



March 15, 2015

Office of Community and Rural Affairs
Stellar Communities Program
The Honorable Sue Ellspermann
Lieutenant Governor of Indiana
One North Capitol, Suite 600
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2288

Re: Letter of Interest for the 2015 Stellar Communities Program

Dear Ms. Ellspermann:

On behalf of the community of Decatur, Indiana, I am excited to submit this letter of interest to participate in the 2015 Stellar Communities Program. Over the past decade, we have been working hard to engage and advance our community. Last year, we were honored to be selected as a 2014 Stellar Communities Finalist. Through this intense, exciting, and beneficial experience, we gained focus and a vision to direct our revitalization efforts. We have since been working to realize this vision by implementing the "Artistically Inspired Innovation" Strategic Community Investment Plan (SCIP), aligning stakeholders and expanding City Staff to oversee efforts. We stand ready to take on the Stellar Community Designation opportunity!

PLANNING AND PROGRESS

The City of Decatur has and is continuing to plan and implement projects for the prosperity of our community. We have managed close to \$20 million in federal funds over the last ten years, demonstrating an ability to manage complex projects. In 2010, a comprehensive plan was completed that highlighted the importance of the revitalization of the downtown. The Greater Decatur planning advisory committee was then established in 2013 to guide and implement strategic planning efforts for the city. Pursuing the 2014 Stellar Communities designation helped us gain clarity on identity and direction. Throughout the process, community engagement occurred through three Town Hall meetings and numerous stakeholder workshops.

As a first course of action upon learning of the 2014 results, we held a community-wide briefing of our Stellar experience. We took the time to gather input from those in attendance regarding our Strategic Investment Plan. During October and November of 2014, we spent time talking with state agencies, visiting recent Stellar Community recipients, and working with local organizations and consultants to develop a plan of action to move our identified projects forward.

Perhaps one of the most valuable times was a workshop held in November 2014. Here we strategically invited over a dozen of the most active organizations within our community in order to further develop a plan of action for accomplishing our SCIP. Together, we discussed and debated the numerous projects, established priorities, and ultimately assigned lead and supporting organizations for each project as well as an initial timeline for progress reports. Specific accomplishments made this year in support of our Strategic Community Investment Plan include:

Monroe Street Bridge/ St. Mary's Gateway Project: Preliminary engineering is underway.

Streetscape, Façade and Public Art Planning/Design: A downtown master plan is underway. The plan includes economic market information, cultural/promotional analysis, and organizational analysis, design concepts for streetscapes, assessment of downtown building facades, local façade plan development and a public art plan.

Creative Housing Community: Biggs TC Development, Inc. has submitted an Innovation Round letter of interest to IHEDA for Rental Housing Tax Credits. The project focuses on artists and entrepreneurs and supports entrepreneurial development through collaboration with the City of Decatur and Connect to Careers.

Sanitary Sewer Improvements: Phase 3 of the Long Term Control Plan, in coordination with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, is being developed to control and restrict combined sewer overflows which discharge into the St. Mary's River.

Wetlands Project: The Decatur/Adams County Five Year Parks and Recreation Plan has been updated to include the Wetland Preserve Project and has been approved by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church has petitioned for annexation of their land into the City. Annexation will be complete in May. Preliminary design of the park is underway in preparation of a June 2015 Land and Water Conservation grant application deadline.

City Hall: The City has completed the \$1,500,000 renovation of the New City Hall at the southeast corner of 2nd and Monroe Streets.

Monroe & Second Street Pocket Park: The City, in partnership with local funders and the Adams County Community Foundation, completed the \$300,000 project including reinforcement of a backdrop wall, insets for sculpture displays and green space.

New Police Station: The construction of a new \$950,000 police station was completed along 7th Street.

Five Points Intersection / Southern Gateway: A boundary study is currently underway.

Creative Engagement:

- A Cultural Needs Assessment has been conducted by Arts Place for the Decatur Cultural Connection.
- An Active Living Workshop was conducted in collaboration with the Indiana Department of Health and Decatur’s local Winning with Wellness organization.
- A Community Coordinator has been hired by the City of Decatur to provide leadership and support to Community Development Initiatives.

While we were able to clarify the “why” and the “what” in the 2014 SCIP, our focus is now on clarifying the “who” and the “how”. Much progress has been made to further define and implement the plan, and participation in the 2015 Stellar Communities Competition will continue to accelerate and elevate our success.

ARTISTICALLY INSPIRED INNOVATION STRATEGY IMPACT AND INVESTMENT

Retaining and attracting talent and investment through quality of life initiatives is imperative to our local economies. As the civic infrastructure of the Northeast Indiana region strengthens, Locavesting (Community Local Investing) is becoming more evident. Even when market demographics may not show strong support for investment from a national developer’s perspective, regional investors can be enticed by understanding the potential for success based on their local knowledge and the community’s development of people and place. While Northeast Indiana as a whole appears to have many attributes in place to cultivate this local investment such as the City of Fort Wayne’s Riverfront Initiative, the focus on future US 30 development in between Fort Wayne and Warsaw Orthopedic markets, growth along I-69 near the Parkview Regional Medical Center, and the numerous lakes within counties north of Fort Wayne, Decatur and Adams County lacks the regional draw to lure significant investment south of Fort Wayne. In addition, realignment of U.S. 27 from 2nd Street in the heart of downtown Decatur to 13th Street in the mid-20th Century has diverted development and created a dynamic where those traveling through the City often have little knowledge of what Decatur is all about.

The Decatur community is committed to change this dynamic. Sandwiched in between Indiana’s 2nd largest city 20 miles to the north and rural Amish settlements in southern Adams County, we are in a strategic position to provide a link to investment and opportunity from the Northeast to the East Central part of the state. By building on our strengths and through receiving a Stellar Communities designation, it is our vision to foster identity, pride, and a quality of place for current and future residents and businesses to grow and prosper.

Decatur has a rich heritage of art and innovation as home to world-renowned artists including modern sculptor, David Smith, and the film director, David Anspaugh as well as successful industries including Mind’s Eye Graphics, Formula Boats, Lingerfelter Performance Engineering; Bunge, Allied Recreation Group, Hoosier Pattern and more. Rooted by an authentic heritage of art and innovation, and catalyzed by the Decatur Sculpture Tour, Decatur’s 2014 SCIP established a founding concept that “Artistic exploration is key to creativity, creativity is an essential component of innovation, and innovation creates new and expanded industries which are the basis of our future economy.” Strategies were then developed to include:

People-Based Strategy: Through partnerships with numerous entities and workforce development initiatives in Adams County and throughout the Northeast Indiana region, promote creativity and innovation through art advocacy, career skill and leadership development, and entrepreneurial training.

Place-Based Strategy: Implement a collection of capital improvements to enhance the downtown target area to enhanced downtown transportation connectivity, walkability, and safety; develop a sense of place; and create live-work-play synergies.

Community Based Strategy: Implement a marketing plan over the next four years that includes branding, internal community marketing (generating community pride) and external community marketing (business and residential recruitment) elements.

At the heart of the plan was the development a Creative Engagement Center that would be the center for art and innovation in the community. Through partnerships with numerous art entities and workforce development initiatives in Adams County and throughout the Northeast Indiana region, the Center was to focus on promoting creativity and innovation through art advocacy, career skills and leadership development, and entrepreneurial training and support in order to equip individuals with the critical thinking skills necessary to develop and lead our businesses, create jobs, and grow our economy. While originally proposed as one physical space, we have decided that emphasis and effort shall be directed towards the development of the programs and that rather than focusing on one “space” that the entire downtown can be thought of as the “Center for Creative Engagement”. In this letter of interest, we are proposing a collection of projects that work with a collection of programs and initiatives that will more completely articulate how the City of Decatur hopes to use the Stellar Communities designation to catalyze the blending of art and science into innovation, entrepreneurship and job creation.

Furthermore, it is our belief that our successes can serve as a model for other rural communities to leverage for their own redevelopment efforts. As promoted by John Howkins, Richard Florida and others, creativity has become a decisive source of gaining a competitive advantage in the future economy. According to Howkins’ Creative Economy website, www.creativeeconomy.com, “New ideas, not money or machinery, are the source of success today...The creative economy is revitalizing manufacturing, services, retailing and entertainment industries. It is changing where people want to live, work and learn – where they think, invent and produce. The creative economy is based on a new way of thinking and doing. The heartlands are art, culture, design and innovation.” While larger communities enjoy the benefits of numerous resources that help to harness creativity and support entrepreneurial initiatives, smaller communities often struggle with sustaining such momentum. By strategically intertwining affordable housing with entrepreneurship support in the downtown area, Decatur can provide a sustainable and repeatable model for similar smaller communities.

PROPOSED STELLAR COMMUNITIES PROGRAM SCOPE

We are proposing to focus the Stellar Program on a collection of projects within the downtown target area. Focus will be given to 4 ½ blocks including the downtown gateway intersection of the Monroe Street Bridge and the St. Mary’s River following Monroe Street (US 224) west to 2nd Street (old U.S. 27 Highway). The target area also stretches along 2nd Street from Jackson Street at the north end to Jefferson Street to the south. A secondary ring of focus extends from Jackson Street to the north, across the St. Mary’s River via the Monroe Street Bridge to capture 37 acres of wetlands to the east, Oak Street to the south and 7th Street to the west. This secondary area will complement the primary target area by enhancing downtown livability through recreation, safe affordable housing and safe access to the downtown.

Monroe Street Bridge/St. Mary’s River Gateway: The Monroe Street Bridge will be modified to allow for improved pedestrian access over the St. Mary’s River. This will serve as a vital pedestrian gateway connection between downtown commercial and residential uses on the west side of the St. Mary’s River to the recreational and environmental assets on the east side of the river. The project will involve realignment of the existing sidewalks rather than construction of an additional bridge extension as proposed in the 2014 SCIP. The north sidewalk would become a wider 10’ path, and the south side would be narrowed to about 5’. This would involve less permit issues and fewer disturbances to the river. This project would also involve lighting on the north side of the bridge and other artistic elements to enable the structure to serve as the eastern gateway to the downtown area. The project would provide continuity to planned INDOT improvements to the east of the St. Mary’s River on US 224 as well as existing and proposed sidewalks and trails along both sides of the St. Mary’s River for extension of the existing trail system. This project is being led by the City of Decatur and Decatur Parks and Recreation with support by Main Street, the Sculpture Tour Committee, Winning with Wellness and the Decatur Cultural Connection.

Monroe Street Sidewalks: Pedestrian sidewalks and urban friendly improvements will be made to the “Downtown District”. This project is focused in the target area and will include new sidewalks and lighting on both north and south sides of the street from the Monroe Street Bridge to 3rd Street.

2nd Street Streetscape & Public Art Improvements: Pedestrian sidewalks and urban friendly improvements will be made at the heart of the Decatur Sculpture Tour Route along 2nd Street from Jackson Street to Jefferson Street. This includes sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting, landscaping, street furnishings and public art elements. Decatur Main Street is leading this project and is currently working on a design process for the target area as part of the comprehensive downtown plan. Project support will be provided by the Sculpture Tour Committee, Winning with Wellness and the Decatur Cultural Connection.

2nd Street Lofts: In collaboration with Biggs TC Development, it is our interest to create a housing community with preference to artists and creative entrepreneurs. Within the target area, 2 downtown properties have been identified for redevelopment into affordable apartments. A preference will be given to artists and creative entrepreneurs that demonstrate a strong interest in utilizing the development’s amenities and partnering programs including an entrepreneurial accelerator, youth

entrepreneurial programming, investor/mentor support, and revenue shared loans with a goal of developing creativity into products or services that enhance our Downtown, either directly or indirectly by their success and supporting the local economy. A mix of approximately thirty-five one and two bedroom energy efficient apartments will be redeveloped in the Stellar target area. The development team will be working closely with Indiana Office of Small Business and Entrepreneurship to develop a targeted marketing strategy to attract the artists and creative entrepreneurs from around the region.

A gray box space will be developed collaboratively with the city to house space for entrepreneurial and artistic engagement. This will include: co-working space; space for meetings, instruction & collaboration; and space to house a community art center. The public space will be owned and/or leased by the City of Decatur and managed by Biggs Property Management for a nominal fee. Project and program support will also be given by Connect to Careers, the Adams County Economic Development Corporation, North Adams County Community Schools and the Decatur Cultural Connection.

Senior Home Accessibility and Repair Program (SHARP): The City of Decatur will implement an extension of its highly popular, oversubscribed Senior Home Accessibility and Repair Program (SHARP) that will be targeted to owner-occupants residing in the neighborhood west and north of downtown. Improvements to accessibility that promote aging in place is mission critical, as the overall housing program is designed to treat existing residents with as much care and concern as it seeks to expand economic development opportunities by making the area more attractive to new residents. The 2013/2014 SHARP Program currently has a waiting list which includes more than thirty (30) eligible applicants.

COMPLEMENTARY PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES (To Be Completed During the Stellar Communities Timeframe)

US 224 Improvements: U.S. 224 is a planned INDOT project. The estimated year of construction is 2017. The construction proposal calls for elevating U.S. 224 five to seven feet in the area between Jackson Street and East Monroe Extended, and a lesser build-up in the road surface from Limberlost Trail west to the Monroe Street Bridge. As proposed, U.S. 224 would feature two 12-foot driving lanes, as it is currently configured. The intersection of U.S. 224 and Jackson Street and North Adams Drive (the entrance to Belmont High School) would be realigned, and left and right-turn lanes would be added at the intersection. Curbs, gutters and pedestrian guardrails would be installed along the highway, and additional storm sewers and drainage devices would be included to alleviate flooding.

Downtown Façade Program: The City of Decatur is in the process of developing a local façade program. This program will provide guidance for façade improvements and will offer 50/50 matching grants to downtown property owners to make improvements to their structures. The improvements to the existing mixed-use buildings within the downtown will promote commercial and retail space to locate in the area as well as attract residents to the upper-level housing projects. Improvements will allow for the 'arts' to be expressed through the exterior improvements of the buildings through a combination of architectural details, materials, and colors. Decatur Main Street and the City of Decatur will be working on this initiative.

Schaefer Building Clearance: The Schaefer Building is a 46,000 sq. ft. structure that is on the corner of Madison and 1st Streets. The structure is in poor condition with part of its roof removed, and is near the end of its economic life. The City is currently pursuing the purchase of the building for the purpose of demolition, environmental remediation and developing the site for parking. This is a potential site to enhance the viability of downtown housing as well as riverfront development.

Sanitary Sewer/Stormwater Improvements: Relocation of the City's sewer interceptor line will be completed from the banks of the river to 1st St from Jefferson St. north to the river crossing behind Zwick & Jahn Funeral home. This relocation will replace an original portion of the interceptor which has been repaired numerous times with a major lining project done in 1982 and, according to investigations done in 2014, is the leading cause of river water inflow. The City will also construct a wet weather relief sewer that will parallel the interceptor from Jefferson St. to the existing Jackson St. CSO storage facility.

1st and Jefferson St. Riverside Park / Trailhead / Rivergreenway Extension: Due to the certainty of a sewer/storm water project on 1st St along the St. Mary's Riverfront, riverfront development will be a subsequent phase of downtown revitalization. However, the city will move forward with securing the properties along 1st Street riverside from Monroe Street to Jefferson Street for development into a future park. The City has committed to accomplishing the trail connection portion of this project from Legion Park up to the 5 Points intersection during 2015.

5 Points Enhancement/Southern Gateway: This intersection is highly traveled, and traffic flow would be greatly improved with a roundabout. According to the 2011 Adams County Transportation Plan developed by NIRCC, this intersection received the highest crash density in the county. A boundary study is currently being completed. The Main Street group led multiple working group discussions regarding the 5 Points intersection. Additional time will be taken to talk to property owners and the community and to make sure that the project coordinates with the downtown plan.

Downtown Nature Preserve: Decatur's Parks Department is in the development stages of a 35-acre nature preserve along the east bank of the St. Mary's River across from the downtown and south of the Monroe Street Bridge. The preserve will include (1) a 0.5 mile long trail/ boardwalk through the wetlands that will connect to the existing river greenway trail along the river, (2) a nature observation/education areas; and (3) establishment of plant and animal habitats. The \$400,000 project will be supported by a \$40,000 land donation; \$200,000 Land and Water Conservation grant application, and other community support. Decatur Parks and Recreation have been working with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources on this project.

7th Street Sidewalk Improvements: Sidewalk improvements will be completed during 2015 along 7th Street near the new police station. These improvements will include decorative lighting and landscaping.

Community Marketing: The City's new Community Coordinator will be involved in developing a Community Marketing Strategy as guided by Greater Decatur and in collaboration with Decatur Main Street, the Decatur Chamber of Commerce, and the Adams County Economic Development Corporation. Public relations, advertising, graphic materials and promotions will all be developed. Greater Decatur has budgeted \$50,000 to hire a professional marketing firm to aid in the development of advertising materials. The Downtown Plan currently underway will aid in providing information on target markets and promotional strategies. Technical assistance will be requested from the Indiana Office of Tourism Development. The resources are being put into place, to build on the Stellar Communities designee status if so achieved.

Capital Campaign: Two funds have been established at the Adams County Community Foundation for Greater Decatur projects – an endowment fund with a goal of \$1,000,000 and a pass-through fund with a goal of \$2,000,000. Over \$500,000 in pledges were received in support of the 2014 SCIP. A formalized fundraising committee is being developed to actively continue building financial community support of Community Development initiatives.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY

The total proposed Stellar Program budget is \$11,828,486. Of this, approximately 72% will come from leveraging resources through local City funds (LOIT, CEDIT, Cumulative Capital Development, Riverboat Gambling, Rainy Day, MVH, and Utilities), business and individual donations, charitable foundations, property owner investment and tax credit equity. More than \$9,070,000 in additional funds will be invested in complementary projects for a total downtown impact of \$20,898,486.

OUR TEAM

Our Community Team is committed to fostering impactful change that will be realized by our families and friends for years to come. The City Administration will provide authoritative and resource support to this proposal. Staff resources available to guide and lead projects include department heads, the city's Engineer and the city's new Community Coordinator. Strategic oversight of the Stellar Communities Initiative will be through the Greater Decatur Planning Advisory Committee.

Partners that will devote time, skill and resources to this initiative include: Decatur Main Street, Decatur – Adams County Parks and Recreation, Adams County Economic Development Corporation, Decatur Chamber of Commerce, Decatur Cultural Connection, Decatur Sculpture Tour, North Adams Arts Council, North Adams Community Schools, Adams County Community Foundation, Winning with Wellness, Adams Memorial Community Hospital, Adams County Public Library System, and local individuals, businesses, and industries.

The Development Team includes a well-qualified list of firms/organizations within a breadth of disciplines including: Sturtz Public Management Group, LLC – Planning/Project Management, Biggs TC Development, LLC. – Multi-Family Housing Development; Martin Riley Architects – Architectural Planning & Design; LandPlan Group – Urban & Landscaping Design; GAI Consultants – Engineering Design; Northeastern Indiana Regional Coordinating Council – Transportation Planning and Grant Administration; High Performance Government Network – Owner Occupied Housing Program Development & Administration.

Thank you for providing the Decatur community the experience of benefitting from last year's Stellar Community process and for the potential to continue to pursue the opportunity to impact transformational change for generations to come.

Sincerely,

John L. Schultz, Mayor
City of Decatur