

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF HIGHLAND
DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Record of the November 14, 2012 Regular Board Meeting
APPROVED**

Members Present: Roscoe Smith, Beth Lewis, Mike Maher, John Hirzel, Gail Perrin, Dale Feigley

Absent: Matt Barnes, Doug Bourgeois, Trish Pilchowski

Staff Present: Melissa Dashevich, Executive Director
Karen Beardsley, Recording Secretary

Visitors Present: Rick Hamill, Design Committee

Mr. Smith called the meeting to order at 6:30PM.

Director's Report

Ms. Dashevich's reviewed her Director's Report and a copy is attached to these minutes.

Mr. Smith changed the order of business in order to expedite the consultants' time.

E. NEW BUSINESS

Sidewalk Grant Status

Jeff Huhta stated that the feedback he received on the status of this grant was not positive. The competition is very strong and Highland would more likely be eligible if it already had a downtown established. Since the trail component is the first element of the program, it is still in design. Mr. Huhta felt that in order to gain some headway in this, it is necessary to get political and ask state representatives and senators for their support, within their district. Perhaps getting political support, requesting they ask that the funding be used within their own district might persuade the process. Mr. Huhta asked Vince Ranger of MDOT to postpone any decisions for 30 days so we might have a chance to get some political backing. Also, he spoke about the differing federal guidelines, involving SEMCOG receiving half of the funding, but unable to administer the process, hence possibly requiring MDOT and their 'already in place' structure.

Regarding Livingston Road layout, feedback from the road commission is that they are against angled parking. This has been reworked to parallel parking on Livingston Road, and using John Street for more parking; there will be a loading zone designated in front of Highland Feed.

Regarding the December 5th meeting, he suggests a specific agenda, introducing project as an opportunity for the community to respond and have input – not set in stone. In addition, there will be exhibits showing what easements will be needed, and hopefully those property owners will be there and we can have dialogue, preparing for securing those easements at a later date. When approaching the discussion of phasing of this project, public input will be very important. That, in addition to funding available will help set priorities for phasing. Also, showcase what DDA has done already. There will be slide show presentations and multiple exhibits on the design, lighting, boardwalk, details and funding to date. Be prepared to stay and speak with some people one on one; they may not be willing to speak in front of a group, but may approach afterward the presentation.

To bring the DDA up to date on discussions with the Design Committee, a presentation was prepared for the light fixture selection, as well as a sample that should be available for the December 5th meeting. Additional options need to be decided such as banner poles, power outlets, wreath hooks, speaker ready. Also discussed was Colasanti's boardwalk and related drainage issues. The rail system should be one that doesn't barricade or block views, such as mesh rail or cables. (See installations at Independence Oaks for example.) Piers will probably be necessary.

Ms. Dashevich will have a flyer available at the December 5th meeting regarding ideas for sidewalk inlays. These could be done as a fundraiser, as a design contest, etc. Creativity is key: animal tracks, bronze plaques, dance steps, handprints, horseshoes, mosaics.

Another area of consideration is mailbox gangs, the postal service desires these; eight in all will be displaced.

With regard to landscaping in the DDA, Nowak & Fraus has a new urban horticulturalist on staff, and taking into consideration maintenance, drought, salt, and environmental considerations, suggestions were made to maximize year round interest. Suggestions were made for textural greens and greens in addition to flowers. Also a variety of trees were discussed.

With regard to the retaining walls at Colasanti's, a cobblestone type of material was selected to match much of the historic sections in the area.

Treasurer's Report

Mr. Hirzel had figures through September; he and Ms. Dashevich will work with Maria at the township to get latest numbers. The budget amendment goes before the township board tonight. Mr. Hirzel stated that only \$15,000 has been paid to date; he will find out if more engineering bills will be submitted for payment this year.

Board Meeting Minutes of October 17, 2012

MRS. PERRIN MOVED TO APPROVE the Board Meeting Minutes of October 17, 2012 as presented. SUPPORTED BY MR. FEIGLEY and the MOTION CARRIED with a unanimous voice vote (6 yes votes).

OLD BUSINESS

Clock Tower Follow-Up

The repaired clock mechanism has been returned. The hands have been repainted so as to be more visible, and the mechanism will be re-installed soon.

Main Street Oakland County

Quarterly reports are in the packet.

Rick Hamill's Presentation:

New state legislature has been introduced regarding vacant schools. If it passes, any vacant school buildings owned by a school district will have to be listed on a state-wide register, and could likely become state-controlled properties, allowing them to be used potentially for a charter school.

Mr. Dittmar, who is on the school board, has shared that the school board will likely rescind their original offer made to Highland Township, which expires in March, and will solicit bids for demolition.

Mr. Hamill, along with many others, and many who campaigned during this last election, feel that Highland Middle School and the property it sits on holds many opportunities for Highland Township, one of which being septic. Mr. Hamill walked and inspected the existing 52,000 square foot septic field and felt it was well engineered when installed, and it has not failed in 20 years. A septic field such as this would cost about \$300,000 to build.

The DDA has an advantage over the township board, in that the DDA can purchase property, incubate business, and make revenue streams. The township cannot, and if they purchased it would only be a liability until they could sell it.

Mr. Hamill, once sworn in, will call a special meeting of the township board to attempt to get approval to negotiate on behalf of the township (and as a DDA partner) for the value of that property. He plans to offer \$1 to the school board for the building and property just to begin discussions on what can really happen there. He plans to put many restrictions and indemnifications on the offer, and hopes that just opening a dialogue will be enough for them to stop plans for demolition and give Mr. Hamill the opportunity to formulate a business plan to determine the viability of any plans. The building costs about \$32,000 per year to sit idle, and if purchased, those costs (just under \$3,000/month) would need to be absorbed. But it could be put to use (and bring in revenue) immediately; Freedom Works is highly interested in a portion of the building, and would be willing to contribute some of the maintenance; Mr. Hamill has received interest in the kitchen portion of the building, as well as many local businesses (and investors) that are excited to pitch in and help. Also, if we find the building isn't going to work for us, we still have the value in the land, septic and even resale.

Mr. Hamill and Mr. Dittmar feel that the school board will listen and be interested since they are looking at the cost of demolition (over \$500,000) and public disapproval and disappointment if the school is demolished. Then they would still have the upkeep of the land until which time they might be able to sell, and could possibly be to a big box store. By entertaining Mr. Hamill's offer, the school board could show a willingness to work together with the township (and ultimately the DDA) for the good of the community. They would save the cost of demolition, avoid losing the building to state control and allow an opportunity for it to be put to better use.

Mr. Feigley sees this as an opportunity to get affordable sewers in the foreseeable future to draw business into the downtown area.

Mr. Hamill felt that the township could also be a tenant, freeing up their current buildings for use as a professional / medical center.

With respect to the current sidewalk project being affected, Mr. Hamill shared that, during a recent Highland Township budget meeting, it was disclosed that the township holds \$900,000, earning less than 1% that belongs to Levy. He would like to approach Levy and ask that it be converted to a gift, or put an end date on the 'loan', such as 2025. That would then be money that the township could loan to the DDA, instead of a bonded amount.

Mr. Hamill sees part of his job as township supervisor to make sure that building gets filled; and for the first time, Highland Township will be working together, as a partner, with the DDA.

At _____ p.m., Mr. Smith adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

A. Roscoe Smith
ARS/kb

APPROVED