

**MINUTES
PLANNING BOARD MEETING
CITY COMMISSION CHAMBERS, CITY HALL
July 16, 2014
7:00 P.M.**

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman John Dame

INVOCATION: Chairman John Dame

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL: Those who were in attendance were: Chair John Dame, Vice Chair Rick Roach, Board Members Karen Abdul-Hameed, Irving Spokony, Deborah Hoffman, Bette Biggar, Ted Anthony, (arrived late), and Alternate Board Member Joseph Hults. Also in attendance were Community Development Director Valerie Ferrell and Administrative Assistant Mamie Drane.

Those not in attendance: Alternate Board Member Judy Schelfo

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Board Member Spokony made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 16th regular Planning Board meeting with corrections. The motion was seconded by **Board Member Abdul-Hameed** and approved by unanimous voice call vote.

PUBLIC HEARING/BUSINESS ITEMS

- 1) **PUBLIC HEARING: CONSIDER RECOMMENDING APPROVAL OF THE PROPOSED COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE AREA IDENTIFIED AS THE COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AREA (CRA).**

Community Development Director Valerie Ferrell gave a brief overview of the Community Redevelopment Area and introduced Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) Executive Director Pat Steed and Program Manager Eric Labbe to provide a presentation on the history of the City initiative, Downtown Vision and Master Plan and how the Community Redevelopment Area/Agency (CRA) is an implementation tool to accomplish redevelopment in the core and transitional areas of the community.

CFRPC Executive Director Pat Steed reviewed brief history of the City and community efforts to date including:

- a. Downtown Visioning and Master Plan
- b. Implementation tools
- c. Downtown Design Guidelines in the Unified Land Development Code
- d. City wayfinding program
- e. Community Redevelopment Agency

Ms. Steed identified the role of a Community Redevelopment Area/Agency/District that requires a board to govern itself which is typically comprised of City Commissioners, and the CRA would operate their own agendas as a separate government entity that cannot increase taxes, pass ordinances or rezone.

The Finding of Necessity is a study required to determine whether the criteria under Florida law exists and is used to create a district boundary where blight conditions exist. She indicated there were 4 determining factors identified in the area showing consistent decreased property values, site and structure deterioration in a variety of zoning districts (residential, commercial, and industrial), faulty lot layouts which make it difficult to assemble for redevelopment, and unsanitary or unsafe conditions such as drainage issues. The total area that identified in the Finding of Necessity study comprised of approximately 1,032 land acres.

With the boundaries being described in the Finding of Necessity study, the benefit of designating this area as a CRA would allow the agency to generate a revenue stream through tax increment financing, which directs additional property taxes generated in the area as their values increase to go to the CRA. She reviewed a graphic demonstrating the slow and steady increase of property values over time and indicated it can take many years to build up significant funds to be spent within the CRA boundaries. Florida law allows CRAs to be established for a term of up to 40 years, 30 years initially with an option to extend an additional 10 years.

Ms. Steed stated the Finding of Necessity study has been approved by the City Commission and accepted by the Polk County Board of County Commissioners. The next step in establishing the Community Redevelopment Agency is adoption of a Community Redevelopment Plan, which is before the Board for consideration this evening. She turned the presentation over to Mr. Labbe to review the elements of the Plan.

CFRPC Program Manager Eric Labbe stated the Community Redevelopment Plan is required by Florida law to identify how the CRA will spend the tax increment funds over the term of 40 years. The major elements of the plan, include: introduction of the district, community engagement, required contents and redevelopment activities. The introduction includes detailed analysis of the boundary and its demographics, land use and zoning, taxable values as well as residential blight and affordability analyses, and downtown core and transitional inventory.

Mr. Labbe reviewed the community engagement section, including the variety of community workshops and public input events spanning from early 2012 to the present. The most recent community engagement session was held in June 2014 to identify issues and opportunities within the CRA boundary. Property owners and residents attended the session and results mirrored many components of the Downtown Vision and Master plan.

The required content of the Plan is determined by Florida Statutes Ch. 163.362 and includes a legal description of the boundary, open space and street layout, dwelling units, neighborhood impact, capital projects funded by the City, project costs, etc.

As a result of several community workshops and an analysis by staff and the CFRPC, the following programs were identified to assist in redevelopment efforts in the CRA:

- Greenfield, infill, and brownfield development incentives
- Building/Property improvements and rehabilitation incentives
- Public infrastructure
- Beautification
- Neighborhood reinvestment programs
- More...

Projects that were identified in the Plan include:

- Redevelopment of the Gray trucking site downtown
- Develop business beautification program
- Pedestrian system/crosswalk improvements
- Wayfinding signs
- Pocket parks
- More...

Mr. Labbe indicated the programs and projects are put in place as a guide for the CRA Board and staff for redevelopment efforts. The CRA would be under no obligation to do each of these items. They also would have an option to amend the plan with new projects or programs at a later date if they decide it is best for continuing redevelopment efforts.

Ms. Steed concluded the presentation by reviewing the next steps for the Lake Alfred CRA, including adoption of the CRA Plan by the City Commission and review by Polk County Board of County Commissioners with an anticipated effective date of January 1, 2015.

Chair Dame opened the public hearing.

Rick Coleman, 485 N Lake Shore Way, expressed his support for the establishment of a CRA in Lake Alfred, however was concerned with the boundaries proposed. He felt it should focus on downtown development. He pointed out the vacant/undeveloped property near Lake Lowery currently has almost no taxable value, and once developed taxes would not go to City, but to CRA. He stated the City has to maintain services including police and fire. He also did not agree with including the residential properties

Allan Arbuthnot, Lake Lowery Road, stated he is not a resident of the city, but lives next to the city limits and owns property within the CRA. He stated this is a policy from the United Nations and part of the Agenda 21 policy which comes to the federal government, through the state all the way to the local government level. He also stated this is no longer a democracy, but is becoming a republic. The CRA plan and tax increment financing is “smoke and mirrors.” Land values will rise as more development occurs and this is a bad deal. He felt the CRA is “biting off more than you can chew.” Also, he lives in the County and does not want to annex into the City because he enjoys the country. He clarified this Plan will make taxes go up as development happens.

John Murphy, 585 Sellars Drive, stated he felt all subdivisions should have 2 entrances/exits in case of disasters or emergencies. The completion of the one-way pair improvements on US Highway 17/92 downtown caused a portion of Buena Vista Drive near his subdivision to be closed. He feels this should be something that could be addressed in this Plan.

Chair Dame asked for clarification on the CRA boundary approaching Lake Lowery.

Ms. Ferrell stated the eastern boundary of the current City limits is included in the CRA, just south of Lake Lowery. The property is owned by Gapway Groves Corporation, is zoned industrial and currently pasture and groves. There is no property outside of the City limits included in the CRA boundary.

Board Member Karen Abdul-Hameed referred to the Plan and inquired about the community policing and neighborhood watch programs. She asked if the CRA could pay for extra police personnel.

Ms. Steed indicated certain programs can be financed for the benefit of the CRA, such as a community policing station. The goal of the CRA is not to minimize the City's obligations to provide services, but rather to make enhancements that are needed. She also discussed the Gapway Groves property and its industrial zoning. The demand for law enforcement services in industrial areas is usually much less than residential. Taxes generated today will still go to the City, and once the CRA is established only the incremental increases will go to CRA including both the City and County tax revenues. Also she stated the establishment of a CRA is not a program sponsored or subsidized by the federal government. She stated the CRA is entirely a local issue dealing with the City of Lake Alfred and Polk County.

Board Member Rick Roach concurred with Ms. Steed's statement regarding the tax increment financing. He stated he has lived in his home for 26 years, and has needed sidewalk improvements on his street. He did not feel the CRA would assist in getting this project completed. He stated his home is within the CRA and proposed that he should abstain from voting this evening.

Ms. Steed mentioned that the residential areas are included because blight conditions have been identified as part of the Finding of Necessity study. She also mentioned several other Polk County cities have established CRAs including Auburndale, Bartow, Haines City, Lake Wales, Winter Haven and Lakeland. The residential component in the proposed Lake Alfred CRA is approximately 154 acres, which is a much smaller portion of the CRA in the other cities mentioned previously.

Board Member Bette Biggar stated that she owns commercial building in CRA and asked if property values could increase based on the adoption of the CRA. She also wanted clarification if the tax burden is to be placed on the current property owners. Also, she proposed she should abstain from voting this evening.

Ms. Steed stated each individual property is assessed annually, based on other components such as improvements and surrounding sales. The CRA would not be the sole reason for any increase in property values. She also stated that simply owning property within the CRA is not a reason to preclude any Board member from voting on the CRA Plan this evening, unless there was a direct financial benefit.

Alternate Board Member Joe Hults stated the CRA affects most property owners in Lake Alfred. He went on to say that the CRA Plan is a list of objectives and asked board members to consider it as a plan. He discussed the risk that property values may not necessarily increase, and the City will still need to provide essential services. Investors need to be encouraged to develop commercial and industrial property and the residential population needs to be increased in order to balance the risk. He stated the CRA Plan is a tool to encourage redevelopment and assist with investment and population in the community.

Board Member Abdul-Hameed stated that there are those property owners who care about their property investment and the community, and those who simply do not want property values to increase. The CRA gives an opportunity for reinvestment into the community, to construct facilities such as a community center, pedestrian-friendly downtown, parks, and to implement senior programs. With such a large investment into the community, then property values will increase. She expressed that this is part of a vision to create a better place to live.

Board Member Ted Anthony stated he has served on the Board for several years and has been a resident of the community for longer, and is concerned with the size of the CRA area. He

senior programs. With such a large investment into the community, then property values will increase. She expressed that this is part of a vision to create a better place to live.

Board Member Ted Anthony stated he has served on the Board for several years and has been a resident of the community for longer, and is concerned with the size of the CRA area. He referenced failed attempts in attracting a grocery store into the community, due to lack of population and other businesses. He also expressed concern relating to development standards within the new downtown overlay district.

The Board held discussion of the benefits of the CRA and incentives in other communities, and how the residential areas could be redeveloped or enhanced with CRA funds. They also discussed educating the public and possibly holding a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce to discuss the CRA.

Ms. Ferrell stated the board must make a recommendation to the City Commission on this issue. She also indicated the board members who may own property in the CRA could vote on this issue as they have for other planning documents such as the Downtown Master Plan and Land Development Code revisions including the downtown overlay district. Unless the board member has a direct financial gain from the action before them, they do not need to abstain from voting.

Chair Dame closed the public hearing.

Board Member Roach made a motion* to recommend approval of the Community Redevelopment Plan as presented. Seconded by **Board Member Hoffman** and approved by majority roll call vote:

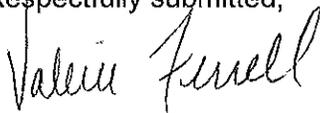
*Mr. Roach noted on record that as long as the CRA residential district area he resides in does not place him in direct conflict with his authority to make this recommendation.

Board Member Biggar	–	Abstain
Board Member Anthony	–	Nay
Board Member Spokony	–	Aye
Board Member Hoffman	–	Aye
Vice Chair Roach	–	Aye
Chair Dame	–	Aye
Board Member Abdul-Hameed	–	Aye

Alternate Board Member Hults also expressed his support of the vote taken above.

With there being no further business to discuss, Chair Dame adjourned the meeting at 8:50pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Valerie Ferrell
Community Development Director

and



Mamie Drane
Administrative Assistant