Organization is the key to a successful downtown revitalization program. A strong, viable organization provides the stability to build and maintain a long-term effort. Developing a management program that is well-structured, well-funded and committed to the future is the only way to make revitalization last. There are several possible funding mechanisms that can assist in supporting the redevelopment effort. This section outlines some of the more prominent programs. Funding for public projects is a dynamic process that needs a systematic approach to ensure every opportunity is evaluated. LaBelle has done a good job seeking funding of important projects and this effort should continue.

**Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)**

The Community Development Block Grant program is a federally funded grant program designed to help communities provide decent housing and suitable living environments by expanding economic opportunities. While rehabilitation of housing has been the largest use for CDBG funds, the program is also an important catalyst for economic development activities. This program is targeted primarily for low and moderate income persons.

Through this federal program, the government has established the State Administered CDBG, which allows each state to administer CDBG funds to rural cities and towns of less than 50,000 people and rural counties of less than 200,000 people. The Florida legislature decides how these funds will be allocated, and the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) makes all of the grant decisions. Currently, the legislature has allocated funding as follows:

- 20% Housing
- 40% Neighborhood Revitalization
- 10% Commercial Revitalization
- 30% Economic Development

Local governments have the responsibility to consider local needs, prepare grant applications and carry out the funded community activities. These funds can be used for projects such as acquisition of property for public purpose, construction or reconstruction of infrastructure, planning activities, and assistance to nonprofit or for profit entities that are carrying out redevelopment activities. The primary criteria for projects under this funding mechanism is that they must benefit low to moderate income individuals, prevent or eliminate slums, blight or deteriorating conditions, or meet other urgent community development needs. LaBelle has taken advantage of this program and should continue to do so in the future.
Front Porch Florida Initiative

The Front Porch Florida Initiative was created to assist in the revitalization of underserved communities, where residents are dedicated to making their community a better place to live. This program is managed through the Office of Urban Opportunity within the Florida Department of Community Affairs and provides education and technical assistance to implement projects that will make long-term changes to a community. This program provides grant opportunities through the “Small Matching” Historic Preservation Grant. This grant program assists in the identification, excavation, protection and rehabilitation of historic and archaeological sites with an emphasis on encouraging historic preservation in smaller cities. These grants are issued through the Florida Main Street Program.

The maximum grant amount is $50,000, however most grant awards range from $5,000 to $25,000. As an Area of Rural Economic Concern, the City of LaBelle is eligible to receive a complete waiver of the match requirements.

It is our understanding that at this time, there is no funding available through this program. However, it is important to be aware of the program as funding may become available again in the future.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection administers grants to local governments through the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP) and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). These are competitive programs which provide grants for acquisition or development of land for public outdoor recreation. All county governments and municipalities in Florida with the legal responsibility to provide for public outdoor recreational sites and facilities are eligible for this grant program.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The City of LaBelle has been awarded a grant from the FWC for a Florida Boating Improvement Program (FBIP) for the Barron Park Warf Project. Grant opportunities related to the waterfront should continue to be pursued.

Florida Enterprise Zone

An Enterprise Zone is a specific geographic area that is targeted for economic revitalization. These zones encourage investment by offering tax advantages and incentives to businesses that are located, or are considering locating, within the boundaries of an Enterprise Zone. The Florida Governor’s Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development is the administrator of this program. The Enterprise Zone Agency will assign a local coordinator that maintains the daily operation of the zone.

Enterprise Zones are designed to accommodate both rural and urban areas. Because the types of businesses that might be attracted and retained in rural areas are different than in urban areas, Rural Enterprise Zones are given different tax credits through various incentives.

As a municipality located in a county with a population less than 75,000 and a designation as a Rural Area of Economic Concern, the City of LaBelle would be considered a Rural Enterprise Zone.

Enterprise Zone programs operate at both the state and federal levels, with each state and the federal government having its own set of

The City of LaBelle would be considered a Rural Enterprise Zone.
incentives to offer. The program provides funding to the Zone for a period of up to ten years.

**Small Business Administration/ Florida Heartland Regional Economic Development Initiative (FHREDI)**

The Florida Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative functions under the umbrella of an Enterprise Zone. This program offers the following assistance:

- Customized work force training
- Demographic and market analysis
- Infrastructure funding
- Financial and tax abatement programs
- Regional coordination for relocation

The Heartland program for Hendry County and municipalities therein is hosted by the University of South Florida Small Business Development Center. This agency provides free counseling and business training seminars for current and potential entrepreneurs.

Below are some examples of incentives that are available for communities in a Rural Enterprise Zone:

- Jobs Tax Credit (Sales Tax) – allow a business to take a sales and use tax credit for 30-45 percent of wages paid to new employees who live within a rural county.

- Jobs Tax Credit (Corporate Income Tax) – allows a business to take a corporate income tax credit for 15-20 percent of wages paid to new employees who reside within an Enterprise Zone.

- Building Materials Sales Tax Refund – available for taxes paid on the purchase of building materials used to rehabilitate property within an Enterprise Zone.

- Property Tax Credit – New or expanded businesses within an Enterprise Zone are allowed a credit against Florida income tax equal to 96% of ad valorem taxes paid on such property.

**National Trust Main Street Program**

The Main Street Program is based on a four-step strategy that is a combined approach of design, economic restructuring, promotion and organization to ensure that all of the redevelopment area needs are addressed. This approach is incremental – it is not designed to produce immediate change, but rather gradual, planned change, that takes into consideration all aspects of a successful redevelopment effort. Long-term dedication by the community is critical to the success of this program. In order to be eligible for the Main Street Program, a full-time staff person to oversee the redevelopment efforts is required.

Through the National Trust Preservation Fund, funding is available to assist with the restoration of historic buildings and homes. The preservation funds provide two types of assistance, matching funds and intervention funds. The matching funds are awarded annually in three competitive grant rounds and may be used to obtain professional assistance in disciplines such as architecture, engineering, fund raising and organizational development. The intervention funds are awarded to non-profit or public agencies in emergency situations. Each year, more than 200 grants are issued totaling more than $650,000. Grants range from $500 to $5,000.
Special Assessment Districts (SAD)
A Special Assessment District is a specific geographic area that can be designated for government to assess a special charge to assist with certain public projects. A Special Assessment can only be levied against parcels of real estate that have been identified as having received direct benefit from the public project. Typical public improvements associated with Special Assessment Districts are street lighting, sidewalk construction, road paving and infrastructure such as sanitary sewer, water mains and storm drains. The SAD can be established by resolution passed by the local government or it may be initiated at the request of certain property owners that would be included in the district.

The distribution of project costs can be accomplished by two methods; the Unit Cost Method and the Front Foot Method.

The Unit Cost Method distributes the assessment of the project cost equally between each property within the SAD. With the Front Foot Method, the assessment per property is determined by the amount of road frontage or side yard exposure that a property has along a right-of-way.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
The Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a method to pay for redevelopment of a slum or blighted area through increased ad valorem tax revenue resulting from that redevelopment. The dollar value of all real property within the redevelopment area is determined as a fixed rate and is then “frozen”. The taxing authority continues to receive property tax based on the frozen value, however as property value increases, the additional revenues, above and beyond the frozen rate are deposited into a CRA trust fund and are dedicated to the redevelopment area. These funds can be used immediately or can be saved for a particular project, or they can be bonded to maximize the funds that are available.

The Florida Redevelopment Act allows Community Redevelopment Agencies to use TIF. In this sense, the property tax revenue goes to the local government and is then appropriated to the trust fund of the CRA. This program does not involve any state participation or oversight.

A redevelopment area must be identified for application of the TIF. A CRA Redevelopment Plan is required that demonstrates linkages to the local Comprehensive Plan.

Revenue Bonds
Revenue bonds are a special type of municipal bond. They are distinguished from a general obligation bond in that repayment of the bond can only come from the revenues generated by a specific revenue-generated entity that is associated with the purpose of the bonds. For example, construction of a sewer plant could be financed by revenue bonds which would then be repaid by the revenue the plant generates by its usage. These types of bonds are considered one of the most secure types of municipal bonds.

Community Donations
The City should seek community donations such as what is being done with the Veterans Memorial Park. Establishing a Community Foundation would provide the framework to seek community donations.

Public/Private Partnerships (P3’s)
Public-private partnerships refer to contractual agreements formed between a public agency and private sector entity that allow for greater private sector participation in the planning and implementation of public projects. Through this agreement, the skills and assets of each sector (public and private)
are shared in delivering a service or facility for the use of the general public. In addition to the sharing of resources, each party shares in the risks and rewards potential in the delivery of the service and/or facility.

Some of the primary reasons that public agencies enter into these partnerships are:

- Public/private partnerships enable faster implementation of projects by increasing the ways of procuring services;
- The private sector can provide specialized management that may not be available within the public sector;
- The private sector offers new technology and expertise in accessing various financial resources; and
- The partnership encourages positive public/private relationships and can be used to spearhead a redevelopment effort.

It must be emphasized that a comprehensive redevelopment program cannot be undertaken without managerial and administrative assistance. Additional professional assistance may be required from time to time in the areas of promotions, special events, advertising and long-range planning. The costs associated with administrative or support staff can be partially subsidized by various State and Federal employment and job training grants.

The Downtown Redevelopment Plan should be implemented through a mix of applications that include establishment of downtown goals, objectives, policies and design guidelines, public strategies, private incentives and capital improvements. The public strategies are the actions that will be taken to implement the goals, objectives and policies of the Plan.

The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) establishes the major improvements that are needed in the redevelopment area and establishes potential funding sources, estimated costs and the fiscal year in which construction might commence. The private incentives might include incentives such as tax abatement programs.

In summary, there are many opportunities to seek funding and management assistance for the downtown redevelopment effort. It is recommended that the City of LaBelle consider assigning a staff person to the task of researching and managing the redevelopment effort, as organization and commitment are key to the success of not only acquiring assistance but implementing these various programs. A central contact that can serve as a liason between the community, agencies and private developers will show a serious commitment by the City in its efforts to revitalize downtown.

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