

BROWN COUNTY ECONOMIC REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE BROWN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

2016 ACTIVITIES

APPOINTEES

ERC appointees for the year 2016 were David Redding, Jim Schultz, Dan Klaker, Bruce Gould, and Judy Hardwick was the school board appointee. Teresa Anderson was appointed in January but withdrew her appointment before the first meeting, so there was one seat vacant. Nick Nungester was appointed later in January and resigned his position in August. Tim Clark was appointed in October. David Redding was elected president, Jim Schultz vice president, and Bruce Gould secretary.

Attendance at regular meetings:	David Redding	12 out of 12
	Jim Schultz	12 out of 12
	Bruce Gould	12 out of 12
	Dan Klaker	4 out of 12
	Nick Nungester	4 out of 8
	Tim Clark	2 out of 3
	Judy Hardwick	2 out of 12

Throughout the year several additional special meetings were called and will be addressed later in this report.

BUDGET

The budget for the ERC provided by the county was \$30,000. In 2015 the county collected \$748,201 in County Economic Development Income Tax funds. These funds are re-directed to fund the operating costs of government. Additionally, \$417,000 remains in an account for the ERC from the sale of the Sock Factory property. Spending by the ERC in 2016 is as follows:

August: discovery phase of website development	\$2000.00
October: Ladd Engineering for Bean Blossom study	\$2380.00
October: CMS Website Development initial payment	\$9250.00
December: CMS Website Development final payment	\$9250.00
<u>December: Eleven Fifty Academy initial payment</u>	<u>\$6000.00</u>
TOTAL	\$28,880.00

SUPPORT – BROWN COUNTY SCHOOLS

An additional final payment of \$6000 will be paid to the Eleven Fifty Academy in the spring of 2017 for services provided to the Brown County School Corporation in the way of a one-week computer coding class for selected students with an aptitude for computer skills.

The Eleven Fifty Academy provides highly regarded training and exposure to computer coding in their classroom setting at their site in Carmel and also reaches out to Indiana school systems with classes taught by their staff in outlying school districts. The ERC felt that this program would greatly benefit local students by helping to build a skill that could result in a career that could be pursued in Brown County. More information about the Eleven Fifty Academy is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xd5V82OroAU>

PRIORITIES

A new mission statement, goals, and objectives were agreed upon to provide direction to the commission. ERC members agreed to develop relationships with other county and town boards and commissions whose interactions are important for the success of all interrelated efforts. Individual ERC members selected specific boards and commissions to interface with, and members of these other groups were encouraged to attend and participate in our meetings.

Several initiatives were considered to be the highest priority for 2016. These included:

- Development of an ERC website to provide an access point for information to any individuals or companies considering Brown County as a place to live, work, or vacation,
- Support for the expansion of broadband service to a much greater part of Brown County,
- Identify strategies for the development of new housing developments to attract millennial families with jobs to help increase our school population and pay taxes to support the county,
- Sponsorship of the Eleven Fifty Academy which provides the opportunity to leverage this support as an outreach to Technology Industries and workers to raise awareness that Brown County is an attractive place to work and live.
- Support the Brown County Sewer District Project to provide sewage treatment to larger parts of the county.

RDC WEBSITE

The ERC website project has been completed and is operational. Content Management Systems, Inc. (CMS) was hired to build the site, and the end product is a very nice site that can continue to be added to as more information becomes available, such as availability of specific utilities like broadband or natural gas in certain parts of the county. Many links are present that provide quick access to local government, county businesses, real estate listings, and much more. Part of this project has been to make sure the site is managed and maintained, new features are added as they become available, and

any business or individual desiring additional information about Brown County can be responded to quickly. The quality of this site is very comparable to economic development sites in neighboring communities. The website may be viewed at: <http://www.choosebrowncounty.com/>

BROADBAND TASK FORCE

A 'Broadband Ready Resolution' was prepared by the ERC and passed by the County Commissioners. This resolution is a signal to companies desiring to install broadband service that the county will encourage and support their activities by expediting bureaucratic and administrative processes that normally cause expensive delays in projects. The ERC created a Broadband Ready Taskforce. This group conducts their meetings with the goal of drastically increasing the availability of broadband service in Brown County by attracting private companies to install lines and equipment. Also, the task force is working with the county to address the major roadblock to installation—easements and rights-of-way issues. Members of the task force include Mike Laros, David Redding, David Phelps, Ric Fox, John Tiernan, and Brian Howey.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AREAS – PROPERTY ACQUISITIONS

County attorneys provided an update on the authority that an ERC has regarding the acquisition of property. Indiana statutes allow a County ERC to identify Economic Development Areas (EDA) within which properties can be bought and sold. An EDA can include a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district.

A Bown Country Economic Development Corporation (ID: 1993101139) was created in 1993 and dissolved in 2015 with no activity. A non-profit can be used to acquire property and transfer it to an ERC for further development.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

New housing developments, to keep the prices within the parameters desired by millennials, must be on smaller pieces of land and therefore connected to a sanitary sewer system. Smaller pieces of land also create a 'neighborhood' atmosphere often desired by younger families. Discussion with housing developers reveals that a housing development of fewer than 50 houses is not economically feasible and most developers of houses in the \$150,000 range build them in developments of 150-300 units.

The ERC discussed in depth among itself and with local contractors the likelihood that what fits into the topographic limitations and available potential building sites in Brown County would be housing developments of about 10-15 units each. With housing developments limited to this size, developers cannot possibly bear the cost of running lines from a sewage treatment plant to the development to provide sanitary sewage treatment to the neighborhoods.

The county and town must be prepared to provide sewage treatment to these developments at a cost that does not render the development unfeasible and in a very time-sensitive manner. Developers

cannot be expected to wait two or three years or more for a sewer line to be available. No state or federal grants are available for new housing developments. There are presently no new housing developments under consideration.

By identifying an Economic Development Area (EDA), the ERC can buy, sell, and hold real estate. Among the options could include purchasing existing houses in Brown County that are on the sheriff sale or tax sale list or houses that are unoccupied and the owners willing to sell. These houses would have to undergo an intense inspection to determine what renovations would be necessary, but these properties could be remodeled and sold. The intent would be to purchase and remodel homes that could be “flipped” in the price range attractive to millennials. Not only would this model provide housing but would also reduce the number of unoccupied and distressed properties that detract from the appearance of Brown County and could get abandoned properties rehabilitated and on the tax rolls more quickly.

Another incentive used by many other counties is to provide tax abatement for new home construction. Abatement terms vary from county to county but could be as short as two years and would provide some incentive at a minimal cost to the county. The ERC will probably discuss this concept with the council and commissioners in 2017.

During a joint ERC meeting in June with the town ERC, the town’s consultant, Ed Curtin, advised that a housing study may be necessary to determine what types of housing are needed. This information could be useful to developers, contractors, and for any available grant money. Ed provided a copy of a housing study from another Indiana community that cost over \$30,000 to complete but felt that a housing study could be completed in Brown County much more cheaply. Later a major housing developer stated that they perform their housing studies and an IU SPEA professor discouraged a housing study and suggested instead to talk to contractors to see where the demand was. Since then, the same IU professor has offered a SPEA graduate student to spend the spring 2017 semester building a housing study for Brown County.

BEAN BLOSSOM SEWER PROJECT

This year the ERC provided funding for the final study of the Bean Blossom sewer project. The Brown County Sewage District is working with Nashville to run a sewer line from Bean Blossom into the Nashville plant to provide treatment to the Bean Blossom and Woodland Lakes area. The ERC and B.C. Sewage Treatment District will continue working together on future projects to provide service for new housing developments.

GIS MAPPING – CRITICAL TOOLS IN SUPPORT OF DEVELOPMENT

The ERC determined an immediate need for what is called an ‘Is Map’ consisting of a county map overlaid with many multiple layers of data, such as property lines, roads, all of the utility services, zoning districts, flood designations, etc. The ‘Is Map’ would work in conjunction with the GIS mapping system

for the county. One important way that such mapping would be useful would be that potential developers could see what services are available in specific areas to determine if development is feasible. Brown County already has some GIS mapping functions, but the system needs to be expanded.

The ERC began discussions with a company called *Butler, Fairman, and Seufert (BF&S) Engineering* from Indianapolis. This company builds and maintains 'Is Maps' for some counties and municipalities. This company and the ERC met in November to discuss Brown County needs. BF&S offered to review the county's current capability and identify possible opportunities for improvement.

The county can broaden its current GIS system and could have the county GIS office begin to overlay the current map as data becomes available. The county would need to reach terms with employees in regards to the additional time and efforts required to proceed with expanding the current system. However, an 'Is Map' is created, moving ahead with this project is imperative.

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GUEST SPEAKERS

Guests who attended the ERC meetings in 2016 to speak about their business activities included the following:

- 1) Beamery owner, David Watters, who spoke about the progress of their company and other occupants of the building,
- 2) Michael Stieglitz from the Chamber of Commerce spoke about the 'Job Connect' initiative to have a job fair several times a year to match prospective employees with available jobs.
- 3) Ann Ellis, an IU SPEA intern, working with the Arts & Entertainment Commission, had spent the summer compiling data concerning the demographics of who visits Nashville and Brown County, so Ann presented her survey results to the ERC, and
- 4) Cindy Steele spoke to the ERC requesting that the ERC take an active role in reversing the blighted conditions in Helmsburg.

HELMSBURG – PUBLIC MEETINGS

The ERC scheduled a series of town meetings in Helmsburg at the Brown County Community Church. Meetings were November 2, November 30, and a final meeting scheduled for January 11. The attendance was significant, and participation brisk with the ERC planning to provide action plans after the final meeting. There is a definite need to involve several other county departments to assist Helmsburg, to include the county highway department to clean out obstructed storm drainage, the Health Department to condemn several properties and planning & zoning to create a zoning map for Helmsburg that is understandable and correct.

INDIANA OFFICE OF COMMUNITY AND RURAL AFFAIRS (OCRA)

Jill Curry from OCRA and Cheryl Morphew from the Johnson County Economic Development Corporation spoke at the November meeting. Cheryl provided valuable information into the Johnson County activities and offered to provide more information and invited ERC members to visit their office. Jill provided information on the various grant programs OCRA has available and offered to assist if Brown County wanted to apply. The ERC will probably apply for a county-wide planning grant in 2017.

COMMUNITY READINESS INITIATIVE (CRI)

Another tool used by OCRA in determining which grant applications receive funding is a survey called the Community Readiness Initiative. Ball State University conducted this survey in Brown County this past year and the results in part were that providing housing should be the number one focus of economic development. An article in the December 28, 2017 issue of the Brown County Democrat explains the survey results in depth: “What are the best bets for future of the local economy?” http://www.bcdemocrat.com/2016/12/28/best_bets_for_future_of_local_economy/

The CRI presentation is available at: <http://www.choosebrowncounty.com/work/rdc-document-resources/>

COMMUNITY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (CPI)

Applying the guidance provided by OCRA in assessing the health of the community, the ERC developed a baseline of Community Performance Indicators (CPIs). CPIs provide feedback on the effectiveness of economic development projects and anticipated future benefits of proposed projects. These indicators are:

- Per capita income,
- Population,
- Assessed value,
- School enrollment,
- Educational attainment.

Any ERC project should have a positive influence on at least one and preferably several of these indicators.

THE WAY AHEAD

2016 was pivotal in identifying strategies and priorities for economic development. The commission members possessed diverse and complementary backgrounds that resulted in the identification of economic development needs, requirements, strategies and priorities that will help guide efforts in 2017.