



City of St. Johns, Michigan City Commission Newsletter Summer 2021



First Congregational Church: When the members of the First Congregational Church put their church building and parking lot up for sale, the City of St. Johns saw several unique opportunities for the building and decided to make an offer. The purchase offer is contingent upon a 75-day evaluation period during which the city will do its due diligence in determining the viability of converting the building for other purposes and have an independent inspection conducted. Saving an historical structure while finding a practical location for City Hall was utmost in the mind of the city commissioners. The building was built in 1899 and has been used as a church ever since. The commission decided that instead of watching the historical building be purchased and possibly torn down, they would look at options of moving city hall to that location plus making room for other community uses. It was felt that considering all options made sense not only for the city, but for the community as a whole. An architectural firm named Studio Intrigue was hired to do both a space needs study for the city and to also look at the practicality of converting the church into municipal and public uses. Should the city decide not to proceed with the purchase, it is hoped that the information gathered by the architect could be useful to another buyer whose desire is to save and repurpose this historical structure that is so much a part of the downtown experience. The city commission plans to make a final decision on the church purchase by the end of the Summer after soliciting public input on this issue.



Downtown Development Authority: The City of St. Johns is fortunate to have two groups working together for the betterment of the downtown. These two organizations are the Principal Shopping District (PSD) and the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The PSD receives its funding from annual special assessments paid by the businesses within the district while the DDA receives its funding from tax increment financing, also known as a TIFA. With a TIFA, the downtown district “captures” a portion of the property taxes to be used exclusively for the downtown district. The local DDA had a TIFA from 2000 until 2015. Those monies were used for a variety of purposes including paying for the current streetscape features such as benches, trash receptacles, planters, light poles and street trees. This year the city commission is looking to renew the tax increment financing plan and expand the district to include some adjoining properties where redevelopment could occur. Any new development within the district would increase revenues to the district and provide more improvements for the downtown. A TIFA does not increase a property owner’s annual property taxes, it just allows a portion of those taxes to be used exclusively within the district. The new district boundaries and TIFA plan should be in place by the Fall of this year.

Wilson Center: The Wilson Center which was for many years part of the St. Johns School District, was recently sold to a developer from Lansing. The new private owner, known as Dymaxion Development, plans to redevelop the building to be mixed use, but primarily multi unit housing. The new facility will also be added to the tax rolls. The developer has pledged to maintain the architectural integrity of the building while modernizing the interior for quality housing opportunities with many common areas for residents to enjoy. The developer has also shown interest in maintaining the existing arrangements with the City of St. Johns and Arts Council whereby the gymnasium, auditorium and other areas of the building can still be used as a hub for cultural, recreational, and leisure time activities. The city anticipates that a redevelopment plan will be submitted for the site by the developer in the next few months with reconstruction beginning as early as 2022. The redevelopment of the Wilson Center saves this historic building for high quality housing and will generate local construction jobs and boost our local economy.