

Report to the Membership

Submitted by the Coordinating Committee of the Community Forum for Economic Development

October 16, 2007

The Community Forum for Economic Development was founded on May 16, 2006 following our first Spring Forum at IU South Bend on April 22, 2006. Initially, five members of the original planning committee for the Forum continued to coordinate the meetings and projects of the group. This group was expanded to nine members in October 2006. At our July 2007 meeting, the participants in the Community Forum approved a structural proposal that provided for an annual election of a nine-member coordinating committee at the October monthly meeting.

This report was prepared by the outgoing Coordinating Committee and is intended to summarize our work since May of 2006. It is divided into three sections: projects, community education, and organization. Within each section we will summarize our successes as well as indicate some of the challenges that remain.

Projects of the Community Forum

1. Responsible use of tax abatements to attract or retain business

We believe that public resources can be used to support private business investment only when there are tangible and documented community benefits that result. The City of South Bend has a tax abatement ordinance with a point structure that was intended to guide the length of tax abatements granted. We initiated a project to strengthen that ordinance and developed a proposed revision that has been submitted to Council members. Important additions in our proposal include incentives for development that revitalize economically distressed areas of South Bend, incentives for environmentally friendly development, and incentives for the rehabilitation of the current housing stock.

We have succeeded in making the revision of the Tax abatement Ordinance an issue not only within the Council but also for community groups and individuals. We have not yet succeeded in getting a stronger ordinance passed but are in a better position to continue these efforts. We also have begun discussions regarding a similar tax abatement ordinance at the county level and in the City of Mishawaka.

2. Revitalization of the inner city neighborhoods

When we began our efforts to affect local economic development, we found that the main focus for new development was the Airport TIF (Blackthorn) and other areas on the fringe of the city. Not only did this focus not address the needs of the inner city neighborhoods but it actually accelerated the disinvestment in these neighborhoods. From the initial Forum in the Spring of 2006, we have challenged the city to develop an "Inside/Outside" policy. That is, if the resources of the Airport TIF can be used to expand development into undeveloped areas like Portage Prairie, then it can also be used to expand into economically distressed areas like LaSalle Square and other areas of the West Side.

We have succeeded in supporting the residents of the West Side and some of the members of the SB Common Council in their efforts to expand the TIF to include not only the LaSalle Square area but also the Marycrest-Hurwich and Sample-Ewing areas.

Our future challenge is to make sure that residents of the targeted areas are involved in developing the plans for revitalization.

3. Other projects and activities

- Since May of 2006, representatives of the Community Forum have monitored most meetings of the **South Bend Redevelopment Commission**. Most of the city's economic development activities originally are discussed and acted upon by this appointed commission. In May of 2007 we sent to the Commission a list of specific suggestions as to how they might improve the transparency of their proceedings so as to encourage citizen participation. Representatives of the Community Forum also met with the Chairwoman of the Commission, Marcia Jones, and the Interim Director of Community and Economic Development, Jeff Gibney, to discuss citizen involvement in economic development. Some, although not all, of the suggested procedural changes have already been implemented in Commission procedures.
- In February of this year, the **St. Joseph County Council adopted an ordinance designed to protect county residents from health problems associated with concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs)**. To win public support for this ordinance, the Community Forum sponsored two public meetings featuring a panel of residents and experts from the committee that drafted the ordinance.
- During the 2007 session of the Indiana Legislature, **we supported Indiana HB 1351 that created a funding source for the Indiana Affordable Housing Trust Fund**

and authorizes counties to establish local trust funds supported by additional recording fees. We are continuing to investigate if and how to pursue such a fund for St. Joseph County.

- After the 2007 Spring Forum, Community Forum members active in community and trade union organizations formed the "**Unity Committee.**" This group will focus on projects that address the goals both of the trade union movement and of community organizations. Current plans are to initiate the ACES Wild program at Washington High School by next January. This program introduces students to careers in architecture, construction, and engineering. A second program is being developed for a group of students at Dickinson Middle School.
- Discussion at the 2007 Spring Forum also helped to **stimulate the development of the South Bend Community Garden Group.** The first Community Garden will be located on the grounds of the greenhouses on Mishawaka Avenue.

Public forums

A "forum" is defined as a public meeting place for open discussion. Being true to our name, we have organized seven public meetings, since November 2006, on topics central to improving our community.

DATE TOPIC

November, 2006 Predatory lending.
November & December 2006 CAFO health ordinance
January 2007 Vacant and abandoned properties
March 2007 Circuit Breaker legislation
June 2007 Affordable housing
August 2007 Tax abatements and community benefits

Spring Forums (April '06 and May, '07)

In addition, both Spring Forums (April '06 and May, '07) featured presentations by economic development activists: **Greg LeRoy and Madeline Janis** in 2006, **Reverend Christopher Boston and John Goldstein** in 2007. In addition to learning from the experiences of groups in other cities, each year we provide an analysis of local economic development as well as small group discussions on a variety of topics.

The Structure of the Community Forum for Economic Development

During our formative period, we have operated with a very simple structure.

- We **developed a mission statement**, a vision statement and a series of goal statements that we have used to guide our work.
- We have, since June of 2006, held **monthly meetings**, open to the public, to discuss and decide upon programs and positions that were consistent with our mission statement.
- We did not, until recently, have a **formal membership**; "participants" in the Community Forum made and carried out decisions and programs. A growing list of email addresses received information on Community Forum meetings and events.
- We **established three task forces** to carry out specific projects. The most consistent and active has been the Inner City Task Force.
- Some of our **projects are being carried out in groups** that include many members who are not involved with the Community Forum. Examples include the on-going Unity Committee, the South Bend Community Gardens, and the former Responsible Lending Coalition.
- Monthly meetings and day-to-day activities of our organization have been coordinated by a **nine member Coordinating Committee**.

Recently we adopted a structural proposal that:

- Provides a **mechanism for membership**, requiring agreement with our Mission Statement and a small dues payment,
- Establishes a short term relationship with the **St. Joseph Valley Project** that allows us to continue as an independent organization but using them as our fiscal agent,
- Provides for **an annual election** of the nine member Coordinating Committee.

Organizational tasks that remain include a fundraising plan that includes **seeking grants** to maintain and expand our activities and the development of a **web site** for public notices about economic development issues.