

**MINUTES
CITY OF DEKALB
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
FEBRUARY 13, 2017**

The City Council of DeKalb, Illinois held a Committee of the Whole meeting on February 13, 2017 in the City Council Chambers of the DeKalb Municipal Building, 200 South Fourth Street, DeKalb, Illinois.

Mayor Rey called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

A. ROLL CALL

City Clerk Jennifer Jeep Johnson called the roll, and the following members of the City Council were present: Alderman David Jacobson, Alderman Michael Marquardt, Alderman Bob Snow, Alderman Kate Noreiko, Alderman Tony Faivre, and Mayor John Rey. Alderman Bill Finucane was absent.

Also present were: City Manager Anne Marie Gaura, Assistant City Manager Patty Hoppenstedt, City Attorney Dean Frieders, Finance Director Cathy Haley, Police Chief Gene Lowery, Fire Chief Eric Hicks, Community Development Director Jo Ellen Charlton, Human Resources Director Cris Randall, Economic Information Technology Director Marc Thorson, Development Planner Jason Michnick, Management Analyst Lauren Stott, Management Analyst Aaron Stevens, I&T Technician Jeff Birtell, and City Clerk Jennifer Jeep Johnson.

B. ITEMS ALSO ON THE REGULAR AGENDA

There were none.

C. CONSIDERATIONS

1. STEAM Learning Center Feasibility Study.

Assistant City Manager Hoppenstedt introduced the topic, and provided background information on the STEAM Learning Center and introduced RATIO Architects, Inc. team members Sarah Wood, Craig Smith, and Matt Rueff. She highlighted that the STEAM Learning Center aligned with the City's 2025 Strategic Plan.

Mr. Smith introduced himself, explaining that the project has been an exciting and collaborative process. He added that the project is imminently feasible, and an exciting way to make DeKalb's downtown stand out. He explained that it will become a destination for over 90 schools around Northern Illinois, which will serve as a catalyst for development within the City.

Ms. Wood provided a background on STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math. She explained how such programming can impact children, adults, and the community. She explained that the Center will have tools that aren't readily available at school or at home. Ms. Wood added that the vision for the Center is to serve as a community leader, provide hands on learning for all, and provide experiences beyond the classroom, and more.

Ms. Wood explained that a big part of the study included community engagement through multiple platforms, including stakeholder workshops, online outreach, social media, school districts, and many more.

Ms. Wood provided an overview of the criteria used to assess potential site selection for the Center. She then touched on the Design Concept, explaining that the process is meant to engage the community, and that it should be a reflection of the community it serves. She identified the most important components of the Center, including science labs, art studios, flex spaces, and many more.

Ms. Wood further explained that all of the buildings considered for the Center were located in the downtown area, each having unique history within DeKalb, and interesting components for the development of the Center.

Mr. Rueff explained that one of the first inquiries undertaken in the study was to make sure the facility was able to be self-sustaining over time. He explained that DeKalb is uniquely positioned in that it has components in place that allow for success of this kind of Center, including the successful and established P20 Center. He explained that the Center has a tremendous opportunity for success given DeKalb's location, and established programming via Northern Illinois University (NIU).

Mr. Rueff provided comparison to other models in order to show the likelihood for success of the program. He used the WonderLab in Bloomington, Indiana as a point of comparison. He highlighted financial scenarios, including not-for-profit, public/private partnership, and City ownership. Mr. Rueff also walked through the key financial assumptions, including a cap of City financial exposure at \$4 million, utilizing existing TIF funds, and no long term City commitment from the general fund.

Mr. Rueff also provided an overview of budget planning over the next 10 years, as well as the operating revenue, operating expenses, staffing projections, board members, and community members.

Ms. Wood reiterated the feasibility of the project, and provided an overview of next steps.

Economic Development Planner Michnick explained that the next step is to continue working with the partners, and determine what the proper format for the Center would be. He explained that over the next several months, they will identify the building and come before Council for next steps.

Alderwoman Noreiko expressed that she appreciates the creativity and energy behind this project. She asked RATIO to explain what enhancements could be made to the P20 program by adding the Center. Ms. Wood explained that while the P20 program has an extensive network and outreach, they are limited in their space and location, and that there isn't a draw from the community or the region that the Center would have.

Alderwoman Noreiko inquired as to the impact on surrounding businesses, with Ms. Wood explaining that the location would provide a strong connection within the downtown, which would benefit the whole area. However, a detailed analysis of each building and business has not yet been undertaken.

Alderman Marquardt explained that he thinks the Center could be a great thing, but really wants more detail on the cost.

Mr. Rueff explained they are very aware of the cost factor, and that while there is more exploration to occur, they believe the ability to raise the funds are there. He also explained that some money would come from TIF, and the rest of the funds would come from investment, thereby eliminating any ongoing commitment from the City.

Alderwoman Noreiko added that one of the strongest arguments in favor of investment from corporations is creating a pipeline to STEAM jobs. Assistant City Manager Hoppenstedt added that 60,000 kids currently go through the P20 Engagement Center.

Alderman Snow added there are national foundations that provide funding for this kind of project as well, with Mr. Rueff adding that some also have relationships with corporations.

Mayor Rey asked what Council needs to do in order to move to the next steps, with Assistant City Manager Hoppenstedt saying they will be checking in with the key stakeholders, and will be coming back before Council with their recommendations, as well as any costs associated with them.

Mayor Rey thanked everyone for the presentation.

D. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Will Heinisch expressed concerns over the feasibility and sustainability of the Center, including the time of City staff. He said the timing is not right, for either this or the Egyptian Theatre. He has concerns about what happens if the project fails. He feels the focus on the community should be on crime, taxes, and jobs. He feels that "build it and they will come" will not work.

Dewayne Brown feels that the Center is a worthwhile project, but the City doesn't have the funding at this time.

Alderman Jacobson wondered why numbers on new construction wasn't included.

City Manager Gaura added that the analysis wasn't done as the focus was in being downtown, and the vast number of available buildings. She added that staff can certainly provide that information if it is Council's wish.

Alderman Baker stated he thinks property could potentially be accrued for free and it should be examined.

Economic Development Planner Michnick added there are ways the City could accrue the buildings with little cost, or without removing them from the tax rolls.

City Manager Gaura added that the next step will include corporate sponsorship and partnership.

Mayor Rey stated that Council has some options for paths of further study. He added that the regional nature is something that needs to be embraced, and it is worth pursuing the next steps.

E. RECESS FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

There was nothing scheduled.

F. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION

Alderman Jacobson moved to adjourn; seconded by Alderman Marquardt.

VOTE

Motion carried on a 7-0 voice vote. Aye: Jacobson, Marquardt, Snow, Noreiko, Baker, Faivre, Rey. Mayor Rey declared the motion passed and concluded the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

JENNIFER JEEP JOHNSON, City Clerk

Approved by City Council: March 13, 2017.