

## Words of Wisdom from the Florida Redevelopment Association

First, please allow me to correct a date I provided in the last column. The City-sponsored workshop to discuss the Redevelopment Plan Revision will be Thursday, September 13<sup>th</sup> at 5 PM at the City Commission Chambers. The PSJRA regular board meeting will be held at the same location, immediately following the workshop. We hope you will attend.

On August 30, we had an informative workshop, sponsored by the PSJRA, featuring the Florida Redevelopment Association executive director, Carol Westmoreland, and the Small Cities' Initiative chair, Marilyn Larson. The City Commissioners were all in attendance along with many residents and business owners.

Even the fundamentals of a redevelopment agency are complex, and it easy to confuse terminology and processes. As Carol Westmoreland stated, "Education is tough; it is a complex area." Carol and Marilyn brought us education as well as trends in redevelopment. With decades of combined experience, they assist the state's 180 Community Redevelopment Agencies (CRA) in all imaginable aspects.

CRA's are created by local governments. As a dependent special district, a CRA is "a legal entity, separate, distinct, and independent from the governing body of the county or municipality." FS 163.257(1)(b) We are often asked if Port St. Joe can have more than one CRA. According to Marilyn, "You can have multiple districts, but you can only have one board."

Over the past year, we have discussed eminent domain in relation to redevelopment agencies. Marilyn addressed this issue as follows: "The legislature has changed eminent domain. Local governments can use eminent domain for streets, roads, but you can't use it for acquiring property to turn around and then sell in the redevelopment area. So, eminent domain exists; it just no longer applies in a redevelopment area. It is a tool for local governments that can be used for roads; it can be used for public improvements. It cannot be used for redevelopment. That has changed."

Carol and Marilyn offered a favorable review of our redevelopment plan revision. The plan is an opportunity to engage the community; to get them involved and to get their input and support for goals. The board then becomes in charge of moving it forward. Community involvement and support continues to be an important part of the process throughout the term of the CRA. According to Carol, there is "just so much money and lots of desires." Goals are set by the plan, and priorities will change over time. According to Westmoreland, the plan is not set in stone "should be flexible enough that it allows you to move forward to meet the demands because nothing is ever static."

One function of a CRA is to "Make the area more attractive for development to occur." According to Carol, the #1 question asked is, "What can we spend the money on?" She responds, "The answer is not 'what'...always remember 'where'...is it in the plan and is it in the district?" Importantly, what do CRAs not fund? CRAs cannot fund projects that have appeared in the city's capital improvements budget within the previous three years because, "This is not a funding mechanism to pick up the kinds of projects that local government should be doing anyway." In addition, CRA's do not fund general government operating expenses.

Carol and Marilyn advised us to remember to "Pat yourselves on the back and celebrate." They encourage us that the future is bright, to measure our successes, to cooperate instead of confront, and to dialog and not monolog. That sounds good to us! And again, we thank you for your ongoing support and involvement.