope to be able to inform EDC was awarded the Rising Tide Program. Lawrence questioned improving housing opportunities for citizens and employees outlined in the Strategic Plan and stated the City has limited growth for this. Chasey reiterated this plan is for the entire County - not just the City. Chasey stated they are considering a complex type of housing near exit 215. Lawrence questioned if they are also looking at growth at exit 215 for business opportunities. Chasey replied they are. Members expressed opposition to Kirtland College moving further from our County. Chasey stated the West Branch building owned by Kirtland is looking for anchor programs now. Chasey reported she helped promote the Hiring Fair for the new business coming to Grayling which over 400 people attended. Due to the shortage of housing in Grayling she anticipates potential employees will look for housing in our nearby county.

**MINUTES -**

Minutes of the December 19, 2017 meeting were reviewed.

**Motion by Stroebel to approve the minutes as presented. Second by Clark.**

**Yes - Jayson Stroebel, Joanne Bennett, Joe Clark, Autumn Hunter, Sandy Rabidue, Mayor Lawrence, Samantha Fabbri.**

**No - None.**

**Absent - Rusty Showalter, Tracy Williams, Dora Zapczynski.**

**BILLS-**

Nothing to report for bills.

**Bids -**

None.

## **REPORTS AND/OR COMMENTS -**

### Chairman Report -

Stroebel did report he had questions on the Financial Sheet regarding comparisons from last month to the current report showing equipment rental increased by thousands of dollars. Stroebel questioned how rates are determined for this equipment charge. Grace advised it is based on the MDOT rate. Stroebel stated we will need to amend the budget as we are over-budget on equipment rental. Clark questioned policy and procedure for DPW removing snow from sidewalks. Discussion was held on the pros and cons of cutting back these services or leaving them as is. Many were concerned that we are early in the winter and we need to look at the budget to see what areas could be amended to ensure the funds are in the areas needed. Grace mentioned she could ask DPW to estimate an approximate cost for anticipated snow removal for the rest of the season. Contracting some of these services outside was discussed. Members expressed the importance of having sidewalks done as priority. Grace stated DPW would do the parking lots even if DDA agrees to not pay for this service...it would just not be a priority anymore. Stroebel suggested we wait until next month and see what snow removal costs the DDA. If it continues to be high we could stop paying for the parking lots snow removal as priority. Stroebel also requested a line item of what DDA is paying for snow removal. Grace stated she bases her City budget on the DDA budget - if we want to make that change and it is not going to cause any issues for the City she can do it.

**Motion by Stroebel to move half of the Contractual Services Funds (\$7500) to Equipment Rental to cover the budget of the remaining season for snow removal. Second by Clark.**

**Yes - Jayson Stroebel, Joanne Bennett, Joe Clark, Autumn Hunter, Sandy Rabidue, Mayor Lawrence, Samantha Fabbri.**

**No - None.**

**Absent - Rusty Showalter, Tracy Williams, Dora Zapczynski.**

Stroebel reported City Council has a vacancy due to the resignation of Mr. Lucas. Stroebel stated he chose not to apply for it due to the fact DDA has 2 members on the board who are also members of Council and according to By-Laws we are not allowed to do this.

Stroebel relayed Officer Beehler was commended by Council for entering a burning house recently to ensure no people were inside.

### Member Reports -

Grace suggested DDA create a Budget Sub Committee for the upcoming proposed budget by the March Council meeting.

Fabbri questioned the \$7500 budgeted for the Merchants? Grace advised when the budget sub-committee first met and the reason the line item was changed was because it was not budgeted to provide \$7500 to the Downtown Merchants. Instead the plan at the time was to potentially spend out of that for Downtown Events. Fabbri stated she thought this \$7500 was "earmarked" for the Downtown Merchants. Discussion was held on the way this money evolved...and how it has been allocated in the past. Grace stated the DDA can still spend this \$7500 but first need to request a budget from the Merchants and a contractual agreement on how the money is spent. Once the DDA discusses and approves the budget they can legally disperse the money to the Merchants.

### Planning Commission -

Rabidue and Bennett advised they attended the last Planning meeting. Rabidue expressed concern over the benches/flower pots with Planning in the midst of re-writing the zoning and Master Plan. Grace stated she is not concerned with flower pots being an issue and is currently waiting for a template from

MDOT for permitting. Grace stated the main concern is for vendors in the streets proposing an actual Sidewalk Cafe Restaurant type of permitting. Grace requested DDA create a plan or drawing she can submit to MDOT for approval of a permit for benches and flower pots. MDOT owns the sidewalk and they are required to make sure it complies with ADA accessibility. Grace stated our current zoning does not have anything specific about benches and flower pots...she can still make it happen by going through MDOT and submitting the proper drawings if they meet their approval.

#### **NEW BUSINESS -**

Stroebel stated he attended the Joint DDA meeting last week. Many other members of the DDA were in attendance also. They were informed the signs for exits 212 and 215 are done and ready to install. Question was raised as to where the signs are being stored. Lawrence informed that a FOIA request was sent previously to West Branch Township requesting information regarding the Way finding Signs. They replied by submitting a bill to the City for over \$600 to comply with the FOIA request. Clark suggested by-passing West Branch Township and reach out to someone else who may have the information we need - possibly Bob Griffin may know where the signs are being stored. The signs are quite large - 12 feet long by 6 feet high and would need a large area to be stored at. The signs have been scheduled to be installed by April 19, 2018 according to information from the Joint DDA meeting. Stroebel shared diagrams and pictures of the signs.

#### **Alleys - Beautification Project -**

Beautification Project - Stroebel advised he has discussed with several people the Alley between Sun Spa and Ink and Thread. This has been discussed as an area in need of improvement which could benefit the downtown area greatly. A Rain Garden is going to be created through grants Collins has secured along that walkway behind Creative Arts leading to the River Walk. Collins stated a small group of people have been working on this Rain Garden for almost a year. A small grant of \$1000 was awarded for the project from Community Foundation for Northeast Michigan. Recently a grant has been submitted to Huron Pines and the amount of \$5000 has been earmarked for this project. With this most recent grant money this Rain Garden coming to fruition is now a reality! Stroebel stated this Alley has much potential. This may be a great DDA project to improve this area by installing outside seating (tables, chairs, etc), plants, trees, overhead lighting (strings of lights). This would tie into our River Walk and beautify the downtown area. Stroebel asked members to think on this before the next meeting so we can discuss the possibility of going forth with this project. We currently have the Pocket Park across the street and with the Rain Garden going in along the alley to the River Walk - this project would complement and enhance the City. Clark suggested we contact Ken Neubecker and ask he create a rendering for this project. Clark agreed to contact Ken.

Grace also wanted to have DDA think about what they would like to do with the space where the old laundromat is next to the railroad in the event it is demolished in the future.

#### **Parking Permits -**

Stroebel questioned the Parking Permits for the City Lots. Grace explained these are issued through City Hall and she thinks this money is put in the general fund. Stroebel asked why the DDA doesn't receive this revenue since they pay for the Parking Lots. Grace stated the small fees received from these permits do not even cover the cost of city administrative fees for the service.

**OLD BUSINESS -**

**Signs -**

Rabidue shared and showed several sample signs she created to display in the vacant buildings in the downtown district. Many styles, sizes, and prices were compared.

**Motion by Stroebel to contract with Office Central to create and produce signs for the vacant buildings in the downtown district. Second by Fabbri.**

**Yes - Jayson Stroebel, Joanne Bennett, Joe Clark, Autumn Hunter, Sandy Rabidue, Mayor Lawrence, Samantha Fabbri.**

**No - None.**

**Absent - Rusty Showalter, Tracy Williams, Dora Zapczynski.**

Update on lights in the 3rd Street Parking lot - Stroebel stated one light is fixed and we are waiting on Consumers to fix the others.

**Victorian Theme -**

Stroebel relayed the Planning Commission is debating on abolishing the Victorian Theme. Discussion was held on pros and cons. Grace stated they need more in the context of current requirements for signage for the downtown area. It was stated the Way Finding signs do display Victorian West Branch which is ok as we still have Victorian Buildings downtown. Clark stated he felt we need some semblance of a theme. Bennett stated we can do that without a theme...we just need some regulations.

**PUBLIC COMMENT -**

Nothing.

**ADJOURNMENT -**

Stroebel adjourned the meeting at 1:51 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kelli Collins  
GPSCR Coordinator