

HIGHLAND REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES
MONDAY, AUGUST 11TH, 2025

Members of the Highland Redevelopment Commission (RC Commission) met in person at Town Hall on Monday, August 11th, 2025.

The Study session was called to order at 8:01 pm by Commissioner Robertson.

Present: Commissioners Alex Robertson, George Georgeff, Tom Black, Phil Scheeringa, Doug Turich and Non-Voting Commissioner Pat Krull were present in person at Town Hall.

Also Present: Some members of the public

Absent: Attorney Reed, Redevelopment Director Maria Becerra

First on the Agenda was Greg Flisram with Kendig-Keast and he introduced himself and gave a little back ground on how his company started and where they are now.

Mr. Flisram started to take a deep dive into the economics of redevelopment and he got certified as an economic development professional and learned public finance tools and really economic feasibility to really understand why and what you need to do to make redevelopment happen. Not necessarily greenfield development on virgin land but how do you actually redevelop property, sometimes in some, what we call, soft market communities and so that's become his specialty over the past 25 years.

Alex and Maria invited him to come down to talk to you after a couple of conversations that we had over the telephone. My understanding is that you're looking to encourage and incentivize redevelopment of your key corridors in the city, Indianapolis Boulevard and Kennedy Avenue. Maria and Alex mentioned that there were several sites, namely the DPW (Ultra) site and the Coach USA site, along with some others, that need to be repositioned and redeveloped and what could we do as planners to help you all facilitate that happening?

So redevelopment planning is a little bit different animal than comprehensive planning. He knows we're going through a comprehensive planning process now. Redevelopment planning is really more implementation-focused. It's really more about matching the community's expectations and desires for what redevelopment could look like versus what the market and what the economics of a deal or real estate will allow you to happen and blending those two and putting, sometimes, public-private partnerships together, and incentive packages to make the deals pencil because when they don't materialize like you want them to. It's often because the deals aren't feasible, given the current market realities in the community but these are all the different things that we have to contemplate and consider when we're doing a redevelopment plan. In a corridor plan or quarter plan specifically it's not just about urban planning and design ideas. It's really about economic realities on a particular site. What are some of the property owner motivations?

Do our regulatory tools match up with what we really want to see happen in the future? and then there are the whole public and the public domain kinds of things you know, civic beautification comes into question, the capacity of utilities, traffic, public safety, stormwater management, all these different things get blended into redevelopment specifically with a corridor plan. His thinking is that with this, it's this plan, based on my riding around.

A good deal of it needs to be focused on how do we encourage redevelopment in these target areas, but there also probably is a serious civic beautification component in terms of gateways, and how do we present ourselves as a community and put our best foot forward and I noticed that there's no gateway signs. There are gateway signs all over the city but there's nothing on the Kennedy Avenue corridor coming in and there's nothing there that really invites you into the city. It's not ugly, it's just not really attractive. You've done a great job downtown in putting together streetscape and lighting, decorative lighting, planting, but there's really nothing on that Kennedy Avenue corridor that would tell somebody visiting the Visitor Center that they really want to go into Highland and see what's down there.

His thinking is that with this plan, based on his riding around, a good deal of it needs to be focused on how do we encourage redevelopment in these target areas but there also probably is a serious civic beautification component in terms of gateways and how do we present ourselves as a community and put our best foot forward. He noticed that there's no gateway signs. There are gateway signs all over the city, but there's nothing on the Kennedy Avenue coming in there's nothing there that really invites you into the city it's not ugly, it's just not really attractive.

You've done a great job downtown in putting together streetscape and lighting, decorative lighting, planting, but there's really nothing on that Kennedy Avenue corridor that would tell somebody visiting the visitor center that they really want to go into Highland and see what's down there. There's not a lot of wayfinding. That's a fancy way of saying navigation signs that tell you kind of where town hall is, where the parks are, where downtown is. So a little bit of that needs to be probably factored in here as well.

He thought this meeting would be more about scoping, this project and really getting your ideas in terms of expectations and time frames, and he knows we're trying to sync this thing up with a comprehensive planning effort that is currently happening, too, but a typical redevelopment plan of this type would generally go about 8 months, maybe a little bit over. It can be shortened, it can be lengthened, depending on what you all want to do. Again, what we really want to do is not get people bound up in planning fatigue or meeting fatigue with this comprehensive planning effort at the same time, so it'd be really important, I think to really link up these two initiatives, so it's not, you know, one consultant team doing one thing and another consultant team doing something else. How do we, you know, how do we combine our efforts here? So this timeline could be shortened, it could be lengthened, depending on again, the city's capacity, the town's capacity to want to do meetings. So, really, we just depend on that.

The first phase he will go through this very quickly because it's kind of dry. First phase would be a due diligence. We'd check out your existing plans, your zoning regulations what your economic development capacities are, what programs you're currently using, what are the what's the infrastructure look like. Talk to your city engineers, talk about any problem areas on these corridors that we need to be mindful of, stormwater management, maybe public safety. Any

dangerous intersections or segments of streets and then do kind of a market overview in terms of not a full-blown market study, but talk to some of the folks in the local real estate community, talk to NIRPC, Northern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, affectionately known as NIRPC, the Northwest Indiana Forum, other folks in the real estate and economic development worlds to find out what their thoughts are on this effort.

Next would be prioritization and goal setting. This is where we really want to link up with your comprehensive planning effort to really understand what your priorities and goals for this work is. Is it redevelopment? Is it jobs? Is it about building the tax base? Is it about civic beautification and presenting yourself more attractively to traffic coming off of I-94? What are your goals here, doing this plan? and then really identify what kind of development preferences you have on some of these key sites

Then we go into an opportunities analysis phase, and this is where we really cast a wide net you know you are straddling a state line, you're right next to the third largest city in the country. There's a lot of recreational assets around here. There are a lot of university satellite campuses around here, so one of the first things we would do, again, in mind with the DPW site and some of these other large sites is there some large, facility or a use that is looking for a home in the region? And that's this is where these conversations with NIRPC and the Northwest Indiana Forum would come in .Is there a branch campus that would like to find a home somewhere in the larger Chicago metro, Indiana region? You know, is there some part of the hospitality recreation market that's not being met in the year? I know you have a lot of hotels, but is there a niche that's not being met?

Is there a corporate HQ looking for a site somewhere in the region? So we really want to cast a wide net to see what out there, what special, unique uses may fit on one of these sites, and whether they'd be interested in coming to Highland. This represents kind of an early market framework and a... or plan framework, I should say, for the plan where we identify ideas, linkages, and key sites, and key infrastructure improvements.

This is the idea of casting a wide net and really trying to understand from a regional level what are some of the needs, what are some of the specific uses, and then taking it down to an individual site level and putting together some conceptual designs of what development or redevelopment might look like. The next phase would be conceptualization. We start putting ideas on paper, really rough ideas, get your feedback, what you like, what you don't like about them, get some developer and property owner feedback as well.

More ideas, you know, different corridors, different building groups, how are they tied together, what, you know, what are some of the gateway treatments, or streetscapes or civic beautification treatments you need to be thinking about? We would contemplate here maybe doing up to 5 redevelopment concepts for some key sites. It could be more, it could be fewer.

Then we would refine and develop those ideas, so take the rough ideas and bring it down to a higher level of refinement based on the community feedback, or the steering committee feedback and then get into, really the more specific design treatments, economic development tools, what are your capacity needs, and what are some of some streetscape concepts that we ought to be thinking about, in the future.

In terms of what the community can look like, different parts of the community. A corridor plan not just talks a little bit talks a lot about the economics of redevelopment and what the development should look like, but also the public domain, what are some key areas that we need to be thinking about to beautify you know, some of these corridors.

Indianapolis Avenue is a state highway right? That's not a U.S. highway, it's 41 right? So there's not a whole lot we're going to be able to do without an act of Congress, because, you know, the departments of transportation are very difficult to work with but the Kennedy Avenue corridor is a local street, I'm assuming, and so we have a lot more latitude, I think, what we can do there as well and you don't want to rule out doing something on 41 just recognizing that it's going to be a lot more difficult to deal with some of the bureaucracy and red tape on a quarter like that.

Then even the civic beautification parts. He doesn't know if this is something that you all are interested in, it's just something that based on my driving around and doing kind of that Google Earth tour of your community seems like you'd use a little bit more of on some of these corridors. How do we beautify and compel people, or impel them to actually come into town from the highways and want to spend their time and spend a little money?

Then the last phase, and in his view, the most important phase, is implementation. This is where we talk about priority projects. What kind of incentives do we need to be thinking about? New incentives. Are there any regulatory changes? By that, I mean any changes to your zoning ordinance we need to be thinking about what's some of the capacity needs that we need, or capacity muscle that we need to build in terms of being able to staff this kind of stuff and then a schedule.

He hated to formulaic things but his experience is that all redevelopment plans come down to at least four tracks. Sometimes there's more, sometimes there's fewer of those, but typically, we would need to address, like, the regulatory framework, the zoning. Number two is the incentives. Do you have the right stack of incentives now to attract the kind of development you want to see? What do we need to do to add to that?

Number three is direct public investment, one of the strongest ways to get redevelopment to happen is to signal to the private sector that you are reinvesting in your own community. This is where the civic beautification pieces come in, and then finally, branding and marketing it's great that we have this plan with all these great graphics and the strategy, but how do we get that message out to the development community, the decision makers who actually would be interested in doing projects here in Highland?

Then we get pretty deep into the grain of implementation in terms of schedules of breaking it down between projects and new programs, and then, like, who does what? Who's responsible for doing what? Who's the lead responsibility? Who has secondary responsibility. So we put this on an implementation schedule, because I think a lot of where plans fall down is that they don't think hard enough about this. They deliver a great plan but there's not a lot of thought about and not often enough thought about. What time frames should these things have? How are they paid for? Who does this kind of work? What kind of support should you need to have to make it work?

In terms of what we see as some of the main products of our work, we would probably do a multi-day interactive planning workshop, a roundtable session, they call it, you know, design share, whatever you want to call it. Some of this work may be already happening with your comp plan, we need to understand that, we don't want to trip over each other, the different consultants. We would do a market survey to understand what the markets are for some of these sites.

Conceptual design ideas for key redevelopment sites. We'll talk about the number of those. Some gateway sign schematics, we'll do a model streetscape design up to 5 community meetings or presentations, and we'll give you, in the end, you know, our interest is not giving you a big 200-page plan that sits on a shelf or is used as a doorstop. It's really about giving you material and content that can be used to go into a developer solicitation, like an RFP, a request for proposals, or it can go be inserted into a grant proposal to the Indiana Department of Transportation. It can be used for any number of purposes, like go onto a special project website. So what we'll give you is something that's lean, but very graphic and very implementation-focused. It'll have a detailed implementation guide along with it.

We have a lot of knowledge and expertise from around the country, including work here in Indiana, which we can kind of roll into maybe in the end, if you're interested.

Commissioner Robertson asked what other projects has he done that would be similar to this ?

Mr. Flisram answered We were hired to do a quarter plan for Highway 30 in Valpo and again, this is, he wanted to say, like, this is, like, 12 years ago now. The community really embraced this plan, and they used it, the plan, big chunks of it, to go to INDOT for a grant to do a lot of roadway and streetscape improvements in that corridor. I think they leveraged about \$20 million of state funds to reconstruct the road, and to do all those streetscape elements, you might see bike path segments, you know, they did a lot of decorative light signals and that kind of thing in the Highway 30 corridor.

He was showing local ones, but we did the 421 corridor in Michigan City. This was also a number of years ago. This was a pretty detailed project. So this is the three redevelopment concepts for the Marquette Mall site. I don't know if you know this site or not, but it's a mall in the heart of Michigan City. It's after many years, finally got sold this path, just a few months ago. It got sold to a new investor group.

Hopefully they'll do something creative here. We think it's a great site. So we came up with 3 different alternative schemes and financing packages for all of them to show kind of a very, conservative redevelopment concept to almost a total scrape off and rebuild and there's a lot of excitement about this, but the project stalled for a number of years because you had an intransigent owner who didn't wasn't really motivated to do anything with it, or couldn't figure out what to do with it. So now that it's sold, I'm hopeful that you know, it gives some life, because I think it's a great site.

Those are two local ones that He's really proud of but there's others in the deck but I would pick those two, probably, just because they're close to you all. So this seems like a good way to springboard off of

our comp plan, and maybe some previous ideas to get some redevelopment projects actually across the finish line.

Next on the Agenda was the Fire department utilizing the building at 7950 Kennedy Ave and nothing will be done till the Commissioners hear back from Attorney Reed concerning the legal status and its current situation

The meeting was adjourned by Commissioner Robertson at 8:36 pm.

DULY PASSED AND RESOLVED by the Highland Redevelopment Commission, Highland, Lake County, Indiana, this 25th day of August 2025, having passed by a vote 5 in favor and 0 opposed.

Highland Redevelopment Commission



President

ATTEST:

Secretary


