

**RENAISSANCE ZONE AUTHORITY
MEETING MINUTES
September 16, 2014**

The Bismarck Renaissance Zone Authority met on September 16, 2014 in the David J. Blackstead Meeting Room in the City-County Office Building at 221 North 5th Street. Chairman Walth presided.

Authority members present were Jim Christianson, George Keiser, Curt Walth and Jeff Ubl. Authority member Josh Askvig participated via telephone.

Authority members Chuck Huber and Todd Van Orman were absent.

Technical advisors Bruce Whittey and Katie Vasbinder were absent.

Staff members present were Jason Tomanek (Planning), Hilary Balzum (Planning) and Charlie Whitman (Attorney).

Guest present was Kate Herzog.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Walth called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

MINUTES

The minutes of the August 19, 2014 meeting were distributed with the agenda packet.

MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Keiser and seconded by Mr. Christianson to approve the minutes of the August 19, 2014 meeting as received. The motion passed unanimously with members Askvig, Christianson, Keiser, Ubl and Walth voting in favor.

RENAISSANCE ZONE BOUNDARY MODIFICATION REQUEST – DISCUSSION

Chairman Walth said he read the discussion in the minutes of the last meeting and he can gather what the general feelings are on whether or not to modify the boundary of the Renaissance Zone. He said he would like the members to summarize their statements and then he would like to give final comments on the request.

Mr. Keiser said he does not support the idea of modifying the boundary at this time as the building in question does not have any functional issues and the whole purpose of the program is to address inner city blight and this has been turned into a commercial transaction. Mr. Keiser noted that the United Printing Building is in good condition.

Mr. Christianson said he agrees with the comments given today and at the last meeting.

Chairman Walth said he knows of other facilities that were designated as Renaissance Zone projects that were not blighted or in poor condition. When Starion Financial wanted to expand, they knew they wanted to invest in the downtown area and to keep all of their departments and employees together in one location. He said if somebody wants to make an investment in or near downtown he sees value in that. He said the United Printing building has been purchased with the hopes of being able to improve the property and that there are other occupants of the Renaissance Zone who are not and never will take advantage of the program. He said Starion Financial would not have expanded had it not been for the Renaissance Zone program.

Mr. Askvig said he wanted to confirm that if a block is removed from the Renaissance Zone, it cannot be readded. Mr. Tomanek said that is correct.

Mr. Askvig then asked how many responses were received when questionnaires of intent were mailed. Mr. Tomanek said one owner in Block 3 responded with intent to make improvements; a single-family owner on 5th Street and Avenue B said they are making minor to major upgrades and would like to stay in the Renaissance Zone; Block 3 has never had a project; Block 5A has had some projects with intentions to do more, according to two owners that responded to the questionnaire. Mr. Tomanek also stated that he had recently met with one of the current property owners in Block 1C. He continued by saying that she has plans to purchase property on the block and requested the block remain in the Renaissance Zone.

Mr. Askvig asked if a map change has ever been denied by the Department of Commerce because of the impression that projects are being chased. Mr. Tomanek said it has never been denied but there has always been justification and landowner support for the change. Mr. Askvig asked if sufficient support for the modification has been shown this time. Mr. Tomanek said one comment of support was submitted and it was from the previous owner of the United Printing building.

Mr. Askvig said if every boundary change has had justification up until this point and the number of blocks is limited and once they are removed they cannot come back which could be detrimental to the program, then he does not agree with the boundary changing.

Mr. Ubl said from a political stand point, it would look like the blocks are being changed to help a project that does not completely need it and there is no justified reason to do it.

Chairman Walth said his feeling is that this could bring more investment and employees to downtown.

MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Keiser and seconded by Mr. Christianson to keep the Renaissance Zone boundaries as they are now, with no modification and not forwarding the request to the City Commission. The motion passed

unanimously with members Askvig, Christianson, Keiser, Ubl and Walth voting in favor.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Askvig asked if tax relief because of Renaissance Zone projects is going to come under fire at the next legislative session. Mr. Keiser said the pros still outweigh the cons when it comes to assistance given from the Renaissance Zone, but funding shift will be a focus at the next session and the risk is always possible.

Mr. Tomanek said he, along with Carl Hokenstad, Kim Lee and Mr. Ubl, recently discussed recently with the implementation of the Downtown Subarea Study of modifying the DT-Downtown zoning district and creating a Downtown Design Review (DDR) committee would be beneficial in the near future. He said there was a suggestion of having the Renaissance Zone Authority also be the DDR committee so that there is some crossover to help with consistent review and zoning regulations. He said a decision does not need to be made now but probably by the end of the year.

Mr. Askvig said he would prefer that it be looked at for the Renaissance Zone Authority to either be the DDR committee or to play a significant role in it rather than creating a whole new board to complete the reviews.

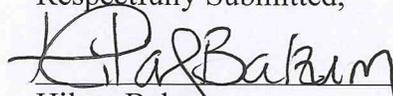
Mr. Tomanek said staff would be the ones to write the regulations to provide a foundation for decisions.

Ms. Herzog reminded those present that the North Dakota Downtown Conference is taking place for the fourth consecutive year and that they have been working on community stakeholders in other communities to hopefully be present. She said Thom Guzman will be presenting information on statewide Main Street Organizations using a four-point approach and showing the benefits of the program. She said the conference is scheduled for October 15th and 16th.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairman Walth adjourned the meeting of the Bismarck Renaissance Zone Authority at 4:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Hilary Balzum
Recording Secretary



Curt Walth
Chairman