



May 21, 2012

Dr. Stephen Viars
Faith Church
5526 SR 26E
Lafayette, IN 47905

Economic Development Commission
ATTN: City Clerk
609 Navajo St.
West Lafayette, IN

Dear Commissioners,

When two of our leaders came to me with the idea of buying 1920 NW, at first I was strongly opposed. Even though the property had gone through a sheriff's sale, it was still extremely expensive for a church like ours. It was also a blighted piece of ground by anyone's standards with obvious drainage problems and other development challenges. My attitude was, sure we could do it, or at least attempt to--but why in the world would we?

I eventually changed my mind for three distinct reasons. The first occurred when we sat down with the neighbors who live contiguous to the site. We asked them about the needs they saw in that part of town and how a church like ours might be able to serve them. I'll never forget what the man sitting right next to me said that night -- "You'll have to give me a minute here, because no one has ever asked us that question before." They went on to tell about how terrible it had been to live adjacent to the troubled Family Inn where violence, crime, and drugs became worse by the year. Then they spoke about the failed planned developments and the tension that brought to the neighborhood. After we posed our question, they began speaking about needed childcare, community recreation, meeting rooms, and a community park. They were describing our eastside community center to a "t". Their response was that the possibility of having a non-profit develop the property in a way that genuinely sought to serve the neighborhood was almost too good to be true.

The second was my deep concern for the state of our economy. There is a portion of our community suffering greatly from this recession. We are seeing record numbers of people come through the doors of our food pantry and clothing closet. People want to work--but they cannot find jobs. Perhaps the saddest aspect is the growing problem of family homelessness. When you talk to the families we

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serve in our family homeless program, it brings tears to your eyes. I calculated that this project, between a church capital campaign and a tax exempt bond issue, could immediately infuse nearly twelve million dollars into our troubled local economy.

The third was my concern for students at Purdue. Week after week we read stories in our newspaper of students getting into trouble, in some cases making mistakes that will follow them well into adulthood. This sometimes results in stress and discord in local neighborhoods--the so called town and gown challenges can be significant. We believe that if we want students to avoid making bad choices, we have to give them resources to help them make good ones. This is also true of international students. Coming here from a foreign country, especially with your family as many international students do, is very hard. We are told that 80% of international students never step foot inside an American's home.

What crystalized the decision for me was thinking about those three areas of need in light of the words of an ancient political leader who once said, "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act." I knew this was going to be a challenging project that would stretch us in all sorts of ways. I also knew there was no reason I had to do it. I had plenty to keep me busy on the east side of town. But I had to honestly acknowledge in my heart that it was in my power to act, and therefore I stood up and set a course to do good for those who clearly deserved it.

The night I presented this to our church family was interesting for sure. I was asking our church members, suffering the effects of a sluggish economy themselves, to commit to a five million dollar capital campaign above and beyond their regular giving. I was also asking them to assume responsibility for a 7 million dollar tax exempt bond. Thirdly, I was asking them to put up our entire eastside campus as collateral for this loan. I am so proud of our church family because when the vote was cast, over 98% of our church family voted in favor of Faith West. They have already begun giving generously and sacrificially to the capital campaign and have now spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in architectural, development, and professional fees. In essence we stood up as a congregation and said, we are going to follow the wisdom of King Solomon -- "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it is in your power to act." No, we don't have to do it -- but we are choosing to do it, or at least attempting to, because we believe it is in the best interest of our friends and neighbors in West Lafayette.

I believe the members of the Economic Development Commission and the WL city council are thoughtful men and women. They have given this project careful scrutiny and they should have. But in the final analysis we hope they will vote to serve as a conduit for the final financing piece necessary to begin the construction of Faith West. As they think about the significant needs that exist at 1920 NW coupled with the unusual offer of a non-profit organization willing to assume the financial liability to meet those needs, I hope they too will follow the encouragement of this ancient king, "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act."

I didn't have to do this, but I decided I should. Our church family didn't have to do this, but they decided they should. We are respectfully asking our city council to reach the same conclusion.


Steve Viars