

## **Elmhurst Economic Development Commission**

### **Meeting Minutes**

**November 20, 2009 – 7:30 a.m.**

**City Hall – Conference Room 2**

**Present:** Betsy Hanisch, Dan Leahy, Diane McGinnis, Rich Reichert, Mark Sabatino, Kurt Warnke, John Quigley (Ex-Officio - Elmhurst Chamber), Tom Paravola (Ex-Officio - Elmhurst City Centre)

**Absent:** Dan Hiffman, Scott LaMorte, Don Meyers

**Staff:** John D. Said

**Also:** Ald. Kevin York, City Manager Tom Borchert, Assistant City Manager/Fire Chief Mike Kopp, Ken Bartels (Consultant)

Chair Betsy Hanisch called the meeting to order at 7:35 a.m. A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of the October 23, 2009 EDC meeting. All Commissioners voted in favor; the motion was approved.

Mr. Said reviewed and summarized the draft Strategic Plan for Economic Development. The document is divided into several sections and takes an approach focused on physical development topics. It also focuses on subareas, as identified in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan. That Plan predicted that these areas, all primarily non-residential, would be subject to potential pressure for change in the future. However, residential neighborhoods are predicted to remain relatively stable for the foreseeable future. Mr. Said made note of some particular areas of interest that could be identified in the Plan, including: a potential economic benefit for Elmhurst College graduates that choose to remain in the community to begin a business; and the idea that the Plan should address market realities and not anticipate business activity that cannot be sustained by the current (and predicted future) stable population. Mr. Said noted that the draft Plan concludes by identifying a number of opportunities for the various subareas.

Upon conclusion of the summary, various EDC members identified items and information they'd like to see the Plan cover, including the following:

- Provide defining role for Commission, potentially including advocacy on issues being reviewed by the Council.
- Identifying the Commission as an impartial body that engages the community and uses facts associated with development proposals or other issues pertaining to the local economy or economic development being reviewed by the Council.
- Specifically identify support for existing and new businesses as a goal.
- Prioritize recommendations and possibly subareas to identify those areas to focus on first.

- In connection with prioritizing recommendations, endorse specific tools while identifying positive and negative aspects of each tool. Also identify the City's track record (very positive) regarding previous use of each tool.

Discussion took place regarding Illinois as place to do business. According to some sources, Illinois is not seen as a good place to do business. As such, Elmhurst would do well by retaining its existing business presence in the face of the 'lowering' tide statewide. Discussion ensued regarding the City's previous successful use, or possible future use, of sales tax rebate, public-private partnerships, and fee waivers.

Extensive discussion then began about the City's industrial area. Elmhurst buildings serve their niche well although they are small with limited ceiling heights. As well, many of the buildings are heavy on office improvements, which could be outdated. Despite trends throughout the rest of the region, price points in Elmhurst have stayed somewhat stable (at around \$8-10 per square foot for industrial sites). Elsewhere, such as Elk Grove, prices increased to the low \$20's per square foot during peak periods a few years ago, and have since 'crashed' to levels around \$7/square foot.

Further discussion ensued about the eventual relocation of businesses from the O'Hare Western Access area. Discussion also ensued regarding the previous tools used by the City, the City's role as a catalyst, and that without City involvement successful projects would not have taken place. Current economic barometers, as identified in various areas including Patchwork Nation, note that all types of communities have been impacted by national and worldwide global economic conditions.

The potential for a new big-box retail opportunity on North York Street was reviewed, as this was proposed in the Comprehensive Plan.

Further discussion ensued on the following topics:

- Whether the industrial park would be a good location to attract trade/supply partners of existing companies, and whether such a strategy is worthwhile.
- How to address long-term financial management of municipal parking, with the opportunity for a Special Service Area to do so.
- Possible use of a scorecard to rate what's happened in Elmhurst in the past to determine the community's vibrancy.

Discussion of the Strategic Plan concluded with Mr. Said proposing to work with a smaller "study group" of the Commission in the time before the December meeting. The study group will help Mr. Said with identifying principal concepts and proposed changes for the draft Plan, along with recommending priorities.

Under Other Business, the group discussed the Elmhurst Fire Department requirements for wireless alarms for businesses. Chief Kopp will work with the Chamber and other local business groups to conduct a workshop to review this program.

Mr. Borchert reviewed the November 16 public hearing and City Council discussion and action regarding the proposed tax levy increase. Despite the increase, it is anticipated that additional cuts will be needed to City services and operations to balance the City's operating budget.

Local shopping efforts were discussed by the Commission.

Mr. Said reminded the EDC that the December meeting is tentatively scheduled for December 18.

There were no further updates or other business. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:40 a.m.

Submitted by: John D. Said