

Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA)
Meeting Minutes March 12, 2024
(DRAFT)

3/12/2024 - Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

Members Present: Chair Robin Gibson, Mayor Jack Hilligoss, Keith Thompson, Danny Krueger, Daniel Williams, Keith Thompson

Staff Members Present: James Slaton, Executive Director; Jennifer Nanek, City Clerk; Albert C Galloway, Jr., City Attorney

Chair Robin Gibson called the meeting to order at approximately 2:00 p.m.

2. COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Clem Johnson, resident and business owner, said that he uses BizLinc as a mailbox. He said that there needs to be more community education. He offered to help the City and be an advocate for the City.

Dai Belle, representing the Youth Entrepreneur Program, said she is working with BizLinc to learn about fundraising. She shared about her organization and goals.

Rayon Vernon, veteran and business owner, spoke on BizLinc and explained that they are all learning from each other. It is a good thing.

3. Minutes - February 13, 2024

Commissioner Thompson made a motion to approve the minutes of February 13, 2024. Mayor Hilligoss seconded the motion.

by voice vote:

ALL "YES"

Motion approved 5-0.

4. Presentation - BizLINC Business Incubator

Frank Cornier and Derrick Blue from BizLinc gave a presentation of their accomplishments over the past two years.

Mr. Blue said there is great potential in Lake Wales. First the pieces need to be put together. The money leaves the community as fast as it comes in. He discussed the importance of economic prosperity.

Mr. Cornier reviewed the four areas that their incubator works on: an Incubator facility, Small Contractor and Handy Man Program, Youth and Future Entrepreneur Program and Outreach and Signature Community events.

Mr. Blue said he is glad that they are being audited because it will validate what they are doing. They monitor their results by quarter. In 2022 they made the investment to purchase a building. It is a home for toastmasters, Lunch and Learns, and other training workshops. They try to connect new business owners

with mentors. They measure jobs created which are over 50. They help business owners develop their business models and elevator pitch. There have been 36 training sessions on a variety of topics. This is new to the City and the northwest community. They have provided over 6000 technical assistance hours. They help businesses get prepared to apply for financing. They train businesses to use QuickBooks or an equivalent. They have helped develop 21 websites.

Mr. Blue said they are helping those with viable ideas to start their businesses. They measure success by who leaves rather than who stays. They are updating the website to have more resources for new businesses and information about their partnerships. They will post reports to the website for citizens to review. The site will highlight various BizLinc members. There is an upcoming expo in April that will be on the website. There are 7 offices at BizLinc now.

Mr. Cornier shared their goals for 2024. There will be some community events and they will try to secure a vocational training facility and offer testing for industry certifications. They have a podcast studio. Podcasts are a great way to get information out there. Mr. Blue said that they are trying to help handy-men type businesses to build up their business. He shared some examples of businesses they have worked with and some successes. They want them to get some certifications. Mr. Cornier said the program to help handymen was not intended but arose out of the need in the community for more construction services. They use some of their businesses in house and try to promote them to the larger community. They shared slides of upcoming training events. They are looking to host a music festival this summer.

Mr. Cornier talked about working with organizations to help retrofit older houses in the neighborhood and addressing the growing construction market. He thanked the CRA for their investment in this neighborhood. Mr. Blue thanked the board for the opportunity. There are great things happening in Lake Wales and they are glad to be a part of it.

Commissioner Krueger said he looked forward to the music festival.

Commissioner Thompson asked about ideas to bring back brick and mortar businesses to the northwest area. There may need to be some creative financing. He asked Mr. Blue and Mr. Cornier to find and recommend some possible businesses. Mr. Cornier said there are opportunities in the northwest area and they will look for ways to bring investment in. He hopes some of their businesses will move out, into other buildings and invest in the community. Commissioner Thompson said he hopes to bring in local business owners to keep the money in the community.

Mayor Hilligoss asked to confirm that they had 28-30 clients and 50 jobs have been created. Mr. Blue confirm these.

Chair Robin Gibson asked if their trainees become graduates or certified. If we have a list of qualified owner operated businesses then maybe the City can help identify those to the public. The citizens can then use those businesses. Mr. Blue reviewed their process to incubate businesses. The process can be 18-42 months. He reviewed the different benchmarks for businesses to reach for them to graduate. In 2025 they hope to graduate their first group. They can review this process in more detail at their next presentation.

Mr. Cornier said the City probably maintains a list of minority and women owned businesses for certain grants. Hopefully some of their businesses can get on this list.

5. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

James Slaton, Executive Director, reported that Whadda Wings have their building permit in for review.

Mr. Slaton said they had a pre-bid meeting with possible contractors for the sidewalks in the Northwest area. Representatives from 13 companies attended. The bid opening is April 1st.

6. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 3:11 p.m.

Chair/Vice-Chair

ATTEST:

City Clerk/Deputy City Clerk