

North Port St. Joe Seeks Return to Redevelopment Area

During last week's city commission meeting, Annie Sue Fields and NAACP Branch President Amy Rogers presented a petition to the commission, containing 225 signatures from North Port St. Joe residents. The petition requested the City introduce "a new resolution, to expand the redevelopment area, to encompass North Port St. Joe." It further stated it is "with great pride that we affix our signatures to this petition, to facilitate an inclusive process of empowering the North Port St. Joe community, in participating in all redevelopment activities and opportunities." The city affirmed their request and voted unanimously to direct the PSJRA to begin the process again.

The PSJRA has been in support of the community of NPSJ and their efforts to be included in the redevelopment area since the Finding of Necessity Study was approved by the City on May 2, 2006. Following a very public process, the expansion was ratified by the City on September 28, 2006, but subsequently rescinded on January 3, 2008. This removal of NPSJ from the redevelopment area felt much like launching a bright ship, full of hope, and watching it unexpectedly sink and disappear below the surface until no trace of it remained.

At that time, the PSJRA Board of Directors expressed hope that the community would unite under a common goal and re-approach the agency for inclusion. This petition seems to do just that and brings to mind the Friends of North Port St. Joe Strategic Plan: "Keep What We Have; Upgrade It; Improve It – We are Here to Stay." We maintain that being part of a Community Redevelopment Agency is an effective forum toward that end. We also believe that the PSJRA is in a position to act as an honest broker, with no agenda other than to the benefit of NPSJ through public process and consensus of the community.

The city has asked the PSJRA to take the lead to re-expand the boundaries of the redevelopment area. We have directed our General Counsel to review all the circumstances and to be involved in every detail of the process. Once we review the status of the Finding of Necessity Study to ensure it does not require updating, the public process may begin anew. NPSJ will have a new base year for their funding. We hope to reassemble all the data and input already acquired as a point of beginning for the redevelopment plan for the potentially new district. We may then also resurrect the NPSJ Master Plan study, originally commissioned by the PSJRA.

The residents and leaders of NPSJ have proven that hope does indeed spring eternal and that the will of the few will not destroy the hopes and dreams of the many. This petition represents the buoyancy, spirit and resolve of their community. To reflect some of the wording in the petition, the PSJRA joins the community also "with great pride"—pride in the strength, commitment, courage, and love of the NPSJ residents for their community, demonstrated by the signatures on this petition. "Power to the people" is an overused saying; however, it continues to run through my head. Yes!