

**RENAISSANCE ZONE AUTHORITY
MEETING MINUTES
August 18, 2015**

The Bismarck Renaissance Zone Authority met on August 18, 2015 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 Josh Askvig, Jim Christianson, George Keiser, Todd Van Orman and Curt Walth.

Authority members absent were Chuck Huber and Jeff Ubl.

Technical advisor Steph Smith was present.

Technical advisor Bruce Whittey was absent.

Staff members present were Jason Tomanek (Planner), Kim Lee (Planning Manager), Brenda Johnson (Assessor), Ross Dettmann (Assessor), Carl Hokenstad (Director of Community Development), Charlie Whitman (City Attorney) and Hilary Balzum (Office Assistant).

Guests present were Kate Herzog, Madison Cermak, Rob McCready, Dave Nelson, Rick Lynam, Chris Sievert, Peter Stenehjem, David Mason and Steve Stenehjem.

CALL TO ORDER

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

TECHNICAL ADVISOR INTRODUCTION

Chairman Walth welcomed Steph Smith, AIA with JLG Architects, as the new Technical Advisor for the Renaissance Zone Authority.

MINUTES

The minutes of the July 21, 2015 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 July 21, 2015 meeting as distributed. The motion passed unanimously with members Askvig, Christianson, Keiser, Van Orman and Walth voting in favor.

DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW

HEARTVIEW FOUNDATION – 123 EAST BROADWAY AVENUE

Dave Nelson, Leaf Design Studio, said an exterior concept was previously approved by the Renaissance Zone Authority which utilized a fiber cement board material. Heartview Foundation had originally received quotes at approximately \$15/square foot but have since received bids for \$28/square foot. He said this is significantly over the previously received estimates, so attempts are now being made to stay on budget while still achieving a desirable façade appearance acceptable to the Renaissance Zone Authority/Downtown Design Review Committee. He said an EIFS product is proposed that will be half the price and they could still have the project completed this year. He said they would like to stay with the appearance of diamond scored joints and they would have a finished surface on the panels similar to what was originally proposed. He said they can also get a more limestone aged appearance on the panels if that is preferred as well.

Chairman Walth asked if the City has endorsed the installation of EIFS on any projects recently. Mr. Tomanek said the building to the south has an EIFS façade in addition to granite and that the EIFS used there was of higher grade and was applied differently to achieve a more upscale look. He said others done totally of EIFS were prior to that and any that were to be proposed now would probably be denied. He said it is intended to be a complementary material, not an overall material.

Mr. Keiser asked if there is any guarantee that it will still look acceptable in 20 years. Mr. Nelson said it was used on the Sanford School of Nursing in 1982 and that has only had to be painted once since then. He said the main concern is people bumping into it or hitting it and since this is to be used on the second floor, it will not be accessible so it is unlikely any damage would be caused to it.

Mr. Christianson said the Patterson Hotel also used EIFS in 1982 between the existing building and the addition 120 feet above the ground and there have not been any issues with it yet. He asked if there is any language in the Downtown Design Review Guidelines that specify the use or prohibition of EIFS.

Mr. Tomanek said the guidelines state the design needs to be complementary and comparable to the surrounding structures. He said the materials used need to be able to withstand the test of time and that the guidelines are open for interpretation. He said this is a historical building that needs to reflect the original architectural character and the guidelines do prohibit residentially used materials such as vinyl and steel siding.

Ms. Smith said this can be done with high quality results, but her experience lately has been that the use of EIFS is trying to be avoided particularly on main floors of structures.

Mr. Van Orman asked if it is allowed here will it have to be allowed everywhere as a complementary material on upper levels of buildings.

Mr. Keiser said he will oppose the approval of this particular design as he does not feel it is right for this building and something closer to what was originally approved needs to be found.

Mr. Christianson said he agrees with Mr. Keiser and feels this is too far of a compromise.

Mr. Nelson said they do want to leave the glazing on the lower level and redo the transom windows. He said he is not completely sure what color or material would be used on the second level until it is approved.

Mr. Askvig said he had abstained from discussion and would like to abstain from voting on this item.

MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Keiser and seconded by Mr. Christianson to deny the downtown design review of 123 East Broadway Avenue. The motion passed unanimously with members Christianson, Keiser, Van Orman and Walth voting in favor.

Mr. Christianson said he would like to abstain from discussion and voting on the next item. Ms. Smith said she would also like to abstain from the discussion on the next item.

METROPLAINS – 100 WEST MAIN AVENUE

Mr. Tomanek said MetroPlains has not yet purchased the property at 100 West Main Avenue to be used as an apartment building, but they will by the end of the year. He said a Renaissance Zone project application has been received and MetroPlains would like to have a discussion now on whether or not their design concepts are on the right track. He said Mr. Whittey did submit a question to him of whether or not the design guidelines encourage ground floor retail and if this would be a good fit for the location. Mr. Tomanek explained that an active ground floor use in conjunction with housing would likely be a lobby or a community room as opposed to residential units directly along the sidewalk.

Rob McCreary, MetroPlains, said having an active ground floor use would not pose a problem for them at all. He said the modification has already been made architecturally and that the site is under contract, as they are working on getting their funding sources together. He said North Dakota Housing Finance Agency awarded them \$600,000 for the project and they chose to seek out the Renaissance Zone designation next.

Mr. Keiser said his only concern is if the project is approved, but does not get completed, then that block will stay in the Renaissance Zone as there are not any other projects approved for that block at this time.

Mr. Tomanek said the City zoning ordinance would require the building to be at least two stories tall so the architect would need to work in that appearance by adding to the structure or elevating the parapet to give the appearance of height.

Mr. McCreary asked if the Renaissance Zone designation application can move forward if a formal approval of the design concept is given today. Mr. Tomanek said yes, that it would have a public hearing at the September 15th meeting and then would move on to the September 22nd meeting of the City Commission for consideration if it is approved by the Renaissance Zone Authority.

The general consensus of the Renaissance Zone Authority was to give a general, overall acceptance of the design concept of the MetroPlains apartment building to be located at 100 West Main Avenue.

RENAISSANCE ZONE BOUNDARY MODIFICATION – DISCUSSION

Mr. Tomanek said a good amount of responses were received to the surveys that were sent out to research where there is interest from owners wishing to be part of the Renaissance Zone. He said everything is spelled out in the spreadsheets provided to include if interest was expressed and what types of improvements are planned to be made by the property owners. He said most of the properties along Jefferson Avenue are residential and many of those lots that are zoned CA-Commercial actually have industrial uses on them, so he would advise against encouraging expansion there as there are multiple non-conforming uses on those lots. He said the previously questioned mobile home park may qualify as a Renaissance Zone project, but he would have to check with the Department of Commerce on what a qualifying project would require. He said he received a few comments from residents in the State Street and Divide Avenue area, but did not receive any response from any owners in the Kelly Inn block. Mr. Tomanek noted that he received responses from the area east of Washington Street, including a veterinary office as well as the Pure Country business expressed interest in improvements such as new windows and façade. Bismarck Arts Gallery Association also indicated they have plans for exterior improvements at 420 West Front Avenue.

Mr. Keiser asked if the traffic study in the area around State Street and Divide Avenue has been completed.

Mr. Stenehjem said the draft is done and has been submitted to the City Traffic Engineer, Mark Berg, for review and he feels the initial report looks satisfactory.

Mr. Tomanek said Mr. Berg does have some concerns such as some of the language used and he will work with the consultant that prepared the study to address the concerns.

Mr. Askvig said there is a major traffic issue in the area surrounding State Street and Divide Avenue and having a Renaissance Zone block in this area would draw attention away from downtown. He said this would be a hard sell at the City Commission level and thinks there are many other areas of town that could be utilized, but it would be very difficult to do that here. He said the traffic study will be heavily analyzed and approval of the traffic study in addition to a Renaissance Zone island in this location would be difficult.

Chairman Walth said he would struggle with approving an island here as there are many other areas of town that could significantly benefit from Renaissance Zone designations more than this location. He said he feels the focus should stay downtown and he does not want to tie up their only allowable island. He said more residential response was received than when these surveys have been done in the past and those are the areas that need projects the most.

Mr. Sievert asked if a decision can be made prior to the traffic studies being completed. Mr. Keiser said he is hesitant to believe that the State will fund 100% of the needs in that area especially since US Highway 83 is a federal roadway.

Mr. Stenehjem said many of those areas surveyed are contiguous to the existing Renaissance Zone and that this would be the only island in a space that if filled will be highly visible. He said he feels support from the State would be significant and that there are many companies who would come to this location that are not currently located in Bismarck. He said he has a hard time understanding why this opportunity would not be jumped on and said they will work on the traffic issues and that he believes the State will help fund their needs.

Mr. Christianson said he does not feel it is the responsibility of the Renaissance Zone Authority to resolve these traffic issues and the focus needs to be on the creation of an island and if this is a desirable neighborhood for that.

Mr. Askvig asked what the timeline would be if this island is added. Mr. Tomanek said it would be a minimum of three months, but reminded the Authority that there is also a zoning change request for this location that has not yet been approved. Mr. Tomanek added that the zoning change request is on hold pending the results of the traffic study. He concluded by stating that the zoning change could be on the Planning and Zoning Commission agenda in October and, with a favorable recommendation, could be before the Board of City Commissioners in November.

Mr. Christianson said he hates to totally deny the creation of an island in this location, as it is an area that needs to be filled with some investment property.

Mr. Askvig said the block and the only allowable island would be tied up, but once the bank project is completed the island can be marked completed and removed. He said without the traffic study being complete, a decision cannot be made now and the City Commission would not likely favor it at this time either.

Chairman Walth asked if developers in the area should be contacted to see if there is interest in having an island elsewhere and to look at other problem areas.

Mr. Van Orman asked if they could designate the island but not give acceptance to the Renaissance Zone project if it is requested. Mr. Tomanek said the island location, the condition of that location and the proposed use would have to be added to the Development Plan which the State could potentially deny approval of or accept as amended.

The general consensus of the Renaissance Zone Authority was to look at how other communities that have utilized their island blocks to see what the best locations and successful uses have been.

Mr. Stenehjem asked what else can be done for the Renaissance Zone Authority to look favorably at an island here with a Renaissance Zone project designation.

Mr. Keiser said the traffic study is important and that those communities with Renaissance Zone islands were also discussed at the last meeting.

Mr. Sievert said they understand the approvals that are needed and does not think their proposed development of this location will impact the intersection. He asked what else could hold up the process.

Mr. Keiser said the City may not have a choice and that the State may be the ones to deny the project.

Mr. Askvig said this is a lot of work for the City staff to do when the project might end up not going anywhere at all. He said even if the island is approved today, the City Commission will not see the request until November. He said he would like to get the boundary modification completed, but there are a lot of other issues to address, and he understands the frustration this is creating.

Mr. Keiser said if something were to happen with this project down the line and the block is removed then it is removed for good. He said he would like to see Mr. Berg attend the next discussion of this to give his input.

DOWNTOWN UPDATE PROVIDED BY THE DOWNTOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Ms. Herzog said the North Dakota Downtown Conference will be held again in October and distributed reminder cards with registration dates and information. She said the Downtowners are also supportive of the MetroPlains proposal as she has been working with them for years to try and identify a good project and location for them.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairman Walth adjourned the meeting of the Bismarck Renaissance Zone Authority at 5:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Hilary Balzum
Recording Secretary



Curt Walth
Chairman