

CITY OF EAST CHICAGO  
ECONOMIC BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

COMMISSION MEMBERS

Jesse Avitia, President  
Leon Valdez, Vice President  
Ezell Foster, Member

Regular Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, December 16, 2020 @ 4:30 p.m.

Reported for Fissinger & Associates  
By: Lisa Pena

CALL TO ORDER: 4:30 p.m.

Roll Call: Present: Jesse Avitia, Leon Valdez, Ezell Foster.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Wednesday, November 18, 2020.

Motion to approve November 18, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes made by Leon Valdez. Second by Ezell Foster.

Questions/Comments: None.

Roll Call: "All in Favor": All Abstain: None.  
Opposed: None Motion Carries.

OLD BUSINESS: None.

MR. AVITIA: Who is present today? Can you introduce?

MR. MORRISROE: Yes. I would like to, Richard Morrisroe, as your former Director, Interim Director, introduce Doug Powers who joined us on December 1.

He comes to us from the State of Michigan with his Masters at Michigan State University and has experience in Battle Creek, Michigan, in Kalamazoo and in Elkhart County, Indiana where he most recently served. We'd like to welcome Doug to the Economic Development Commission.

Doug, you may give whatever background you'd like to give.

1 MR. POWERS: Thank you, Richard. I think you put it  
2 pretty well. I also did some work in Detroit as well as  
3 across the State of Michigan through school grants, things  
4 like that.

5 MR. AVITIA: We welcome you. Congratulations.

6 MR. POWERS: Thank you.

7 MR. AVITIA: Since you started working for the City of  
8 East Chicago I hope they treat you well because I know we  
9 will.

10 MR. POWERS: I hope so too.

11 NEW BUSINESS:

12 MR. AVITIA: The next item on our agenda is New  
13 Business. The first item is we'll have a discussion and  
14 presentation, maybe a brief discussion on the problems and  
15 requirements for processing facade applications.

16 Any comments on that?

17 MR. POWERS: So currently I'm working with our legal  
18 counsel to propose a new resolution to allow for the next  
19 year's processing of facade applications as well.

20 So I will reach out to you as well because I'm not  
21 certain as to what potential issues you've seen with the  
22 Facade Program thus far.

23 MR. MORRISROE: I should mention if I may there were  
24 resolutions for 2013, 2014. We just kept the program going,  
25 we meaning the City, without renewing those resolutions.  
They should have been.

And when he means counsel, he means Carla Morgan,  
the Corporation Counsel for the City and Joe Allegretti and  
myself as well as the Controller's Office which found this  
because it always has to find what is the authorization for  
spending different kinds of money.

And they found it in going over this. And  
Esperanza was helpful as well trying to get the money in line  
to fix the facade of the parts place at Columbus Drive and  
Fir Street. And some of these kind of situations emerged.

Now we had an extensive meeting yesterday. And it

1 can be done. It's not a problem. It's just through  
2 oversight it was assumed that it was done. But it needed  
continuing resolution.

3 Either that or they have to change it into an  
4 ordinance and put it in the Planning Department budget,  
Planing and Economic Development Department budget.

5 MS. CEJA-RAMIREZ: Excuse me. If I may be able to add  
6 to his commentary, the funds are available. They're just  
under a different account number.

7 MR. VALDEZ: What is the maximum amount of funds we  
8 have?

9 MS. CEJA-RAMIREZ: Well, currently I believe it's  
\$170,000.

10 MR. MORRISROE: Divided between the 80/20 on Main Street  
11 and Broadway and the 50/50 for the rest of the City.

12 MR. POWERS: And the resolution has specified \$100,000.  
And they're each separate resolutions.

13 MS. CEJA-RAMIREZ: Right. That's what I was going to  
14 add. The 50/50 does have one account. But the 80/20 is a  
different account that we did have access to. And I believe  
15 right now there's like, I don't know, between 70 to \$100,000  
left.

16 MR. VALDEZ: Will it carry over?

17 MS. CEJA-RAMIREZ: Well, that's what I'm trying to find  
18 out what right now.

19 MR. MORRISROE: They're trying to have that done. One  
of the problems is they're different sources of funds.

20 The 80/20 at Main and Broadway is through the Tax  
21 Increment Finance, TIF funding. Whereas the other is from  
the General City Budget whether Gaming or other sources of  
22 discretionary money.

23 MR. POWERS: So a lot of it has been sitting under the  
Gaming Fund. And that's where part of this issue comes from.

24 The question whether it rolls over or not is kind  
25 of moot because really it was designed to be established for  
that much per year.

1           And the question with me discussing with Carla, the  
2 legal counsel, period is figuring out what makes most sense  
3 moving forward, whether these should be combined potentially  
4 having one resolution instead of two. Well, you know that  
5 type of aspect looking into it.

6           So that's where if you have any feedback or any  
7 potential issues certainly keep me apprised. Then I can get  
8 the details worked out before presenting you with something.

9           MR. MORRISROE: We're fortunate in that we think the  
10 Council generally favors this program. And so we hope it  
11 doesn't get caught in the switches likes some of the other  
12 matters going on currently between the Council and the Mayor.  
13 We hope this would move relatively --

14           MR. AVITIA: Do we still consider the Facade Program a  
15 pretty important part of rehabbing East Chicago?

16           MR. MORRISROE: Yeah. I think the Council agrees with  
17 that although we denied one of the councilmen the Facade  
18 Program because his operation is part of a chain. And the  
19 way the resolutions read that is ineligible. So it was  
20 already being reviewed.

21           I think he has part of a chain operation as far as  
22 different cell phones in the Harbor on Main Street.

23           MR. AVITIA: As you drive Main Street you can see some  
24 of the changes. It's pretty obvious.

25           The emphasis of this Commission is that the purpose  
of this program continue especially with the funding spent  
under the condition that we are working on it right now.

Ezell, any questions?

MR. FOSTER: No.

MR. AVITIA: Leon, anything further?

MR. VALDEZ: No.

MR. AVITIA: We'll move on to the next on the agenda  
which is Meeting Minutes from the Redevelopment Commission of  
November 4.

I reviewed those. And I am sure that you guys  
reviewed those too. Do you have any comments, questions on

1 those because they are pretty much a part of Economic  
Development?

2

I have a question about the Fitzsimmons Building.

3

MR. POWERS: I can answer that. But first if I could go  
4 back about the facade for Gary and Julie Hanney and G&J Auto.

5 The reason that is listed on here is because I know  
that you approved this with the 2019 budget. However since  
6 there wasn't funding available we're trying to move that  
forward to the next year's budget.

7

8 So I just wanted to make sure that you were  
apprised of that.

9 MR. VALDEZ: So the action that we took --

10 MR. POWERS: The actions you took were fine. The issue  
is that there wasn't money allocated. And been in contact  
11 with the individuals as well especially Esperanza. And there  
just wasn't the money in the budget to have it approved for  
12 the 2019. So it's going to have to come out of the 2020  
budge.

13

14 MR. VALDEZ: So we won't have to take any further action  
on that?

15 MR. POWERS: No.

16 MS. CEJA-RAMIREZ: Yes. And they've also agreed. If I  
may add, they've also agreed to postpone some of the work to  
17 affect 2021 budget instead of this year. So they're working  
with us.

18

19 But I do want to mention that there were funds in  
there. But it just under a different account.

20 MR. AVITIA: I'm glad to hear that because when he was  
here he seemed to be very eager because he asked about  
21 renewing or redoing the siding of the building.

22 That place has been in East Chicago forever as far  
as I remember.

23

24 MS. CEJA-RAMIREZ: If I may add as well he did mention  
to us that it may actually lead into next year to actually  
start construction because right now what he is supplying are  
25 funds for down payments for like supplies and materials.

1 MR. AVITIA: I'm glad you got me back into that because  
I by-passed this. Sorry about that.

2  
3 Getting back to the Fitzsimmons building, any  
comments on that?

4 MR. POWERS: So earlier conversation it sounds like  
they're moving forward with some of the residential and  
5 developments. They're trying to finish those out.

6 Beyond that I don't know if you have anything  
specific to that.

7  
8 MR. MORRISROE: No. There are three living units above  
the stores. And there are four townhouses along the side on  
138th. And already there has been a bid for one of the  
9 living units above the stores. Mr. Powers can tell you more  
about that than I may.

10 And the other then is for one of the units along  
11 138th. Apparently one of those is moving as well.

12 So after a long time of not moving it looks like  
things are happening.

13 MR. AVITIA: My impression was that all those townhouses  
14 were ready to be sold.

15 MR. MORRISROE: They've been ready for months.

16 MR. AVITIA: I got the impression that some of the units  
were not finished yet.

17 MR. MORRISROE: Well, some of the units were not  
18 finished in the three units above. Were those units also not  
finished?

19 MR. POWERS: I do apologize. There's four units above.  
20 There's four condos and there's three townhomes. One of the  
condos is finished. And they're moving forward with  
21 finishing another one of the condos as well as one of the  
townhomes.

22 So there will still be two condos and two townhomes  
23 that remain unfinished at this point.

24 MR. AVITIA: How are we pricing those condos?

25 MR. POWERS: I am not certain as to what potential

1 updates are. I believe the condos were listed at  
2 approximately 220, going a little above a little below.

3 MR. MORRISROE: I think they were being priced at cost  
4 rather than at market. And that's why it's been so long.  
5 The market has not been there in that part of town for people  
6 living on the second floor of anything for a long long time.

7 MR. AVITIA: That building is almost in the heart of the  
8 area. We need to really push the economic development in  
9 that part.

10 MR. MORRISROE: Well, we lost. Fortunately we have one  
11 restaurant now on Main Street. We lost the one on 138th.  
12 That was really kind of a strong part of that community.

13 MR. POWERS: The townhomes are about 170.

14 MR. AVITIA: That's part of the economic development.  
15 If we get people actually purchasing those units, that would  
16 be somebody who will work in the area. Maybe we can get a  
17 restaurant in the area, more restaurants, shopping in the  
18 area.

19 So that's the key for doing downtown, having  
20 tenants and people living in the area.

21 Have any comments?

22 MR. VALDEZ: No.

23 MR. AVITIA: Ezell, anything?

24 MR. FOSTER: Well, you asked and I was wondering was any  
25 of them occupied. But I heard him say nothing.

MR. POWERS: One of them just was finished as of last  
month. There is no occupancy as of yet except for the one  
commercial that's downstairs which is the Urban Affairs.

MR. MORRISROE: The Urban Enterprise people who have the  
school at the corner of Euclid and Chicago Avenue. Their  
offices are now there.

Their offices for a long time were in the Main and  
Broadway building on the second floor. They're now on the  
first floor in the Fitzsimmons Building.

MR. POWERS: I know they are entertaining other

1 potential offers, investigating further commercial aspect as  
2 well. So nothing as of yet though.

3 MR. FOSTER: I know this building has been up for  
4 awhile.

5 MR. AVITIA: Well, that's one of the keys to like I say  
6 economic development. I see economic development developing,  
7 getting the whole area down Main Street to really come up  
8 with some sort of a standard where people are living and  
9 shopping.

10 We would like for you to keep us apprised as to  
11 what developments are going on in that area.

12 MR. POWERS: Absolutely. I will certainly let you know  
13 once we have any movement on there because there's a lot of  
14 property potentially in the cusp of that area.

15 MR. AVITIA: This is the reason why I think that  
16 continuing to receive the minutes of the Redevelopment  
17 Commission is pretty important to this commission. It keeps  
18 us kind of alert and apprised as to what's going on in the  
19 City besides what we're doing.

20 PUBLIC COMMENTS: None.

21 COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

22 MR. AVITIA: Commissioner Comments.

23 MR. VALDEZ: I would like to take this opportunity to  
24 thank everyone. I am going to retire. So our next meeting,  
25 I have some surgery coming up, so I will probably be doing it  
with the video from home.

But I want to thank everyone for their service,  
even though you've only been here one day. But thank you  
all. Thank everyone. And I hope you have a very Merry  
Christmas and a prosperous new year.

I'm sure that we all want to get this year 2020  
behind us. I know we'll never go back to a normalcy because  
of this epidemic. But we should go back to some type of life  
that we're in control of instead of something controlling us.

So thank you and God bless all of you.

MR. AVITIA: Ezell.



1 MR. FOSTER: I have a question now. You're retiring  
when?

2  
3 MR. VALDEZ: My official retire date is April 2. But  
I've got a lot of vacation I am going to take.

4 MR. FOSTER: So the fact that you're retiring you still  
can't serve on the Board?

5  
6 MR. VALDEZ: I can serve. Mr. Avitia is retired. He  
doesn't work for the City anymore.

7 MR. FOSTER: Okay. I just wanted to know.

8 MR. AVITIA: If you're retired, you can still.

9 MR. VALDEZ: If they want you.

10 MR. FOSTER: Okay. There you go. I got it.

11 MS. CEJA-RAMIREZ: We'll make sure to send you the Zoom  
information.

12  
13 MR. AVITIA: That was a good question, Ezell, as far as  
who is actually qualified to be here. And I've been retired  
a lot longer than he has.

14  
15 Any other comments anybody?

16 I'm just going to repeat what Leon said. I wish  
you a Merry Christmas instead of Happy Holidays, that's  
pretty neutral, for everybody in here. We do thank you for  
your service for what you've been doing with us and for us.

17  
18  
19 \* Next Regular Meeting Date: Thursday, January  
28, 2021 @ 4:30 p.m. in City Hall Council Chambers.

20  
21 Motion to adjourn was made by Leon Valdez. Second by Ezell  
Foster.

22 Roll Call: "All in Favor": All Abstain: None.  
23 Opposed: None Motion Carries.

24 \* Meeting ended at 4:54 p.m.

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Approval of the Meeting Minutes of  
Wednesday, December 16, 2020

Approved and Signed Thursday, January 28,

2021

Jesse Avitia  
Jesse Avitia, President

Leon Valdez, Vice President

Ezell Foster  
Ezell Foster, Member

Esperanza Ceja-Ramirez  
Esperanza Ceja-Ramirez, Recording Secretary


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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Lisa Pena, a competent and duly qualified court reporter, do hereby certify that I did report in machine shorthand the foregoing proceedings and that my shorthand notes so taken at said time and place were thereafter reduced to typewriting under my personal direction.

I further certify that the foregoing typewritten transcript constitutes minutes of said proceedings taken at said time and place, so ordered to be transcribed.

Dated at Portage, Indiana, this 21st day of December, 2020.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lisa Pena  
Notary Public Porter County  
Certified Shorthand Reporter  
License Number 084-003483



