

CITY OF CHARLEVOIX
DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (DDA) MINUTES
Monday, August 26, 2013 — 5:30 p.m.
210 State Street, City Hall, City Council Chambers, Charlevoix, MI

A. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Chair Hugh Mason.

B. Invocation or Pledge of Allegiance

C. Roll Call of Members Present

Chair: Hugh Mason

Members Present: Dan Barron, Kirby Dipert, Fred DiMartino, Jeannine Wallace, Todd Wyett, John Yaroch, and Mayor Norman L. Carlson, Jr. (arrived at 5:44 p.m.)

Members Absent: None

CED Director: Bethany Pearson

D. Inquiry Into Potential Conflicts of Interest

None.

E. Approval of Minutes

Motion by Member Barron, seconded by Member Yaroch, to approve the May 28, 2013 and June 10, 2013 minutes as presented. Member Wyett abstained as he was not present at the June 10th meeting. Motion passed by 6 to 0 voice vote.

F. Old Business

None.

G. New Business

General Discussion on New Community Economic Development (CED) Director Position

City Manager Rob Straebel introduced Bethany Pearson as the new Community Economic Development (CED) Director. He stated that she had been on board for two weeks and he wanted to make sure she gets settled and can give some feedback both to the DDA and the City Council as to what she sees for the projects. Manager Straebel stated that there had been some discussion about conducting a joint meeting of the DDA and the City Council regarding how to divide Ms. Pearson's time in the future.

Manager Straebel also reported that there were two interesting programs at the library the previous week: (1) the Main Street program, which the DDA may want to discuss further, and (2) a presentation regarding Economic Development. Manager Straebel's recommendation, based on the Economic Development presentation, is to conduct a marketing survey of the downtown areas and industrial parks to inventory what is currently available, look at any deficiencies and recruit those types of businesses that might make a good fit in the community.

Member Wyett indicated that he had included a copy of the Boyne City Main Street program in the agenda packets. He had met with the Boyne City Director and found out that they spent \$7,000 on their plan. Manager Straebel stated that Boyne City had been successful over the years, but one of the things he gained from the presentation by Bob Gibbs is that a community should maintain its own character and values and not necessarily "cookie-cutter" other successes in other communities. Discussion followed regarding specifics related to Boyne City and the changes both communities have gone through over the years. Member Wyett felt that whenever a new business opens in Boyne City, Charlevoix should find out why the business chose to locate in Boyne City rather than Charlevoix and if they would consider coming to Charlevoix also.

Member Barron recommended polling the downtown business community to find out what else can be done to promote the businesses. He also felt that a local questionnaire to find out what type of businesses people want to see downtown would be helpful. Member Wyett suggested talking to the vendors who use Castle Farms to see if they would be willing to locate a business or a branch of their business in Charlevoix.

Director Pearson asked the members what they felt was working or not working in terms of the downtown area. The following items were discussed:

- Lighting of the trees downtown and expansion of the number of trees that are lit;

- Concerts in East Park, possibly shift concerts to Friday or Saturday nights;
- Need the community to support new businesses in town, need the right tenants supported locally;
- Lack of quality hotel lodging;
- Need draw for winter visitors, newer lodging at Boyne Mountain close to the ski slopes draws more winter visitors;
- Need for a “flag” hotel in conjunction with Castle Farms as close to downtown as possible;
- Lack of gift shops in downtown area;
- Lack of shoe store in town; and
- Need for an anchor store, a name that would attract people to Charlevoix.

Director Pearson asked the members what their priority is - attracting new business or supporting and expanding existing businesses. Discussion followed regarding the need for some “new blood” (new businesses), as well as supporting existing businesses in their efforts to expand or upgrade their business.

Member Wyett stated he had written down a number of random thoughts that he read to the Board:

- Expand Waterfront Art Show from one to two days; and
- Change the management of the Chamber and the Convention & Visitors Bureau into one entity; discussion followed regarding the three entities that receive funds related to economic development – the Chamber, the Convention & Visitor’s Bureau, and the DDA.

Discussion followed regarding the logistical challenges in the area for job creation and the cost per square foot of manufacturing/light industrial space in Charlevoix as compared to down state.

Member Yaroch stated that he had a lot of materials that he had gotten from the Governor’s Council on Downtown Reorganization and Economic Development including brochures such as “100 Concrete Ideas on How to Jump Start Your Downtown” to share with Director Pearson.

Discussion followed regarding the lack of available buildings to house any type of light industry, high tech, or manufacturing, and the challenges of getting someone to build a new building in this area when there are so many vacant buildings available in other parts of the State.

Manager Straebel stated he felt that the logistical issues could be trumped by quality of life issues, and there are a lot of knowledge based businesses that would love to move to Charlevoix regardless of our rural nature. He felt that the focus needed to be on the soft sciences: engineering, medical, insurance services, web design, and the up and coming pre-technologies.

Member Wyett stressed the need for higher quality schools in the area to attract young professionals to locate to this area. Member Yaroch felt that it was the young working professional with the young family or looking to start a family that would like Charlevoix’s quality of life. Chamber of Commerce President Erin Bemis stated that retention on the industry side is definitely easier than attraction for some of the new industries and she listed the companies that have expanded in the last 18 months. She stated that the St. Mary’s Cement Plant was the most profitable cement plant in North America and the DDA needed to look at what can be done to help them grow and create more jobs. President Bemis advised that there are issues with workforce training in the retail and restaurant trades, but that they could put 50 welders to work in Charlevoix County right now.

After listening to members’ comments, Director Pearson noted that it seems the priority for revitalizing the downtown is to be working to improve the school system and the industrial park. Member Barron felt that 25% of her time should be focused on that; the other downtown related issues fall into the quality of life component. Member Dipert stated that the City had a full, vibrant downtown which is one more tool to have when you go to ask other businesses to locate or re-locate in Charlevoix.

Mayor Carlson stated that the Charlevoix School System is the highest rated school system north of Clare and in the top 20 out of the whole State. Member Wyett stated that he had just read an article reporting that the Charlevoix School System was rated 64th in the State. Mayor Carlson admitted that the Charlevoix School System had to re-group; however, he felt that they were doing a good job regrouping and that merging into two schools and opening up the Great Lakes Educational Center (old middle school) was the best thing that they ever did. Additionally, the school district is bringing a college, an early age development program, a seat voucher program and an alternative ed program to town. They are also considering the recruitment of an Aveda Institute cosmetology school for the Center.

Director Pearson stated that the consensus appeared to be that quality of life is what is going to bring Charlevoix back up to speed and she questioned what within the DDA District would enhance our quality of life. Mayor Carlson replied that a vibrant, successful downtown, which includes businesses that people can go back to year after year, is essential. Member Dipert suggested also promoting a "shop locally" program. Member Barron reminded the board of the "Shop Charlevoix First" campaign that had run in the past.

The Board had previously discussed emailing boaters who frequent the Charlevoix Marina. Member Wyett suggested that they include something asking boaters to consider re-locating their business to Charlevoix. Other ideas discussed included: additional food and beverage establishments; promoting the library more; creating a Marina brochure "You'd Rather Be Here" or "Come for the Summer, Stay for a Lifetime" programs; and target business owners who are coming through the airport to see if they would be interested in locating a business in Charlevoix.

Member Wyett asked about the status of adding more lights to the downtown, the marina and East Park for the winter season. He said he will donate \$5,000 if the City Council and DDA each comes up with \$5,000 for enhancements to the lighting. He asked to include this item on the next agenda for discussion.

Director Pearson asked if the members attended the Main Street program meeting at the library and whether or not they were familiar with the program. Mayor Carlson reported that, in the past, the City of Charlevoix never qualified for that program. Manager Straebel noted that the "Cool Cities" program and the "Main Street" program is an "either/or" situation and the DDA chose the "Cool Cities" program. Director Pearson brought the Main Street program to the Board because there are various consultant and specialist services available, free-of-charge, to help Charlevoix create plans for lighting of the downtown, or downtown revitalization, if Charlevoix was accepted into the Michigan Main Street program. At the Main Street program meeting on Thursday there was an overwhelming positive response to pursue the program. The only cost was staff-time and travel time if staff needed to attend a conference on the program. Director Pearson printed out a copy of the application packet for each Member to review and stated that the application is due November 1st, so this item could be considered at the next Board meeting. The program includes a two-pronged approach – historic preservation of the downtown district and economic development (a building owner can invest as much or as little into the program as they would like). While there is no direct financial benefit of being in the program, the Main Street program offers many in-kind services and opens up the door for grant funded opportunities. Boyne City contributes a lot of their success to the Main Street program.

H. Audience – Non-Agenda Input

None.

I. Executive Director's Report

Director Pearson stated it was a very busy first week and noted that the contract for the Art in Public Places' initiative expires October 1st, asking the Board to consider about what it wants to do with this program next year. She also reported that there are going to be nine (9) new park benches installed in town via the memorial bench program and the benches would be installed within the next month or two. Eight (8) of the benches are from one donor and will be placed along the waterfront on East Park, and the ninth bench is coming from a donor through the Charlevoix Community Foundation. The ninth bench may be placed along the channel, near Michigan Beach, or on top of Water Tower Park.

J. Miscellaneous Business of the Board

None.

K. Future Agenda Items

None.

L. Adjournment

Motion by Member Barron, seconded by Member Yaroch to adjourn. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 7:04 p.m.