

## HIGHLAND REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

### SPECIAL STUDY SESSION MINUTES

MONDAY JUNE 2ND, 2025

The Highland Redevelopment Commission (“Commission”, “RC”) met in Highland Town Hall on Monday June 2nd, 2025. The Special Study Session was called to order at 7:08 P.M. by President Alex Robertson.

Commissioners Phil Scheeringa, Commissioner Tom Black, Commissioner George Georgeff, Commissioner Alex Robertson, Commissioner Doug Turich and Pat Krull, Non-Voting Member/School Board Representative were present in person at Town Hall.

**Other Officials present:** Attorney Reed. Director Maria Becerra, Redevelopment Assistant Kendra Hernandez

Commissioner Robertson discussed Sol Smart, and getting bronze level certification. So Sol Smart was something that was brought to the Redevelopment Commission's attention several years ago. I want to say 2022, 2023 about that timeframe just circling back on it to see if there's an appetite to pursue a bronze level certification, Gary and Michigan City our closest neighbors that have got a certification in Sol Smart , Is anybody familiar with this program?

Commissioner Black commented that actually came to the Council last time as well and it's a program that is supposed to aid people through the permitting process. Well, Sol Smart will come and advise us how we can adjust our permitting and things like that and after speaking with Mr. Mika at that time last 2 years now but the last term that we don't impede any type of solar. Our programs don't so it seems like this is going to be something unnecessary. I know that to achieve different levels. You can adopt different programs. That Sol Smart recommends to gain points to move up in those levels. I think that's something that probably does not benefit the town. I mean, if they were offering direct access to funds, you know low cost loans whatever they could to help promote solar that would be different but I don't think that this really accomplishes that. I think it just lets the Feds look into what we're doing, and you know, give us very little in return.

Commissioner Robertson commented this program, I think they do it in conjunction with the Department of Energy. They have a goal of getting a certain number of communities on by 2027 as far as what it will do for the town. You know, if we're already in compliance or hitting the marks that they want to see for at least the bronze level certification. It's not going to be a game changer. I think that getting the certification is free. If we're already able to attain it, it's something nice that we can say that we are solar friendly, or we're sure that certain barriers have been removed. It's not like

If it's not going to do a whole lot for the town. It's also not going to cost the town anything, either. I think it's worth pursuing basically the steps to do this would be to submit the solar statement which I had drafted a solar statement. That's in the packet and I already had a phone call with a representative from Sol Smart. If we get that solar statement to them and they give us an advisor That would suit our needs and then we would start the process from there and they said even if we're just going after the bronze level, we might already be at a silver level or a gold level so I think it's worth pursuing because it's not any cost to us, and I think it gives the perception shows people that we're thinking about this. And you know, maybe someone sees that. And like, you know what? Yeah, I thought about putting solar on my home or business, and maybe I will. Now, I don't see any drawbacks, is what I'm saying.

Commissioner Georgeff asked If we're not certified, where do they make recommendations to us.

Commissioner Robertson answered Yeah, they give recommendations.

Commissioner Georgeff stated We have the option, then, whether or not we're not obligated

Commissioner Robertson answered we're not obligated at all.

Commissioner Scheeringa stated there's no obligations if they do certify us?

Commissioner Robertson answered Correct

Attorney Reed stated I mean, I read through it , you know with not much of a tooth comb as I'd like but I will say it I don't see a downside to it. I don't see a cost associated with it. I see some potential cost savings. If some people want to do solar I don't see an evil, I guess we're not signing a check or anything like that.

Commissioner Turich asked are we sharing any type of information with them to obtain the bronze.

Attorney Reed answered I'm sure they will be asking for information, probably primarily from the building department.

Commissioner Robertson stated if they find anything problematic and just say, Hey, you know, this could be a roadblock for somebody. They help remove the red tape. Okay and make it easier for residents and businesses to go through that process. Make things clean so that people don't have to spend extra time and money on navigating what it would take to utilize solar. I noticed on their website the list of communities that have done this, a lot of them are cities, and I asked that question, you know, do you have you done a town? Our size? and the guy said their smallest municipality is under 2,000 residents and they just did their 1st certification with a tribal nation.

I think they have a little over 500 different municipalities throughout the US. That have gone after a certification for certification level at some point it's 26 in Indiana.

Commissioner Turich stated looking at page 3, talks about the prerequisite, one of them is zoning review. What can you elaborate on that?

Commissioner Robertson answered I don't know how much of a review it would be? I'll have more information if we start the process and talk with the agent. I imagine we would be pretty much sending them our codes and standards, and zoning.

Commissioner Turich stated It's pretty straightforward, One's just a statement. The other one's a checklist. But the zoning review just like learn a little bit more about that.

Commissioner Black stated I think it's something that's better to come from the Council than the redevelopment, and understand where the same people but a different body. I think that because town control any funds, and directly you know, the employees that will be affected can that perhaps it should come from the council and not from the redevelopment.

Commissioner Robertson stated that sounds good, too. This was I think, this came up through the Sustainability Commission, which is under the Redevelopment Commission. It's how we heard about it 1st go around so smart, put it in your minds. I've done a little bit of work on it, so if there's an appetite we could move it on to the Council.

Next on the agenda was the discussion of bench replacement .

Commissioner Robertson mentioned getting a call from a business owner on Jewett here's some pictures in the packet, and I've emailed out color photos where you could see the damage a little bit easier, but I didn't know if redevelopment wanted to assist in replacing or repairing this bench over on, do it, or maybe taking a look at the others, or if that falls under different department, I'm not sure over there by miles books, and I think it's almost like a rubber coating on there. He asked Doug if this might be a parks issue

Commissioner Scheeringa stated he thought it was a Main Street ting at one time

Maria stated she thought that George might know

Commissioner Georgeff stated we had purchased the benches a while ago and the only thing we had to do with Parks Dept was with the bike racks .

Who purchased them? I don't know what the cost would be to repair them, or if they do need to be sandblasted and painted, or I'm sure it couldn't be or is that something that can be? I mean, I hate passing on work. Our public works and parks are. So yeah, I do you think that would like, is that damage, or is that age like some of the broken. It's probably age. I think it's a rubber coating that's come off over time and then underneath it's just bare metal is little bit jagged, rusted.

Commissioner Turich asked Is this the only bench? Are there more benches in this area?

Commissioner Robertson answered I'm not sure if there's other benches in the shape. I haven't walked the downtown to know for sure.

Commissioner Turich asked Do we look at it as an opportunity to refresh everything? kind of do it as a larger project, and not just this one isolated bench.

Commissioner Scheeringa stated if it's 10 benches and they're all in this bad, is it cheaper to replace them or to fix them. The challenge is to take a look at all of them.

Commissioner Turich stated My question is, though, if it is 10 right, or if it's 1, can, the redevelopment fund that because it's I thought. there're some stipulations right? So I question whether the redevelopment can even support this project, or it would have to go somewhere else.

Commissioner Georgeff stated That can be considered maintenance.

Commissioner Robertson stated I think that would that would fall under that it gets a little trickier if we were, going to do maintenance.

Commissioner Turich stated That's my understanding , that's why I asked. So if we look at it and say, we've got 10 benches downtown, and we want to do a replacement. I think that could be something we could discuss further. But if it's maintenance we've got to defer it somewhere else.

Attorney Reed stated Yeah, I would think the maintenance should go back. Just go to the Council, I would suppose. Essentially, it's not parks.

Commissioner Turich asked Is there anybody that can evaluate if we have more than this bench and the on Jewett and Highway?

Maria stated we would

Commissioner Robertson stated I know at one point, right we there was a matching Grant program that parks that pursued and redevelopment was part of that. We were going to get some more benches. On this the company folded

Next on the agenda the decorative lights on Jewett

Commissioner Robertson asked if we needed to go for another bid ?

Attorney Reed stated We're fine. Anything you know with what's going on. I mean, these are these are not. It's not the scope of the projects, not changing. Base prices aren't changing. It's to me it's nothing. It doesn't require a Rebid or reevaluation or anything, I guess is this technically like phase 2 of the same project that was already approved?

Commissioner Scheeringa asked if they were holding to that bid ?

Attorney Reed answered there's variances due to I mean, it's not the price increase of their labor, It's the product but every bit or been the same product. So it's not gonna change it anything that's different from the original scope will be subject to a change order.

Commissioner Turich expressed I've heard so many positive things about what we've done to this point, and I'd love to continue to expand upon that.

Commissioner Robertson asked If that project does end up going through. Is there any sort of timeline anyone would want communicated, you know, last year we were trying to get it all done for the October Restaurant Crawl Is anything you'd want communicated to the vendor?

Commissioner Georgeff stated if it gets approved soon, I can't imagine why they couldn't have it done by October.

Commissioner Robertson stated once they start getting in October that's when they switch gears over to project flying through Christmas and all that.

Commissioner Turich asked when are first Crawl was and if we find out about getting concrete barriers at the end of Highway and Kennedy, and then also Highway and 5th after last year's incident around October.

So both Crawls will have closures at Kennedy and Highway and Highway and 5<sup>th</sup>.

Maria mentioned to Commissioner Robertson that we were going to have ask for additional appropriations for the Decorative Lighting .

Next on the Agenda was HWC Engineering proposal for redevelopment plans for 8 targeted sites in town

Commissioner Black stated he thought this is what was being done with our comprehensive plan

There is some overlap. I spoke with. Bill, who's kind of heading that up with the consultant they are not providing detailed plans like this. They're doing the community outreach the stakeholder input stuff like that helping us prioritize developments. But they're not coming up with these more site-specific plans, something that we can actually present to interested developers and say,

this is what we really want. This would be much more specific with options for having some renderings done, you know, really figuring out what the town wants and you know where we want developments to occur, so that we can have a more informed discussion with future developers.

Commissioner Scheeringa stated We had something like this in place. It would have been a lot easier. Let's say, you know, someone like the gentleman that wants to develop on Indianapolis Boulevard. If we had a plan, a more targeted plan on that location. That property probably would have already been partially developed or not developed already.

Commissioner Robertson stated this would be more of a complement to our comprehensive plan.

Commissioner Black questioned the dollar amount of \$75,000

Commissioner Robertson answered I called them up today left them a message. I want to go over what they had proposed because we could take out some things that are overlapping with stuff that we're already doing with the comprehensive plan. So speaking with Phil, he said, you know you don't need to go through and worry about prioritizing developments quite yet, you know. Let them finish up on there, and the same thing with stakeholder meetings and all that that there's a lot of overlap with what HWC had proposed so we could pull a lot of that out. I imagine it would significantly affect the price.

Commissioner Turich asked if we had a list of the 8 sites?

Commissioner Robertson answered No

Commissioner Black asked So we're doing a drive through

Commissioner Robertson answered that's sort of the stuff that we could probably do with this comprehensive plan, too. That's some of the overlap anything else. So we have already a couple of sites that we're interested in.

Commissioner Georgeff stated we have already a couple of sites that we're interested in. Yeah, that we're interested in. We're looking. I guess, for some development there, and the owners of the property. I think there's some movement there, so I would want to hold off at least a little

while on something like that to see how those areas develop. Why would we want to pay for something? If there's if there's an activity there that's going to take place anyhow.

Next on the Agenda rubber matting at Main Square . does the RDC want to fund the project ?

Commissioner Robertson commented that he spoke with the Park board a couple of meetings ago, just to make sure that they were moving on, that they had anything they wanted to present to us. If we were going to be funding that project and how it was going to work.

Commissioner Robertson stated Do they have multiple bids down or anything like that? At that time they didn't have multiple bids. I think they just had the one, and it seemed like they had an appetite to move forward. With that. I think they're still trying to figure all of that out, I think on our end is. the question is, do we want funding? If that project comes us from the partner

Commissioner Turich stated he was in favor of it .

Commissioner Scheeringa stated I'm definitely not opposed to it. Everybody knows I love these parks in this town, so I want to see them better. I just want it to be easily maintained by our parks department. These guys are already have struggling because of staffing and is this cost effective over? I'm sure Alex already has all this information. Is it cost effective over 10 years because I know they spend a fortune on mulch every year for these parts. I know he has that. I think that would just be able to justify us. So if we have that information, I'm definitely not opposed to it.

Commissioner Black commented that his biggest concern was vandalism and any repair costs

Commissioner Turich stated I just I don't hear about the vandalism in other communities. I don't know why that's such a hang up here with us.

Commissioner Georgeff commented I thought somebody relate to me an issue. It was either portage or a community out East that had some vandalism, they couldn't repair it. They had to replace. It currently is what I was told. So there's no patchwork that's can't cut it out and just replace it.

Commissioner Turich stated I'll be honest with you. I kind of let off the gas a little bit with the new superintendent coming into town. So I want to see what that individual brings, you know, as

up as ideas and shares with the park board, and then we'd refresh it. My goal was to have it in place by the 4th of July. That's impossible now, and I understand that. So I think at this time. Let's go ahead and just wait. Let's let the new superintendent come in. I know we have a park tour scheduled with him. I think it's going to be the 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday in August. I think it's a tentative date, and then we can bring it back up from there. If that's okay with the group.

Commissioner Scheeringa stated Yeah, I mean, that's great. I mean. I'm excited to see who the new Park superintendent may or may be.

Commissioner Turich stated I don't mind sharing. I just don't know if it's been public. I haven't heard it from Alex officially

Commissioner Scheeringa stated we didn't release the name of the possible new fire chief, either. Right. You got to wait, make sure everything's accepted, and what's but right like I wouldn't want to make some big giant purchase for the fire department, I'll be upfront. And honest, when my kids were little, I would take my kids to neighboring communities because they had that pour down surface so I knew my kids. It's better for ADA access. Yeah. My aunt, who lives in Griffith and watched my kids a lot when I was at the firehouse. She would take them to Central Park all the time, because it was easier for her. She's 70 years old and it was just easier for her. It was great, so I would love to see that in our community. you know.

I mentioned it before. There was one Facebook post about a year and a half ago that drove me nuts Someone new to the town lived in Highland put on there. I have some young kids where should what park should I take my kids to and not one park mentioned was a Highland park, and that made me sick. You know. I don't respond on there to Facebook. I choose not to try to be a Councilman through Facebook. That's my choice. I don't want to get in arguments or say the wrong thing on there. I would like to see the rubber banding and our parks improved.

Commissioner Georgeff asked is there a community close to here that one we can take a ride. Just take a ride by and look at ?

Everyone answered Griffith, Munster and Schererville and Redar Park

Commissioner Turich stated They all have parks that have the rubber manning. We're the only ones that don't. and not that I know, people are saying, well, we're just trying to follow everybody else. It's not that. It's the ADA compliance. It's the ease for the park department,

Commissioner Scheeringa stated what are the most people complain about? We hear all the time is the darn weeds. Yeah, that's what you're not weeding through it. It makes it easier because you can spray it. There's something with these weeds in this town over the last couple of years, because you could spray them a hundred times, and they're not dying. Yeah, it's crazy. So that'll help in that aspect. there's just more information I'd love to hear from our park superintendent.

Next on the agenda Homebuyers down Payment Program

Commissioner Robertson the program from our neighbors to the north East Chicago and Hammond . Hammond's program is not funded through their redevelopment commission, but East Chicago's is so this is another item where there may be overlap or start discussion here, and maybe moves on to the council wherever it's funded. But put some examples in there. I did like Hammond's program. It seemed cut and dry and easy. East Chicago's had a lot of a lot of money in there for down payment assistance. I don't think we need to get that crazy

Commissioner Scheeringa stated I think it's a good thing because it can help with employees. I mean, we're hiring some new employees, right?

Commissioner Georgeff stated if we open it to all employees of the town. Our Park superintendent, our fire chief police officers, public works, parks. Good thing, I think, to have our employees living in town. I had called and asked Maria, because I did. Did we get an email or something from Mark Herak? I had questioned. I thought it was the gaming fund. Did you get any information on that?

Maria answered Mark Herak did reply to the email. Gaming revenue can be used for almost anything. \$558,550 is in the fund right now.

Commissioner Georgeff stated it's not appropriated to any to any purpose. So it's just sitting there accumulating and it's not coming out of tax dollars from the Homes property taxes. It's coming from the gaming funds.

Commissioner Scheeringa stated what do we get annually with that?

Maria answered He didn't say

I seem to remember was something in the area of \$90,000 a year

Maria stated it was Hammond and East Chicago. That's the money they use, because it is unrestricted. I believe they're unrestricted, and so there's no income limits. I believe if they do use Hammond or East Chicago any of the CBDG money there is income guidelines but this has no restrictions, no restrictions for police fired city employees.

Commissioner Robertson added They also extended it to licensed education professionals, teachers.

Commissioner Georgeff stated he would like to see something in place in the area of price 6 grants a year as long as the gaming funds come in and support it. If we have any extra funds that fund is not being used for anything. I mean, you could use it to repair sidewalks in front of public buildings and parks and stuff like that. We have to be the example before we go out and tell people they've got to replace their sidewalk and everything. So if we have bad sidewalks and tripping hazards, we probably should fix those before we require the residents to do theirs.

Commissioner Scheeringa asked so is this something we need probably move to council rather than because council would control those?

Commissioner Georgeff answered It would have to go to the Council, if it's the gaming funds.

Commissioner Scheeringa stated I say, we go there and have further discussion.

Number 7. Comprehensive plan feedback

Commissioner Robertson stated I think there was a steering committee meeting I was unable to attend and did you guys jump in on that one.

Commissioner Scheeringa stated because we were only allowed two. So it was you and Tom and I noticed I somebody sent me the list. I think you sent me the list of everybody on there. Good mix of department heads and board members.

I think the challenge is the timing of the 1st one. Can we do another one after 5, 36 o'clock in the evening, so cause some of the Board members plan Commission, BCA. They work full time jobs, Monday through Friday. Could we do another one after 6 pm.

Maria answered Sure.

Commissioner Scheeringa stated Yeah, I think that would make for a better group of people.

Maria stated So it was the 1st meeting. It was more of a how the agenda covered more of an education of the committee. What is the plan? How will the plan be used? Project overview and then implementation steps? So it was, you know, just kind of scratching the surface. So we are really just starting

Commissioner Robertson mentioned Here is why we're meeting tonight. I talked with John about this and get the feeling from the group.so there is a I don't know what. The document is called something with redevelopment as far as what the meetings should be. What is that? Resolution? 2019 - 25? So do you guys want to follow this and have the meetings per the resolution, as in here, with the way I read it. We couldn't reschedule our study sessions. You'd reschedule everything else except for the study session. So If we don't want to have the study sessions on the 1st Monday of the month, at 7 o'clock, I'd say we amend the resolution, John, did you have a chance to look at that ?

Attorney Reed answered it really doesn't, but it comes down to. If you, it's all comes down to the public notice.it would be best to change that language, to be honest. So it's in the book like that but it's all based on the lawful public notice that goes out 72 h or 48 min depending on the meeting. I mean it's your pleasure to do it.

Commissioner Georgeff stated Yeah, we eliminated the Council study so I can't see us throwing a Redevelopment Commission study session in place of that. So if we're going to do it, I mean, why did we eliminate the Council study sessions?

Commissioner Robertson stated I would like to see the study sessions be on a dedicated night, and we only get that half hour for the meetings. I don't know how everybody's schedules are just want to make sure that whatever we've got going on. If we follow this, if we don't but I would like to see at least the study sessions be on a different night if everybody's able to meet. If not, I totally understand. I'm probably the most flexible. Given my work situation. I'm pretty flexible, too. Yeah. So I just show up when I'm pulled.

Commissioner Turich stated I do like having a little more time to talk about things. I feel like sometimes, for the 1st of all, I have a challenge of getting here, driving from work to get here by 6 It's challenging for me. Second, I think there are times where we're rushing to wrap it up, because we've got to get in into it the next meeting, and that's my only concern, and I agree with that but I also like when we start, things start adding up, we have a night like this, we can add you know we can add a night if we if we need to.

Commissioner Scheeringa stated when we start, things start adding up, we have a night like this, we can add things

Attorney Reed stated what if the study session was on the tail end of the Town Council study session on the second Tuesday that way. It wouldn't be time limited. I don't think anybody minds how late we're here.

Commissioner Georgeff stated we're here to 8, 8, 30, and if we have the Redevelopment Commission study session after that and we spend all the time here rather than coming, everybody coming back for another day killing them.

Attorney Reed added the average town Council meetings between an hour, an hour and 15 min.

Commissioner Robertson asked Should we move the plenary meeting the same way after the council meeting.

Commissioner Georgeff stated the plenary redevelopment that would be the 4th and the study session would be the second.

Commissioner Scheeringa stated usually we have enough notice, and people can arrange their schedules. One thing I know. Rohit was supposed to be here a few months ago, and then he had something in his family. Is he planning on coming?

Maria answered I haven't heard from him for about 3 weeks but Bill Baker, his representative, did reach out that they are working on something.

**Adjournment:** Meeting was adjourned by President Robertson at 7:45 PM.

**DULY PASSED AND RESOLVED** by the Highland Redevelopment Commission, Highland, Lake County, Indiana, this 23rd day of June 2025, having passed by a vote 3 in favor and 0 opposed.

Highland Redevelopment Commission



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President

ATTEST:

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Secretary