

A meeting of the Business Improvement District (BID) Board was held at City Hall on February 12, 2024 at 6:00 P.M. Board members Kylee Wussow, Duane Johnson, Lyall White, Andrea Hoffman, Vincent Meyer, and the City Administrator were present. There were 11 citizens in attendance – 10 in person and 1 remotely via Zoom meetings.

1. The City Administrator called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.
2. The public hearing regarding the continuation of the Business Improvement District was opened.
3. The City Administrator gave a brief history of the Business Improvement District (BID), the purpose of the district, the BID Board structure, assessment rates per zone, the 2024 annual budget, the dissolution of the Downtown Association, and the BID Board's desire to gather feedback from business and property owners to see where they want to go with the BID.
4. Dave Hatch expressed concern about lack of communication among downtown businesses, would hate to see the money disappear or go in to something else, but after further thought and no one from the downtown area wants to take this on, then the district should be dissolved and go away and each business could use it to offset the assessment on their properties. He also mentioned the revaluation of property and concern with having to pay personal property taxes. The City Administrator advised that if all assessed values go up individual business portions of taxes shouldn't change if everyone goes up the same which only changes the mill rate. However, the formula for funding the BID is directly proportional to the assessed value so if assessed value goes up 45-50% then the special assessment would also go up 45-50% unless the BID Board recommends to Council that the zone rates be adjusted to keep the special assessment amounts about the same. The City Administrator also explained that the State has eliminated personal property tax so this is the last year and then personal property tax will be gone.
5. Jim McAvey expressed concerns about trying to get people interested and it's always the same people doing the same thing over and over again. Would hate to see Christkindl or other events that have been going on for years and years that bring people in to town. The City Administrator explained events are no longer funded with BID funds. Money was raised for each event. If the BID were dissolved, then each business would have what they would have paid in to the BID to fund these events.
6. Carrie Timp believes the Downtown Association is a valuable organization and dissolving would be a shame. We need some kind of organization to promote the downtown, and maybe it is just a paid position with someone with a professional background in marketing or running a small business and has the time needed to promote everything businesses are doing instead of having that fall on the shoulders of people already trying to run their businesses and do lots of things. This individual could be from the outside and supporting all of us would be impactful. Festivals are also important, and she is willing to give those festivals support as a business. She feels as business owners we should be able to pool together and work together.
7. Laura Lindow advised she has been the person doing the fundraising for Christkindl for the past 3 years and they were able to raise \$3,000 to \$4,000 in donations to put that on so she doesn't feel it would be a problem raising funds for the festivals it's just finding the help.
8. BID Board member Lyall White explained that has always been the problem. He was on the Downtown Association (DTA), and it was the same thing there were 3-4 people doing all of the work so how do we get people involved. DTA members only had so much time to dedicate to it and it takes a lot of time. They looked to having a paid person do it several years ago, and you only have \$30,000 so to put a full-time person in there goes your entire budget. The City used to put in more money too, but there came a time when they couldn't after a while either, so it dwindled. It is all volunteer and no one seems to have time.
9. Dave Hatch suggested the money budgeted for advertising could be used to advertise for all businesses or each business could keep the money they would pay and use that to advertise for themselves. There is no money there to hire an outside agency. He hates to dissolve anything, but if finding people has been an issue since the beginning of time what else do you do?
10. Justin Dougherty explained the Chamber of Commerce's discussion regarding the request for them to administer the BID Operating Plan.
11. Chris Hardie offered perspective that a strong thriving downtown in any community is good for the community, and thinks that downtown Black River Falls has come a long way from empty store fronts to opening of a good variety of businesses coming in. This is always an opportunity to work together so should try to keep that going and the events. It is a good discussion you are having and are looking at all potential

opportunities and maybe there is that person out there with a marketing background if you put it out for request for proposals. There are over 80 BID districts in the state, some big and some small, but the fact that the city took this action years ago meant that it was important for them to have strong economic development in the downtown and would hope that would continue because things like the streetscaping and the signs and the plants, those types of amenities add to a vibrant downtown.

12. There was discussion on insurance for festivals and where that would come from. If businesses took on Christkindl that would fall on them.
13. BID Board member Andrea Hoffman asked if anyone had any thoughts on restructuring this and how that would look and simplifying it a little bit? Would that make more businesses more comfortable if it were more relaxed.
14. BID Board member Vinny Meyer suggested instead of having an organization putting on an event the individual businesses put on things they want to do and come ask for the funding.
15. There was discussion on the social media efforts the DTA was doing and how that could be handled. Pay one person that is social media savvy to do that instead of an organization. Marley at Studio 107 was doing that for the DTA and could reach out to her.
16. There was discussion on the administrative duties and reporting that would still need to be done. That would fall back on the BID Board if an organization were not designated. Also need to figure out how to administer the grant programs and how often is the BID Board willing to meet to get this done.
17. Laura Lindow reported that there were a lot of grant applications that came in last year that did not get looked at because the DTA dissolved at the end of the year. The City Administrator suggested those applications should be submitted for the BID Board to review.
18. It was suggested perhaps the banks and their employees could be tapped in to for volunteers. Bob Becker advised banks have volunteered a lot of people over the years and are like others that are frustrated over time and are burned out. The Black River Country Bank is willing to continue to contribute as it is a valuable asset for the City, but what is getting done? Back when it started in 1997 there was grant money to fund a position to manage the downtown. The City Administrator explained at that time we qualified for the state's Main Street Program that came with grant money but one of the requirements was you had to have a full-time person to manage the district. For some reason we did not qualify for that program or those grant funds. Bob agreed it's a good idea to hire someone, but you need money.
19. Carrie Timp suggested paying someone for the social media aspect could be a good use of the funds. Jane Tande explained her experiences with social media, and she feels the downtown businesses' presence on multiple platforms is important. She would rather do her own social media but is willing to pay toward a social media person for other businesses, but the person needs to be a part of the community and be able to meet with local businesses. There was discussion on how people find downtown businesses whether it be billboards, interstate signs, advertising, and/or social media.
20. There was discussion on how closing down Main Street for events hurts businesses that rely on out-of-town traffic, but benefits others and also provides an added level of safety.
21. BID Board member Duane Johnson asked if the BID Board could consider taking a small piece of the budget and continue on with the grant programs and possibly the maintenance reduce the tax rate and leave the rest to the businesses. The City Administrator added that he would recommend if the BID Board were to do part of this budget that the maintenance stays because the trees and decorative sign posts and lights are expensive to maintain. Jane Tande asked if the budget is reduced, and we find out we need more do we just put it back in the budget the next year and is that an easy process. The City Administrator explained it is a two-step process so it's not quick, but it is possible.
22. Bid Board member Lyall White explained how the DTA was the organization that administered all of this and now we no longer have that association the money is here, and we have to figure out how to get it out and somehow have someone to do it. The BID Board can be the administrator, but there is a lot to take on and it's hard when you are running a business or two.
23. Rod McGillivray asked those in attendance if there was interest in creating a board completely different than the DTA to administer this fund. There were some attendees that provided Rod with their contact information. The City Administrator advised if a group is formed to administer the fund, then that group

would need to be established as a bone fide group with by-laws, etc. so there would be a fair amount of work to establish that. There was discussion on how that could work and a possible meeting in a couple of weeks to explore more ideas. The City Administrator encouraged them to schedule a meet on that idea, but recommended they think about sustainability because the DTA had a similar situation putting one or two people in charge of an event and they had trouble recruiting help so how are you going to fix that problem, how does it look 10 years from now, and how do you replace players in that group? Justin Dougherty summarized that having a smaller group of people meeting more informally can be done whether or not the BID is there. Everyone is talking about wanting to do something, but not wanting to have committees. There is ability to do that and involve the entire city. If the BID is dissolved all of this can be done and have the meetings and groups and you don't have all the background, not so fun stuff to do. BID Board member Lyall White suggested this might be difficult when it comes to funding without a pot of money already established for that purpose, and insurance could become an issue.

24. Justin Dougherty suggested possibly amending the boundaries of the district to include more businesses so you have more resources that might be interested in doing something and helping with it.
25. Bob Becker asked if the DTA structure has been dissolved. Laura Lindow indicated nothing had been done. It was suggested a group could find board members for the DTA and use the structure that is already established.
26. The City Administrator suggested there are other ways to fund these activities. The financial institutions that are paying \$4,500 toward the BID now could allocate those funds for grants and the city could potentially contribute \$5,000 from the Economic Development fund, and then those financial institutions could have their own group to review grant applications and award those grants. Then it is private money in a pool for grant programs for the downtown only. BID Board member Lyall White suggested possibly using the remainder of the BID budget to help downtown property owners with other maintenance issues that go along with having an older building.
27. BID Board member Lyall White suggested we schedule another public hearing to hear from more owners, and meanwhile the BID Board can review the grant applications and maybe there's enough interest to revitalize the DTA or maybe people don't like that name and we change that. He added, there's money coming in to help our downtown let's use it. Laura Lindow advised the DTA started talking about dissolving in April 2023 but thought they could do it, but in the end they couldn't and said we're done. BID Board member Kylee Wussow commended the idea but reminded those in attendance that someone needs to do all of the leg work behind it. Kylee was on the DTA and asked business owners for their opinion. She put in the hours and does not own a business but had a job and had family commitments and it drains a person to no end when you want to give as much as you can, and you can't. When thinking about restructuring, keep in mind you need to be accountable and who is going to be accountable for it?
28. Amy Bloczynski, having been on the DTA feared this may all snowball again with the same problem and is not sure what the answer is. The Waumandee State Bank wants to be involved to help the downtown and the community, but they cannot contribute more people. She would hate to see this not keep going, but we need that one person that is retired or doesn't have much going on that people trust to step up and say I want to help my community. Bob Becker added that you still have that recruitment problem and maybe the next person isn't the right person.
29. It was moved by Kylee Wussow, seconded by Duane Johnson to close the public hearing. Motion carried at 7:43pm.
30. It was moved by Kylee Wussow, seconded by Lyall White to set another public hearing for Monday, March 11, 2024 at 6:00pm at City Hall. Motion carried.
31. The City Administrator reminded BID Board members they are members of a government body and therefore discussion of BID business should not be held with more than two of you at a time outside of a meeting otherwise it constitutes a walking quorum. Be conscious of how many of you are talking together, and if 1 of you decides to call the other 4 it is the same thing. All business must be done in an open meeting.
32. It was moved by Kylee Wussow, seconded by Andrea Hoffman to adjourn. Motion carried at 7:48 pm.

A. Brad Chown, City Administrator
City of Black River Falls