

COMMUNITY FORUM FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT A REVIEW OF THE YEAR, November 2014

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, 2014

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: **"Does South Bend need more affordable housing?"** featured presentations by Pam Meyer (City of South Bend), Lee Byers (SB Housing Authority), and Judy Fox (Notre Dame Law Clinic). In February, economist Marty Wolfson and LaTasha Bosse, a family development consultant for REAL Services, provided information answering the question, **"Is it time to raise the minimum wage?"**

"Michiana's Sustainable Future" was the topic of discussion at our March Forum, with presentations by James Summers and Mike Keen from the IUSB Center for a Sustainable Future.

Our April meeting date fell on **"Tax Day, 2014,"** and provided a good opportunity for CFED Board Members to share their experiences as volunteer tax preparers and to lead a discussion of issues such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and its effect on income for low-wage workers.

In May, we partnered with South Bend's Department of Community Development, to provide **public input for the "Housing and Community Development Plan,"** required for the use of CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funds from the federal Department of Housing Development (HUD).

In June, a panel of presenters (Cheryl Ashe, Carolina Arroyo, Kate Williams, and Isaac Hunt) described the need to eliminate barriers to employment for local ex-offenders: **"Shifting an Economic Burden to an Economic Benefit."** The Community Forum and the South Bend NAACP co-hosted the August meeting on **Indiana Moral Mondays.** Former South Bend resident, William Morris, traveled from Bloomington to share plans for a rally and march in Indianapolis. The keynote speaker at the rally was Reverend William Barber, a leader of the North Carolina Moral Monday Movement.

The **South Bend Budget** was the topic of our September meeting. CFED's John Hagen assembled representatives of the City of South Bend including Councilwoman Valerie Schey, Controller John Murphy, Chris Fielding and Pam Meyer from the Department of Community Investment, City Purchasing Manager George King, Shubhada Kambli from the Department of Code Enforcement and Eric Horvath, Department of Public Works.

October's program was a **Candidate's Forum for the SBCSC District 2 School Board** candidates. Oletha Jones, Carolyn Peterson and Stanley Wruble described their programs and responded to questions from community members.

2014 PROGRAM AREAS

EQUITABLE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

1. Members of the Community Forum have, since 2007, participated in the **VITA** (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program, coordinated locally by the United Way of St. Joseph County. We have recruited and trained tax preparers and other volunteers needed to maintain a program that, last year, prepared tax returns for 3,128 low and moderate-income residents. Members of our organization represented 15.6% of volunteers but 84.5% of volunteer hours.
2. **Ban the Box:** In addition to a well-attended forum addressing barriers to employment for ex-offenders, we participated in a successful effort to incentivize tax abatement recipients to ban the box.

RESPONSIBLE USE OF PUBLIC RESOURCES

1. Representatives of the Community Forum participated in public meetings on the realignment of South Bend's **TIF district boundaries**, and the **LWW and Western Avenue Corridor plans**.
2. Representatives regularly monitored meetings of the **Redevelopment Commission** and frequently attended meetings of the Common Council and the **Common Council committees**.
3. We provided consistent public input on the **South Bend Budget Process** and the **Vote Center Proposal**.

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

1. The Community Forum advocated, throughout the year, for **increased funding for rehabilitation** of both vacant and owner-occupied properties.
2. Members of CFED provided support for the activities of the **Far Northwest Neighborhood Association** and the **LWW/LaSalle Square Steering Committee**.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS

1. The Community Forum is a member organization of the Northern Indiana Coalition for **Immigration Reform** and has helped to build support for Coalition activities
2. The Community Forum played an active role in the formation of the **Indiana Moral Monday Movement**, helped to organize two busloads of local participants in a September March and Rally, and continues to build this state-focused coalition.

PROVIDED SUPPORT FOR LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

1. Working for educational equity with the **Parents for Racial Equality**
2. Working for food security with the **Urban Garden Market**