

Downtown Revitalization Committee reorganizes

By Linda Wyeth

Members of the Downtown Revitalization Committee (DRC) met at city hall on Thursday, April 16, 2015, at 7:00 p.m. to reorganize and to plan activities for the next several months.

At their meeting on Thursday night, Linda Wyeth moved, with a second by Carol Devine, to accept the resignations of several DRC members who have been inactive for the past two years.

They also voted to recommend that the mayor and council approve seven people as voting members of the DRC. They are co-chairs Marcia DeLuca and Mary Lynn Kiviko, Carol Devine, Kelly Knight, Jill Schindler, Steve Ristola, and Linda Wyeth. Other, non-voting members include Drew Potocnik, Tim Swiggum, Jackie Reinke, Don Wyeth, Phil Greschner, June Roohr, Michelle Renderman, Julie Baker, Bob Schuh, Pam Ristola, Bill Benzschawel, and Kenny Truman. New member/volunteers are encouraged to attend board meetings and to help out with the activities of the DRC.

The DRC decided to allow vendors to bring and sell flea market items at the weekly Farmers Market, as well as "green growing stuff." Kelly Knight volunteered to be in charge of the Farmers Market the first few weeks it is open, helping direct vendors to set-up locations and parking. Mary Lynn Kiviko and Marcia DeLuca presented samples of two banner-style signs. Linda Wyeth moved and Kelly Knight seconded the motion, and the committee unanimously approved allowing them to spend up to \$100 to have the sign printed and set up for hanging on Saturday mornings when the market is open.

Linda Wyeth talked about a recent grant-writing workshop she attended in Eau Claire for Farmers Markets and Community Gardens. Although the workshop was interesting, it was for two specific Department of Agriculture grants, and did not include information about grants appropriate for Owen's efforts. She will continue to look for other grants that will work for Owen and to talk to other community gardeners about their gardens. In response to Marcia DeLuca's inquiry about whether the community garden will give first choice to residents, Linda noted that the city council did not take action to require or mandate that. "In fact," she said, "I think we need to think about expanding the garden, not restricting participation. We should be welcoming people from Withee, for example." Kelly Knight explained that she and Wyeth had been discussing setting aside a plot for a children's garden and getting kids involved.

Wyeth will contact people who have expressed interest in this year's garden and set up a garden committee to discuss the set-up and organization of the garden. "If we have 30 people who sign up, and we have 15 garden plots, then we'll have to talk about digging more plots," she said. One firm ground rule that has been in place for the community garden from the outset will remain in place, and gardeners will not be allowed to use pesticides or herbicides in their gardens. She also plans to visit the DeKalb (Illinois) Area Community Garden and talk to Dan Kenney, one of the chief organizers of that garden. They have been successful in establishing raised beds and in getting grants. Wyeth said she is

interested in having raised beds and elevated garden beds for senior citizens and handicapped gardeners. Another topic for discussion of the future of the garden, she said, is setting up permanent beds for growing crops such as berries and rhubarb. Don Wyeth felt we should also explore the possibility of setting up benches at the garden site.

Jill Schindler and Drew Potocnik have plans well underway for the Third Annual Car Show. Drew stated that they would like to get all approvals necessary from the Common Council and the fire department, such as for the popular burn-out contest, early in the process. We discussed having the car show set up in the same location as last year. Jill and Drew said they plan to have the sponsors set by mid-June or Father's Day so we can start serious advertising by then. Marcia DeLuca said she would welcome advertising and posters in her store windows, but said she would want to place them on the inside of the windows and not have people tape them to the outside. Don Wyeth said the video he made last year is still available. He will re-post information and a link to the video on the Owen-Withee FaceBook page. Jill said she is still looking for assorted car-related trinkets to put in the goody bags for exhibitors and show-goers.

The committee also discussed the Battle of the Bands scheduled for September 5, which will take the place of the Indian SummerFest event. Don Wyeth volunteered to contact high school band directors and student bands to recruit more bands. We talked about using the same agreement as last year, when each band signing up paid a \$50 deposit. If the band then did show up and perform, their deposit was refunded. However, if a band did not appear, they forfeited the deposit. Tim Swiggum said that the person who did the sound set-up last year will not be available this year, so we will need to make other arrangements for the sound. We also discussed creating or sponsoring one or more other events to pair with Battle of the Bands to bring more people to downtown Owen that day. Marcia DeLuca said last year's participants would like to have the judges for the Battle of the Bands easily identifiable and set up where people can see them.

Tim Swiggum also said that there is approximately \$5,000 set aside in the city budget for "celebrations." Carol Devine volunteered to take a proposal to the common council to allow the DRC to spend up to \$2,000 on seasonal banners to help dress up the main streets of the city.

Steve and Pam Ristola discussed their interest in doing something to preserve Owen's history. They have a particular interest in perhaps utilizing the old train depot as a historical museum. Steve will contact other people who share this interest, and Don Wyeth will check on NPR's StoryCorps project and see if it would be feasible to initiate a local version of StoryCorps.

Linda Wyeth made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 p.m., seconded by Steve Ristola.