VALPARAISO REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Regular Meeting Minutes
May 8, 2025

The regular meeting of the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission was called to order at 5:07 p.m. on Thursday, May 8, 2025, Vice President Barbara Domer presided.

Members present were: Barbara Domer, Bill Durnell, Trish Sarkisian and Diana Reed. Also present were Director of Development George Douglas, City Attorney Patrick Lyp, City Administrator Bill Oeding, Engineering Director Max Rehlander, Kyle Becich, Principal Portage County Career & Technical Education, Sandy Bodnar, Executive Director, Porter County Education Services, Dr. Nick Allison, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education Valparaiso Community Schools, Dr. Aaron Case, Superintendent, East Porter County Schools and members of the public. Rob Thorgren and Frank Dessuit were not in attendance.

ITEM #1- MINUTES (12:49):
Mr. Durnell stated Commission members met for the Executive session.

Motion: Mr. Durnell moved to approve the May 8, 2025, executive meeting minutes. Ms. Sarkisian seconded. A voice vote was unanimously carried.

Mr. Durnell reported copies of April 10, 2025, regular meeting minutes were distributed to members for their review prior to the meeting. After reviewing the minutes, all seemed in order.

Motion: Mr. Durnell moved to approve the April 10, 2025, meeting minutes. Ms. Sarkisian seconded. A voice vote was unanimously carried.

ITEM #2 CLAIMS REGISTER AND FINANCIAL REPORT (14:22):
Mr. Douglas reported that the Commission was sent the May 2025 Claims Registers and April Financial Report prior to the meeting. Mr. Douglas highlighted a few key claims and noteworthy items in the Claims Register and Financial Report.

Discussion from Commission members ensued. Questions and items of discussion included:

- A clarification was made regarding the Sports Park bond lease is a historical name, there will not be a sports park and the funds are retained by the city, not the commission.
- When will the report from MKSK be completed?
- What is included in the debt management payment to Baker Tilly?
- A clarification was made about the yearly stipend for the 3 Commission members appointed by the mayor.

City staff answered and addressed questions and discussion items.

Motion: Ms. Sarkisian motioned to approve the May Claims Register and the April Financial report. Ms. Reed seconded the motion. A voice vote was unanimously carried.

<u>ITEM #3 SCHOOL CHALLENGE GRANTS</u>: (21:03)
Mr. Douglas welcomed presentations for this year's School Challenge Grant applications, including submissions from Porter County Career and Technical Education and Porter County Educational Services (SELF) School for the first time, Valparaiso Community Schools and East Porter County School Corporation. Each organization prepared strong applications outlining their intended use of funds. The purpose of the presentation is to allow the Commission to review the proposals, ask questions, and consider approval to move the process forward.

Mr. Becich, Principal of the Porter County Career Center, presented a proposal to expand and update the radio and television classroom. The program has experienced significant growth, offering students valuable real-world experience through partnerships with organizations such as Jed TV, Valparaiso University, and ESPN. Students have been involved in live streaming local sports events, including Valparaiso football, and have had opportunities to visit professional broadcasting control rooms. The core of the grant request is to address outdated equipment and a lack of sufficient workstations in the classroom. Currently, students often share computers; sometimes two to three per device; which limits their hands-on time with projects and slows progress on assignments. The proposed technology upgrade would ensure each student has their own dedicated workstation, enhancing their ability to collaborate, create, and produce media content at a professional level. This investment would better prepare students for careers in broadcasting, production, and digital media by giving them more equitable access to tools and learning time.

Mr. Becich also highlighted the growth and success of the Porter County Career Center's Fire Science program. The course has gained substantial interest among students, bolstered by active engagement on social media and hands-on experiences like "Burn Day," where students train in full gear at the MAAC Foundation's controlled burn facility. These real-world training opportunities have been highly visible and have contributed to increased enrollment. Currently, the program boasts a 90% pass rate among participants, demonstrating both student commitment and instructional quality. To support this continued growth and meet the increasing demand, the Career Center is requesting funds for additional fire safety equipment. The investment in equipment is essential to scale the program and ensure students are fully equipped for training in fire service careers.

Discussion from Commission members ensued. Questions and items of discussion included:

- How many classrooms are there for the radio classes?
- Whether graduates in the program go directly into the field or go on to college?
- What type of computers are currently used?
- How many large screens will be purchased?

<u>Motion</u>: Ms. Sarkisian moved to approve the Porter County Career Center's Challenge Grant application in the amount of $50,000. Ms. Reed seconded. A voice vote was unanimously carried.

Ms. Bodner, Executive Director of Porter County Education Services, presented key elements of this year's Redevelopment Commission grant application, which supports technology and sensory needs for students served through their specialized programs. PCES currently serves 185 students, with 99 coming from Valparaiso and East Porter County.

The proposal includes funding for 24 Chromebooks for diploma-bound students at the South School facility, supporting their growth in academic and life skills programs. These devices have become essential tools, especially since COVID, not only for student learning but also for increasing family engagement through virtual conferences. Each Chromebook would come with protective accessories to extend their durability.

Additionally, the request includes laptops to pair with existing interactive whiteboards in the 15 classrooms. These dedicated laptops would free up teacher devices currently being used for IEPs and administrative work. Whiteboards have significantly increased student engagement across academic and music lessons, and additional units are requested for shared spaces such as the library, sensory room, art room, CTE classroom, and boardroom. These would enable more group learning opportunities and instructional flexibility.

Lastly, the proposal requests sensory egg chairs for five classrooms serving students with autism. These calming, sound-dampening chairs allow students to manage sensory needs while remaining in the classroom and engaged in instruction. The goal is to proactively support students without removing them from the learning environment.

Discussion from Commission members ensued. Questions and items of discussion included:

- Does the school currently have interactive whiteboards in the classrooms?

City staff answered and addressed questions and discussion items.

Motion: Ms. Reed moved to approve the Porter County Education Services Challenge Grant application in the amount of $50,000. Mr. Durnell seconded. A voice vote was unanimously carried.

Mr. Allison, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education at Valparaiso Community Schools, presented key elements of this year's Redevelopment Commission grant application, which supports both elementary and secondary initiatives. He noted that while in-person learning remains a top priority, the grant continues to play a critical role in sustaining the district's one-to-one device program. This initiative not only ensures students have access to technology but also provides essential connectivity through Wi-Fi hotspots, bus Wi-Fi, and backpack routers; resources that have significantly enhanced educational equity and continuity, especially during and following the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the elementary level, the grant seeks funding to expand 3D printing within STEM programs at all eight elementary schools. This expansion will allow students to move from basic printing to more complex design and problem-solving experiences, supporting hands-on, project-based learning at an early age.

At the high school level, funding is requested to update MacBooks in the art department. These devices are vital for digital art production, particularly within AP and IB programs, and are also used in conjunction with the district-wide Adobe Creative Suite license to support student creators across disciplines. Additionally, the grant includes support for the continued use of the Anatomage Table in the biomedical science program.

Mr. Allison shared a compelling student success story to highlight the real-world impact of these resources. A student who transferred into the district as a freshman with a 1.8 GPA engaged deeply with the biomedical science track—especially the hands-on experiences offered through the Anatomage Table—and has since raised her GPA to a 3.8. She is now graduating with a full scholarship to pursue forensic science in college. Her journey exemplifies the life-changing opportunities this grant helps make possible.

Discussion from Commission members ensued. Questions and items of discussion included:

- What features the anatomage table has?
- What happens to the waste from the 3-D printers?

City staff answered and addressed questions and discussion items.

Motion: Ms. Reed moved to approve the Valparaiso Community Schools Challenge Grant application in the amount of $441,278.17. Mr. Durnell seconded. A voice vote was unanimously carried.

Dr. Case, Superintendent for East Porter County Schools reported East Porter County has a tradition of using Redevelopment Commission grant funds to help offset the cost of Chromebooks. This year's request includes support for our 5th and 9th grade students. In addition, the school district will be launching a new Advanced Manufacturing course. Levels 100, 101, and 102. The requested funding will be used to purchase a Skill Boss hydraulics unit, which is a compact, hands-on training system that mimics what students would see in real-world manufacturing settings. Mr. Lichtenberger, the Industrial Tech teacher, is leading the charge. He's passionate, already enrolled in summer training, and working with local companies to create strong student-industry connections. Dr. Case stated this is just phase one, but it's an important step in preparing the students for success in the workforce.

Discussion from Commission members ensued. Questions and items of discussion included:

- Whether the 101 level classes are college level.
- A clarification was made about the funding amounts for each of the grant applications.

City staff answered and addressed questions and discussion items.

Motion: Mr. Durnell motioned to approve East Porter County Schools Challenge Grant application in the amount of $158,271.82 Ms. Reed seconded the motion. A voice vote was unanimously carried.

ITEM #4 REQUEST FOR PAVING FUNDS AND USE OF PARCEL FOR STORMWATER: (52:17)

Mr. Rehlander introduced Daniela Martins, a deputy engineer who joined the team in January. Ms. Martins has been contributing significantly to the paving improvement projects and assisted in preparing the map presented during the meeting. Ms. Martins distributed a map outlining planned improvements. City staff are requesting funds to pave Bush Street from Napoleon Street East to Calumet. Also, request was made to use a 20' x 40' green space area (currently without trees) for ponding, located between Lafayette Street and Washington Street on the north side of the road.

Discussion from Commission members ensued. Questions and items of discussion included:

- What is being proposed for the area with ponding water?
- Will that area become a rain garden?
- Is there a curb present at the location?
- How will stormwater pass through the curb?
- What type of drainage structure will be used?
- Will pedestrians still be able to walk on the north side of the street?
- Clarification was requested regarding the scope of paving on Bush Street; does the request include the stretch from Washington to Calumet, or just from Washington to Napoleon?
- Will the Washington to Calumet portion of Bush Street be funded through other local sources, and what is the estimated cost for this segment?
- Was the road assessed and if so, what was the Paser rating?
- Since Lafayette and Washington are being addressed this year, can you provide details on the planned work for those streets? Additionally, will the Bush Street project occur around the same time, or on a separate timeline?
- Is the section of Washington north of the railroad tracks excluded from the project because it is concrete?

City staff answered and addressed the questions and discussion the items.

Motion: Ms. Reed motioned to approve the Parking Lot User Agreement. Mr. Durnell seconded the motion. A voice vote was unanimously carried.

ITEM #6 STAFF REPORT – RAZING STRUCTURES AT 357 & 359 LINCOLNWAY AND 360 INDIANA AVE: (62:02)

The commission now owns the vacant properties at 357 Lincoln Way, 359 Lincoln Way, and 360 Indiana. Due to public safety concerns, city staff have coordinated with Building Commissioner Vicki Thrasher and Ken Corneil from the Project Management Office to prepare demolition plans. The project is expected to go out to bid pending Board of Works approval, with bid opening scheduled for May 23.

Discussion from Commission members ensued. Questions and items of discussion included:

- Can you explain the approval process for the demolition project, specifically why it is coming to the Redevelopment Commission first?
- Where will the funding for the demolition project come from?
- Will that area become a rain garden?
- Is there a curb present at the location?
- How will stormwater pass through the curb?

City staff answered and addressed the questions and discussion the items.

ITEM #7 LANDSCAPING PROPOSAL RATIFICATION: (64:55)

The commission reviewed two lawn maintenance proposals: one from K & D for $15,900 and another from Lake Shore Landscaping for $14,614.99. Lake Shore Landscaping was selected as the winning bidder and has already begun work. The commission is now ratifying the lawn maintenance agreement with Lake Shore Landscaping for services at the TOD.

Discussion from Commission members ensued. Questions and items of discussion included:

- Is this the same area that has been landscaped in the past?
- It was noted that the approved price with Lake Shore Landscaping is consistent with last year's pricing.

City staff answered and addressed the question and discussion item.

Motion: Mr. Durnell motioned to ratify the Landscaping Proposal. Ms. Reed seconded the motion. A voice vote was unanimously carried.

ITEM #8 OTHER BUSINESS: (67:14)

A contract with FE Moran for fire equipment maintenance at the Regal Beloit building was presented. Ken Corneil oversees the building and coordinated the service. Although there was consideration to decommission the fire sprinkler system, it was decided to keep it operational due to active remediation and building occupancy. FE Moran, with a history of maintaining the equipment, provided a quote of approximately $6,803 for a one-year service agreement covering quarterly inspections and necessary maintenance. Approval of the contract was requested.

Discussion from Commission members included:

- Whether this contract is just for the sprinkler system.

City staff answered and addressed the question and discussion item.

Motion: Ms. Sarkisian motioned to approve the 1-year agreement with FE Moran. Ms. Reed seconded the motion. A voice vote was unanimously carried.

Regarding the recently approved farm lease, a beaver dam issue on the creek running through the property is causing flooding and impacting planting efforts. The farmer, Matt Goetz, raised concerns, prompting coordination with engineering and stormwater officials. A licensed trapper has been identified to remove the beavers at a cost of approximately $100 per animal. Once the beavers are removed, the dams can be cleared. Efforts will be coordinated with Public Works or the farmer, and an agreement will be brought forward once a proposal is finalized.

Discussion from Commission members included:

- Was the beaver there last year?
- Would the beaver dam flooding issue be a concern if the property were not farmland?

City staff answered and addressed the question and discussion item.

An update was provided on the West Street Corridor Plan. Phase one, the initial assessment and opportunity analysis, has been completed by consultants MKSK. Phase two, the final phase, is expected to take six to eight months and will include multiple stakeholder and public engagement opportunities. Completion is anticipated in the fall.

Discussion from Commission members included:

- Have the consultants been updated on the lift station location?

An update was given on future development planning with no action needed. Regarding the TIF district, potential properties for inclusion, not removal, have been identified. A detailed report will be presented at the next meeting to begin the public review process.

Discussion from Commission members included:

- Will City Council be involved in the process?

ITEM #9 PUBLIC COMMENT: (75:11)
Councilman Cotton expressed appreciation for the board's consideration of the Porter County Educational Facilities. He raised concerns about the condition of Bush Street from Calumet to Washington and questioned whether this segment is included in the current paving plan. He also requested further discussion on the pollution mitigation and navigability aspects of the proposed five-point roundabout at the intersection. He questioned whether the proposed roundabout is necessary for pollution mitigation and requested an analysis comparing it to alternative options, such as widening the existing four-way intersection to maintain pedestrian access.

ITEM #10 ADJOURNMENT: (82:35)
Staff said they had no further items for the Commission's consideration. Ms. Reed motioned to adjourn the meeting with Mr. Durnell seconding. A voice vote was unanimously carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:22 p.m.

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Bill Durnell, Secretary