

City of Crystal Lake Economic Development Committee
Regular Meeting
March 24, 2009 – 7:30 a.m.
Municipal Complex – Council Chambers

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 a.m.

Roll Call/Attendance

Members Feddersen, Fowler, Riley, Viger, and Haleblian were present. Members Affrunti, Johnson, and Bawolek were absent.

James Richter II, Assistant Director of Economic Development, was present from staff.

Approve minutes of the February 24, 2009 EDC meeting

Mr. Riley moved to approve the minutes from the February 24, 2009 EDC meeting as presented. Ms. Viger seconded the motion. On voice vote, members Feddersen, Fowler, Riley, and Viger voted aye. Mr. Haleblian abstained. Motion passed.

Public participation and comments

There were none.

EDC Projects

I Shop Crystal Lake www.ishopcl.com website redesign and maintenance

Mr. Richter said it was challenging to compare the original proposals that were submitted. Most of the quotes included a self-managing website, and others were hourly maintenance fees which escalated the bid price. He contacted the bidders for further clarification of their bids and provided the members with a chart comparing the bids and their clarifications. Mr. Richter said the City is unable to host the I Shop website on our servers and it will need to be hosted off-site. The bids included a training fee on how to use the system and the time-lines for the website to be up and running varies from just a few weeks to several weeks. Any of the self-managing systems must include the City having the final approval of the content to be added to the website.

Mr. Richter said the chart provided includes two recommended companies but funding this project is the key. It depends on how much of the EDC's budget for the next fiscal year the committee wants to use on website since there are other items to be considered in the future such as marketing, ICSC events, etc. He said the City is proposing to do the holiday certificate again but that is a separate budget item and not included in the EDC's proposed budget. Mr. Richter proposed that he interview both companies.

Mr. Haleblian said part of the process is Staff's comfort level. He likes the lowest bid is from a Crystal Lake firm. Mr. Fowler asked if anything was missing. Mr. Richter said the proposals will provide excellent tools for businesses. Mr. Riley asked websites they have done. Mr. Richter showed various websites.

Ms. Viger said it is important that they have more than one employee. She feels more comfortable if there is at least two so someone can step in if needed. She agrees that Staff should talk with the two companies first. Ms. Feddersen also suggested that we find out how easy is it to get a hold of the company if there is an emergency with the website. Ms. Viger feels that a 4-week turnaround for the website is unrealistic. Mr. Haleblian said he is currently working with a company that is creating his company's website and it is taking a long time. He said there is no rush to have the website up and running in just a couple of weeks.

Mr. Fowler asked what happens at the end of the contract with either company. Mr. Richter said the only cost would be to pay for the monthly hosting fee for the website. Mr. Riley said it wouldn't have to be hosted by either company after contract has expired especially if their cost goes up considerably. Mr. Haleblian asked what is the length of the contract. Mr. Richter said 10 months, but that the hosting fees should remain consistent or be lower over time.

Ms. Feddersen said we are looking for a more efficient way to process the holiday certificates and possibly it could start with filling out an application on the website and send in the receipts in the mail. Mr. Richter said that was not part of the RFP but it could be an additional cost if they can do that.

Ms. Viger moved that Staff interview the top two bidders (Simple Logic of Crystal Lake, and Verity 3 of McHenry) for additional information (number of employees, easy of getting hold of someone in case of an emergency with the website, turnaround time for the website to be up and running, training sessions, etc.). Based on the answers received from the two top bidders, Staff will forward the EDC's recommendation to the City Council. Ms. Feddersen seconded the motion. On voice vote, all members voted aye. Motion passed.

I Shop Crystal Lake program 2009 – advertising and promotions: 2009 program management

Mr. Richter said this was more difficult and wanted to allow room for creativity for the companies. He said they received 4 bids. One of the bidders focused on a video marketing program. The video examples that were provided seemed to be too specific to one business. Mr. Richter said the bid received from Dobbe Marketing was the highest bid received but they had excellent ideas on events. The proposal amounts are beyond the proposed budget for the next fiscal year.

Mr. Haleblian said both JMS Marketing and Dobbe Marketing proposals were well done and he would be more in favor of Dobbe. Mr. Richter said since the bid was broken down into components, we would be able to select what we would want. Ms. Viger said after reading the top two she believes that it would be a full time job for a staff member to keep up with everything and they have enough to do. She would propose that the bid be scaled back.

Mr. Haleblian asked if Component #1 would be covered in the I Shop Certificate portion of the budget and not the EDC's budget. Mr. Richter said no.

Ms. Feddersen asked how much awareness do the businesses receive from the newspaper ads. She believes that radio has more impact since we are in our cars more.

Ms. Viger believes that Component #2 is the most important but some items could be eliminated. She is not big on contests (photo, video, etc.) as well as blogs. Mr. Fowler said the I Shop video was shown on the Northwest Herald's website. Ms. Viger said it would have been better if it was shorter.

Mr. Haleblian said he likes the proposal from Dobbe Marketing but it needs to be tweaked. Ms. Feddersen believes there is a log spent on paper advertisements. Mr. Haleblian agrees that print ads don't do much. He asked if there was any way to track what publication or website people got the I Shop Certificate application

from. Mr. Richter said no. Mr. Haleblian suggested that a code be added to the advertisements next year so that can be tracked.

Mr. Richter said he can see a conflict on how to select a business to be featured in the Business of the Week section. Ms. Feddersen suggested that we have consumers give recommendations or even a mystery shopper. Ms. Viger suggested that a business type be featured for a particular month and those businesses involved with the I Shop program be notified to get their information in. Mr. Riley said if they run out of business categories they could feature locations such as Route 176 or Route 14.

Mr. Fowler suggested that Staff contact the finalists to tweak their proposals eliminating some of the items that were discussed earlier. Mr. Richter said he was concerned with the trunk ads. Mr. Fowler suggested they contact Downtown Main Street to see how they run their monthly ads – if they sell them or the Herald does.

Ms. Feddersen suggested that they charge a fee to allow temporary signs to be out longer than 30 days. Mr. Richter said that would require a sign variation and he is not certain how this could be done in conjunction with this program. Mr. Haleblian said he was never approached about being part of the trunk ad for the I Shop program.

Mr. Richter said he will seek a clarification from the vendors with a revised scope. He will send the information to the members.

New business welcoming program

Mr. Richter has asked the Building Division to give him copies of all new occupancy applications. Ms. Feddersen said we can get that information from the business licenses. Mr. Richter said the City does not have a general business license.

Mr. Richter suggested that a letter be sent from the EDC welcoming the business to Crystal Lake. Ms. Viger said later we can send them information on the I Shop program. Ms. Feddersen said she will contact the Chamber about how they handle new businesses. Mr. Richter said he will put together a draft letter and will get that to the members as well as a current listing of new businesses in the City.

Retention Survey

Mr. Richter said he had contacted another community about their retention survey. He said they initially send out a short survey and then schedule time for a longer survey. Mr. Richter said he will send a draft of a short survey to the members. Ms. Feddersen suggested that a question be added asking how they market their business to draw customers.

Staff projects and reports

Recruitment initiatives

Mr. Richter said the City is testing a tracking system that needs to be customized. This will help him create reports for the EDC and Council.

Mr. Richter said on the next agenda there will be information on the possible redevelopment of the Crystal Court Shopping Center. Staff has been in contact with Legat Architects and handed out three draft plans which included mixed uses.

Ms. Feddersen said there is a center in Ohio that was recently redeveloped with mixed uses and has a downtown feel.

Mr. Fowler asked how realistic is this redevelopment. Mr. Richter said the City is not contemplating purchasing the property and it is part of the TIF district, but that this would be a way to obtain the support of the PZC and City Council on a proposed redevelopment plan that could be sent to developers.

Organization Reports

Downtown Crystal Lake (Brian Fowler)

Mr. Fowler said they are very excited about the new gazebo. Ms. Feddersen asked about the Classic Car Nights. Mr. Fowler said that had run its course and is dead.

Committee for Business Support (Terry Feddersen)

There was no meeting this past month.

McHenry County Economic Development Corporation (Brian Fowler)

Mr. Fowler said he and Mr. Richter had met with a representative from the MCEDC. He said they will be working together more in the future.

City of Crystal Lake (James Richter II)

Mr. Richter stated that Bickford Cottage EDC award will be given today at 11:30 a.m. He said the second award will be given to Advocate on Wednesday at 4:30. He said Advocate is so happy to receive the award they have done press releases.

Mr. Riley said the shopping center forum was wonderful. Mr. Haleblan said the business owners wanted to know that we are concerned for them. Mr. Richter said it was a chance for them to meet the Mayor and Staff. Mr. Haleblan said the economy is bad everywhere – it isn't just Crystal Lake.

Comments from the Commission

Mr. Haleblan asked what businesses have been around the longest and have weathered economic storms more than once. A number of businesses were mentioned. He said we might want to do articles on those businesses.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 a.m.