

From the Mayor...

September 2, 2016

A few weeks ago, our community got the disappointing news that we were not chosen to be the 2016 Indiana Stellar Community designee. I thought taking a few weeks "off" would be a good thing. It becomes easy to react emotionally when disappointment is fresh. It's now time to look forward and realize the tremendous positives that came from the Stellar process.

One of the most beneficial outcomes has been the depth to which we engaged the community through this process. The sheer volume of collaborators working towards the designation included neighbors, employees, students, volunteers, organizations, businesses, public boards, foundations, industry, and many others. The community was "all in". It showed during the process with volunteer support, in-kind support, financial support, and most important, the community pride I saw and heard at every mention of 'Stellar'.

The level of community involvement became even more noticeable when the decision was delivered. The positive, encouraging comments vastly overshadowed the mentions of disappointment. It reinforced the qualities that made us a Stellar Finalist: forward thinking, community focus, and planning with purpose for the betterment of everyone. As Tom Hanks so famously said, "There's no crying in baseball!" In fact, "Let's play two!" (-Ernie Banks).

Our post-designation plans have not changed. We are continuing with our Market Street improvements and the Warsaw/Winona Lake Stellar Connection. The Winona Avenue roundabout is under consideration for state funding in the current competitive "non-Stellar" grant cycle. We have also applied for competitive state grants to fund the park projects described in our Stellar application. While access to Stellar funds would have simplified the process, our projects have not changed.

Our Market Street reconstruction continues and is slated to go to construction late next year or spring of 2018. The Little Crow Lofts are currently being engineered and construction will begin in 2017.

In addition to those current projects, many ideas continue to evolve with the Gatke site and the Maker Space. Several potential partners have come forward with even more sustainable ideas to develop the property.

Interest in the maker space has become more apparent and many potential collaborators have come forward with support. Maker space special interest groups need to evolve and consolidate to give more definition to the development of a physical space.

In a few weeks, our core committee will meet with the State Stellar Committee to review our application and their final decision. Our site visit presentation and written application (Strategic Investment Plan) were both the result of years of

intense community focused planning, deep community engagement, and four months of exhaustive preparation. We eagerly anticipate their comments.

What we have come to realize is how beneficial the process was. There is no doubt that we are in better position to improve the quality of our community now than had we not gone through the process.

Will we try again? Let's let the committee tell us a little more about what they are looking for before we decide. In the meantime, we'll keep swinging for the fences.