

Minutes
Railroad TIF Advisory Board Meeting
February 16, 2023, 10:00 a.m.
Held via Zoom Virtual Platform

Board Members Present:

(*Chair*) Max Pigman, L&C Brewery
(*Vice Chair*) Rose Casey, 6th Ward Neighbor
Janelle Mickelson, School District
Bruce Day, Helena Food Share
Jon Iverson, Property Owner

City Staff Present:

Ellie Ray, Senior Planner & Grants Coordinator

Members of the Board Absent:

Abigail Rausch, Helena College

Public in Attendance:

Ramsay Ballew
Amanda Reese
Maxwell Hay

Call to Order & Staff Introduction:

Meeting was called to order.

Minutes from Last Meeting:

Minutes from the August 18, 2022 meeting were approved.

Budget Report

Ms. Ray presented a brief update on the budget noting that the previous application from Ray and Suzie Kuntz had not moved forward to the City Commission for consideration yet, and that hopefully it will be moving forward in coming months and be reflected in the budget for the TIF after that time.

Discussion Topics

- **HPAC Application**

Amanda Reese, Chair of the Helena Public Arts Council, gave an overview of the proposed project and the work that has been put into getting the project off the ground including details about the RFP that has been created by the city. Chair Pigman asked about the timeline for completing the work. Ms. Reese stated they anticipate the work happening this summer and that the project should be completed by August 31st. The plan would allow for access to the tunnel during the

entire painting process and responded to Chair Pigman's follow up questions that the artists would propose concepts of the mural in their RFP responses and that the mural is proposed to cover 3,000 square feet and after consulting with muralists determined the project cost of \$15,000, which would include supplies, averaging to about \$5 per square foot. Ms. Reese outlined the selection process of the RFP and what the artist selected would potentially be expected take on in the project. Additionally, the mural would be covered with an anti-graffiti sealant to help ease future maintenance and after a question from Mr. Iverson, it was explained how the sealant worked and that it would withstand up to 100 washes. Mr. Pigman asked about the lighting in the tunnel, and Ms. Reese stated that the tunnel in question is lit with solar lights, but it would be ideal if there were more lights in it.

Vice-Chair Casey did not have any questions but expressed that she was not in support of the project, as she felt it was too soon to consider a project like this as the neighborhood plan for the area is still in the process. Vice-Chair Casey also made remarks about her desire to see bathrooms and benches in the park by the train depot, that she felt there were better "canvases" for artists that would have the potential to be seen by more people, and that while it may seem like there is a lot of money available for projects, there will be a lot to be done once the neighborhood plan is complete. Ms. Reese responded to Vice-Chair Casey laying out that HPAC was asking for \$7750 toward the project and that this project is a test run to be able to try out the RFP process, and that they saw this tunnel as a gateway into the Railroad district, making it a great opportunity to mark the entrance to the neighborhood and that they could incorporate some signage letting people know they have entered the district, and that public art is also a needed amenity. Chair Pigman noted to Vice-Chair Casey, that while there are other things that the Board would like to see done, the Board has to wait until someone has the desire and funds to step forward with a project, and in the case of the engine in the park by the depot, it is unlikely that a private individual is going to step forward for that particular project. Ms. Reese added that HPAC has seen an increase in the personal investment that public art projects can inspire, and that the Railroad district needs to be uplifted, and that projects like this one can be catalysts for change and conversations on how to make the community better. Ms. Ray clarified that the park in question is not a City park, but in fact owned by BNSF and part of their right-of-way, so [a request from the TIF for improvements to the park by the depot] would need to come from BNSF directly. Ms. Ray further clarified that only a portion of the park, approximately the southern triangle is owned by the city. Vice-Chair Casey stated that the city has said that there needs to be a bathroom there. Ms. Ray reiterated that the land in question is owned by BNSF and not the city, and pointed out that a portion of the Railway Ave right of way is not owned by the city, but by BNSF, so the city has very limited control over the area. Chair Pigman

suggested that the Board may be able to put together a concept for the park to present to BNSF to see if they would be interested in improving the area and encourage more pedestrian and tourism traffic in the area, with the understanding that it would be a good opportunity to be considered as a part of a TIF application.

Regarding the application before the board, Chair Pigman stated that it is a positive project, that does not require a large monetary investment. He related that many people have commented on how nice Rodney St is since not only the improvements there were made to the infrastructure and streets, but also the "vibe" has been revitalized, and it is encouraging more traffic and movement through that area. Chair Pigman stated that he rides his bike through this particular tunnel often and that the project would be nice, additionally it would be ideal if they could take some elements of the 6th ward and the railroad district into the thought process of conceptualizing the mural. Ms. Reese stated that any history that HPAC could find for the artists to use for concepts was included with the RFP. Ramsay Ballew, HPAC and Holter Museum, stated that HPAC is waiting on applications that do favor historical context and history about the railroad district. Ms. Ballew stated she lives in the Rodney St district and as a community member feels that the two murals there have uplifted the neighborhood and made it a much more inviting and safer feeling place in general, pointing out an increase in children to and from school or to friends' houses independently. Ms. Ballew further stated that history is going to be weighted in the applications. Vice-Chair Casey stated that the true gateway to the district is at malfunction junction and there is a desire to have something there, and that it has been talked about many times. Vice-Chair Casey also expressed her opinions that the project will invite graffiti to itself, that she would like to see the neighborhood plan to come up with a view of what the Board is after, and while this is an okay idea, she thinks it is very pricey and \$5000 sounds like a more reasonable amount. Ms. Ray noted that there would not be a complete neighborhood plan until the end of the calendar year, and the board might want to consider holding off on considering further applications if that is their stance. Chair Pigman stated he agreed that this is not the entrance [to the district] but that it is on the path there, and therefore doesn't believe that it has to be as directly tied to the look and feel that may be done in the entire 6th ward in coming years. Chair Pigman further explained that he has a significant monetary amount invested in the murals painted on his business' building and that the amount being asked from the TIF for investment in this project is not out of line as far as budgets are concerned, and he would be excited to ride through the tunnel and see the finished product. Chair Pigman also noted that there had not been an application for funding submitted to the Board since the demolition and abatement of the lot near Starbucks, and that it would be good to have more of these small "wins", and this may encourage some other small projects that will make a difference within the district as it is so visible. Ms. Ballew noted that the Rodney St project started with

a small lower cost project which phased slowly to the higher end murals which created community buy in and a desire for more. Ms. Reese added that murals typically cost between \$20 to \$50 per square foot, so HPAC is hoping to attract someone very interested in the community aspect and in bringing beautification to an underserved area.

Maxwell Hay, HPAC Vice-Chair, added that from their perspective this is not an either or thing. There is more that they would like to invest in the 6th Ward. There are plans for doing dumpster artwork in the next year, as well as other murals around the 6th Ward, which is poised to draw a lot of investment from neighbors and other community members. Ms. Ballew stated that a small investment can help catapult more investment in the community, and HPAC is only asking for \$7750, and want to put more in themselves, and with strategic planning hope to build in sponsorship opportunities and within their own budget reserve funds to match with other organizations doing similar projects throughout the community, and would like to be involved in more opportunities for public art in the district as a possible funding source. Ms. Mickelson stated that she liked the proposal and thought that it could be a catalyst and generate more projects and rather than sit on \$7500, the Board should go forward with it. Chair Pigman then went through the goals and objectives of the TIF and how the proposal fits them. Ms. Ray noted that it only needs to tie back into the goals and objectives, and that there is a way to do so.

Mr. Iverson made a motion to recommend approval of the application for \$7750 for this project. Ms. Mickelson seconded the motion. The motion carried, and it was noted that it would advance to City Commission on March 27, 2023.

It was noted that the RFP had already been released, proposals were due back on March 2^{2ns}, and the plan is to review the proposals in April, and execute a contract with the winning artist in May. Chair Pigman asked if HPAC would update the Board on the decision on the concept once completed. Ms. Ballew noted the day and time of HPAC meetings and that they are open to the public and that the Board would be welcome at the jury session as well.

- **Railroad Neighborhood Plan Update**

Ms. Ray noted that staff was hoping to be able to provide an update at the next meeting, whether in March or a subsequent meeting, and that hopefully there would be information or materials from the consultant to share.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment.

Vice-Chair Casey did ask about what had happened with the land next to Starbucks on Lyndale (the previously funded application) as there is a sign there that states it is for lease. Ms. Ray noted that the investment was made in the demolition and abatement work associated with that demo as there were a lot of hazardous materials that needed special care. The investment was not toward any aspect of the future development on the site, but that the hotel project was still moving forward and the sign was for the portion of the property not associated with the hotel project. Vice-Chair Casey again asked about the city installing a bathroom at the park and that the 6th Ward Neighborhood Association had been promised that one would be installed 8 years ago. Ms. Ray noted that the Parks director at that time has not worked for the City for a number of years and therefore could not speak to her promises, and so did not know the status of plans for that park. Ms. Ray did state that the Parks Department has a lot of ideas for Memorial Park, which also falls within the district, such as a warming shelter for the ice rink, which has been heavily utilized over this winter. Ms. Ray invited Vice-Chair Casey to visit the Parks Department and have a conversation with them, but advised that they have a lean budget, but could apply for TIF funds. Chair Pigman asked if there were any additional applications in the pipeline. Ms. Ray stated she had received a phone call about a potential application, but did not know if or when to expect it to come in.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting is scheduled for March 16, 2023.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned.