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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2023

A FREE PRESS NEWSPAPER • (815) 476-7966

City leaders explain TIF, and its benefits, at town hall meeting

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

When the city of Braidwood held its final town hall meeting for the public to get to know their leaders and ask any questions they want, the subject most discussed was how the city attracts new businesses.

Namely, folks in attendance at the special meeting on Nov. 28 wanted more information on TIF incentives offered for the new car dealerships coming to town.

TIF stands for tax increment financing. Braidwood currently has one active TIF district, TIF III.

In layman's terms, a TIF district works by establishing a base value for the property in the district, and then freezing the amount of taxes from those properties that is paid to the taxing bodies for a time period not

exceed 23 years. As property values increase, taxes subsequently go up. Those additional increments of tax dollars are added to the TIF fund, which is used for redevelopment projects within the district.

Braidwood's TIF III was created in 2011.

The deal penned in 2022 with D'Orazio Ford and Arnie Bauer Chevrolet/GMC to bring those dealerships to town includes TIF eligible incentives up to \$4.765 million, including:

- Real Estate Tax Increment — the city will reimburse the developers 100% of the annual net real estate tax increment generated by the dealerships, until the developer has received the TIF eligible project costs. For other development within the 64 acres, the city will reimburse 50% of net real estate tax increment generat-

ed by retail or commercial development.

- Municipal Sales Tax — The city will reimburse the developer 55% of municipal sales tax revenues generated by the dealerships in calendar years 2025 through 2034.

- Construction projects — Those projects to be constructed by the developer that are eligible for TIF reimbursement include site preparation, grading, engineering, architectural services, legal services, planning, infrastructure improvements, utilities extensions, and job training.

The city also purchased \$1.8 million in property for the project along EZ Street, and will waive all permit fees and utility tap on fees for the two dealerships as well as construct a left turn lane onto north Division Street, which is currently a right in/right out only.

Residents asked city leaders at the town hall meeting why such incentives were being made available to the dealerships, but not to smaller businesses in the city.

"We're able to take that money and use it to assist—and that's what it's for—to bring in business to your town to help them get started," city administrator Tony Altieri said. "I've done a lot of business, I'm a business person, [Commissioner] Warren [Wietting] is, it's hard to get a business up and running and keep it going. So, anything [the city] can do to help, we absolutely will. If it's not in TIF and we can't do a TIF incentive, maybe we'll waive permit fees. We'll do whatever we can, something to get them to town, because they're going to pay sales tax, gaming tax, real estate tax, things like that."

Altieri said that several municipi-

alities were essentially competing for D'Orazio and Bauer, because car dealerships tend to bring in upwards of \$500,000 in a year in sales tax for a municipality. The administrator said since the dealerships were able to pick and choose where to go for the best deal, the city opted to purchase the land as part of the incentive package.

"They're also putting in \$4 million of infrastructure for our system, connecting our water and sewer, which makes a loop around town now and [the development] is also creating eight more commercial lots to be able to put more businesses in, a hotel, a restaurant, anything like that over there," Altieri said. "Diamond spent \$4 million to get Jewel in there,

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Shop with a Cop returns to Braidwood



Photos by Marney Simon

SHOWING OFF SOME unexpected skills, emergency responders including officers with the BPD and members of Braidwood's ESDA helped wrap gifts purchased at this year's Shop with a Cop event. The annual event was held on Dec. 6, and officers brought several local children along with their families for a holiday shopping spree at Walmart in Morris, followed by a pizza party at City Hall, gift wrapping, and a visit with Santa. The department said Walmart also provided each child with a surprise gift, as well as snacks and juice. The annual event is made possible thanks to donations from local businesses and individuals.



Wilczak appointed to vacant council seat

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

The Braidwood City Council once again has all five members on the dais.

On Nov. 28, the council unanimously approved the appointment of Ron Wilczak as Commissioner of Public Health and Safety.

That position was left vacant when previous commissioner James Mikel resigned in October.

Upon being sworn in, Wilczak briefly introduced himself to the members of the public.

"I can promise all of Braidwood citizens that I will do my very best to serve all of you," he said. "My door is always open. I know that's been common to this whole council, so if there are any questions or any concerns, please contact me in one way or another. You can use phone calls, e-mails, arrange a meet-

ing or whatever."

Wilczak's appointment followed a bit of a shakeup in October, when former Chief Todd Lyons was asked to resign by Hart. Hart said that while Lyons was a popular police chief, there was a lack of leadership and accountability in his office, a charge Lyons denies. Mikel submitted his resignation as commissioner within a week of Lyons' resignation.

"I'm very sorry to see that Jim Mikel and Todd Lyons had to leave, did leave," Wilczak said. "They served the city well. I thank both of you, Todd and Jim, for all your good service to the city. I will hope to do the best I can to fill those shoes, along with our new police chief."

Bret Goodwin, a 23-year veteran of the department who previously held the rank

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City, schools sign SRO agreement

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

The Braidwood Police Department will continue to provide a school resource officer (SRO) to Reed-Custer schools to keep watch over students, staff, and families and visitors to its three campuses.

On Nov. 28, the Braidwood City Council approved an intergovernmental agreement with the Reed-Custer School District to provide that SRO to the district, a renewal of the same ongoing agreement between the city and the school district that has been in effect for several years.

Per that agreement, the SRO is an employee of the city and supervised through the Braidwood Police

Department.

The SRO is to be present on school grounds from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on weekdays when school is in session, and during special events as agreed upon by both parties.

The Reed-Custer School District will pay a rate of \$30 per hour for the SRO, with overtime picked up by the city.

The agreement is in effect for one year.

The Reed-Custer School District Board of Education approved the same agreement on Nov. 15.

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