

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PRESIDENT
& BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE VILLAGE OF BEECHER
HELD AT THE WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP CENTER,
30200 TOWN CENTER ROAD, BEECHER, ILLINOIS
JULY 26, 2010 -- 7:00 P.M.**

All present joined in the Pledge to the Flag.

President Lohmann called the meeting to order.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: President Lohmann and Trustees Cleary, Ahrendt, Szymanski, Gardner, Kuhlman and Wehling.

ABSENT: None.

STAFF PRESENT: Clerk Janett Conner, Administrator Robert Barber and Treasurer Nelson Collins.

GUESTS: Lynn Dill from the Beecher Herald, George Schuitema, Kim Koutsky, Gerald and Carol VonAlven, Pat Cleary, Dave Hudik, Joe Suppes, Don Sala, Glen Abney, Marcy Meyer, Joyce Giroux, Rudy Oliver and Byron Harden.

The Board held a special meeting for the purpose of discussing the future of the old downtown area. Property owners of the old downtown area were invited to the meeting to participate in the discussion. Administrator Barber reported that there have been ongoing problems with development in the old downtown area and the Village is looking for potential ways to try and revitalize it. Trustee Szymanski explained that this meeting came about due to the request from a property owner to convert to first floor residential on his commercial property. The agenda set forth the following items for discussion:

- 1) The use of a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District
- 2) Age restricted housing
- 3) High density residential
- 4) The Chuck Eckenstahler plan from 1996
- 5) A pioneer village
- 6) Use of School District property
- 7) National Register for an historic downtown
- 8) Artistic-centered downtown

Property owners from the old downtown area were asked for their input. The following provided input:

Pat Cleary voiced her opposition to first floor residential on commercial property. She was afraid this would lower property values and didn't like the element that might rent the properties.

Dave Hudik said he loves Beecher's small town atmosphere and would like to keep things the same. He did not support putting residential housing in first floor commercial. He asked the Village to look at how other communities revitalized their downtown. He felt that it might jeopardize the feel of the old downtown if the zoning is changed.

Joe Suppes said he was against the first floor apartments. He also complained that businesses are not allowed to put signage on Route #1 to direct people to downtown businesses. He wants more marketing to the area. He would like to keep the integrity of the downtown and hope it comes back when the economy gets better.

Joyce Giroux, owner of a two unit apartment, commented that she screens her tenants well and had issue with comments made about the quality of people renting. She said she sees nothing wrong with first floor apartments and property owners can't afford to wait for the economy to improve.

Vic Reato explained that he is the one who started this process and does not want Beecher to change in a negative way. He said Beecher is depressed and needs to change. He is trying to make things work and better the downtown. He said the infrastructure is crumbling in the old downtown.

President Lohmann commented that the building across the street from Reato's building has been vacant and under construction for a long time which is not good for the downtown either.

Byron Harden explained that he has a recording studio in the old downtown area. He was able to build the studio through a grant from the State of Illinois and has a large investment in his property. He said safety is very important to him and his family. He is concerned about additional rental property and what it could bring to the area. He wants to maintain the current beauty of the old downtown and would like the area to stay as is or control who can rent.

Trustee Szymanski asked Mr. Reato what other property owners supported his proposal for first floor residential and why they were not present at this meeting. Trustee Szymanski also asked the board what should be done now that some buildings are in disrepair and people don't have the money to reinvest in their properties. The bricks falling off Teapot's on Gould Street was discussed. A long form complaint has been filed to get repairs done and the judge has given Mr. Tully time to make repairs but they have not been made. The judge then found Mr. Tully guilty at trial and he was fined. He has since lost the building to the bank. Mr. Abney, whose property is next door, indicated that he would allow the bank to get on his property to make the needed repairs to Tully's building but still would not allow Tully on his property. He also indicated he plans to reopen his bar in the near future.

Administrator Barber reminded everyone that the Village is looking for ideas to revitalize the old downtown if the property owners do not want to put in rental units.

Mr. Reato provided a list of former businesses in town that are now rental units. He also complained about the Buchmeier building not getting done.

Mr. Hudik asked about grants available for downtown improvements and asked if the area can be put in the National Registry. Administrator Barber explained the processes for grants and getting on the National Registry. Grants require matching amounts and have to meet very specific criteria. The Board discussed that many of these ideas have been discussed in the past but there is no money to make improvements. President Lohmann said that commuter rail could help rehabilitate the old downtown but the board has opposed it in the past.

The possibility of senior housing was discussed but felt to not be feasible since seniors don't want to be near railroad tracks and wouldn't be able to walk to main shopping areas, etc.

Mr. Hudik suggested holding a competition with school kids of their vision for the old downtown.

Trustee Cleary said that businesses closing is not unique to the old downtown area. Businesses are closing on Route #1 and elsewhere in this economy. Buying business property is a risk.

Joyce Giroux commented that the businesses have to make money to be able to reinvest in their property. She said there are currently places in town where some are living on the first floor of commercial property.

Trustee Ahrendt commended Mr. Suppes on the work and money he has put into his property saying it looks beautiful.

Carol VonAlven commented that she has maintained their home in the downtown area and she does not want rental units. She also expressed concerns about limited parking in the area.

Rudy Oliver said that his taxes have increased ten fold in the last twenty years and he hasn't seen any improvements to the area. It is hard to reinvest when you don't have the money. He also commented on a sign he had on Eagle Lake Road some years ago that he had to remove.

Joe Suppes commented that the infrastructure is in poor shape on the west side of town and supported signage on Route #1.

It was commented that everyone needs to work together and with the Chamber of Commerce to get people informed about local businesses.

Trustee Cleary suggested doing a flyer with a map of businesses at the Business Expo/Beef Roast.

Marcy Meyer commented that signs about community events need to be put further north on Route #1 because many residents in the newer subdivisions don't even know the old downtown exists.

George Schutema suggested hooking up with school functions to advertise to families.

Paul Lohmann suggested getting school kids downtown to the museum on Reed Street. He said the Village is willing to work with business owners if they have ideas.

Byron Harden suggested that businesses have a website and advertise online.

Joyce Giroux asked why the Chamber doesn't do more for the old downtown businesses. She was asked if the business owners were current Chamber members. Also discussed was the October Fest the Chamber and Lions Club helped with last year in conjunction with the Historic Downtown Business Association.

As a recap on what was discussed, Administrator Barber said he was hearing from the property owners that: 1) Directional signage on Route #1 is needed pointing people to the downtown; 2) More marketing of downtown businesses is necessary; 3) An article in the newsletter to let residents know about the downtown area could be done; 4) Signs at entrances to the Village that are currently used for special events could be utilized.

President Lohmann advised Vic Reato that his request for first floor residential probably doesn't have enough votes to get approved. The matter will be considered formally at the August 9th Board meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Janett Conner
Village Clerk