

## **COMMUNITY FORUM FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT A REVIEW OF THE YEAR, November 2012**

The Community Forum seeks to promote economic development, the process of increasing living standards and opportunities for area residents. Through education, organizing, and advocacy we intend to promote social and economic equity and to open up the economic process to greater democratic participation.

### **PUBLIC MEETINGS AND FORUMS, 2012**

The Community Forum probably is best known for regular public meetings that provide an opportunity to "shine the light" on the myriad of issues that affect local economic development.

Our January program: "**Right to Work – More Than a Union Issue**," provided public discussion of the decision by last year's Indiana General Assembly to reduce the ability of unions to bargain with employers and negotiate contracts. The potential affects upon the economic health of our entire community were central to the discussion.

The February CFED meeting featured an update on the **A J Wright penalty money** by Don Inks from the South Bend Department of Economic and Community Development. Discussion focused on how this money could best serve the needs of the community and of the workers who lost their jobs as a result of AJ Wright's closing.

Our guest in March was Notre Dame law professor Jim Kelly, who co-chairs the **Vacant and Abandoned Housing Task Force**, that is preparing a comprehensive plan for vacant and abandoned properties in South Bend.

In April, the Community Forum joined with the League of Women Voters, the North Central Indiana Central Labor Council, and the Michiana Voting Coalition to host a public forum, "**Are Vote Centers Coming to St. Joseph County?**" Speakers included Betty Doversberger, from the LWV of Indiana, Terri Rethlake, St. Joseph County Clerk and County Elections' Officer, and Robert E. Smith, from the Michiana Voting Coalition.

The **May meeting** examined a local initiative, "Blakenomics," that addresses the critical task of overcoming poverty. Community activists Hardie Blake, Ray Turner, and Shane Peters led a discussion, "**Overcoming Poverty and Creating Wealth through Community-owned Businesses.**"

South Bend Mayor Buttigieg, Councilwoman Karen White, and several **MBE/WBE Diversity Board** members joined us in June for an update on progress made in implementing South Bend's diversity ordinance. This meeting was co-sponsored by the South Bend NAACP Branch. Our August public meeting focused on the **health status of St. Joseph County**. It featured a presentation by CFED Board of Directors member John Hagen who compared St. Joseph County to other Indiana counties with regard to key factors influencing health.

In September, "**A Community Conversation about Poverty, Inequality and Economic Justice**" was held at IUSB – the seventh annual community forum on economic development. Informational material written for the forum explained how poverty and income inequality are issues of economic injustice and how, since the early 1980s, the rules for how our economy operates have been changed to benefit the wealthy and large corporations.

The Community Forum did not meet in October; instead we co-sponsored a **Candidates' Forum for the SBCSC Board of Trustees**, organized by the NAACP and also co-sponsored by the NEA South Bend, the MLK Jr. Senior Men's Club, Teamsters Local 364, Kappa Alpha Psi, Delta Sigma Theta, and "We Care."

## **ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY, 2012**

During 2012, the Community Forum has continued to focus on these areas.

**1. Advocating the responsible use of public revenues**, including tax abatements, TIF funds, and federal money targeted for economic development, etc.

There was a move by some members of the St. Joseph County Council to repeal the County Tax Abatement Ordinance. Members of the Coalition for Responsible Tax Abatement, of which the Community Forum is a member, mobilized to testify at the County Council in defense of the ordinance. However, the bill to repeal the ordinance was withdrawn by its sponsor, Dale Devon.

The South Bend Tax Abatement Ordinance revision was addressed recently by the Common Council and meetings will begin soon. It is the intent of the Council to include both the Coalition for Responsible Tax Abatement and the St. Joseph County Chamber of Commerce in these meetings.

Representatives of the CFED regularly attend meetings of the Redevelopment Commission that is responsible for the use of TIF revenues. Finally, the City of South Bend's Budget process was closely monitored during the most recent budget adoption. The Community Forum offered five specific recommendations that would facilitate public participation and we have an expectation that changes can be implemented.

**2. Achieving economic equity**, the fair and just distribution of economic resources and opportunities throughout our community.

The Minority and Women Enterprise Diversity Board was established by the City of South Bend to support increased participation of minority and women owned-businesses in public and private economic activities. We have offered critical support for this Board and, as well, to community non-profits working to support the development of minority-owned businesses.

We have continued to participate with the LaSalle Square Steering Committee in advocating for and supporting development along the LWW corridor. Public resources for economic development should be used equitably for all areas of the city.

**3. Saving our neighborhoods.** We think they should be improved, not removed!

The Community Forum believes that economic development efforts should save neighborhoods for the people who are living there. A new committee has been studying and discussing some of the issues that we anticipate will be part of a plan for vacant and abandoned properties that is being developed by a South Bend Task Force.

**4. Supporting programs that improve financial stability for low and middle-income residents.**

For the past four years, members of the Community Forum for Economic Development have been enthusiastic supporters of the IRS-certified Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program, a program facilitated by the United Way of St. Joseph County. The CFED has recruited and helped to train tax preparers and provided volunteers for the many support activities essential for a successful program.

We also participate, through the United Way Financial Stability Committee, in supporting programs that provide economic support and stability for low-income residents.

To learn more about any of these projects, contact us via email [sjc.cfed@gmail.com](mailto:sjc.cfed@gmail.com) or leave a message for the Community Forum at 574-287-3834. Our mailing address is P.O. Box 11082, South Bend, In 46634. Additional information about the Community Forum can be found at <http://www.communityforum.typepad.com/>