

City of Crystal Lake Economic Development Committee
Regular Meeting
August 25, 2009 – 7:30 a.m.
Municipal Complex – Council Chambers Executive Conference Room

Call to Order

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

Roll Call/Attendance

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

James Richter II, Assistant Director of Economic Development, was present from staff. Brett Hopkins, Councilman, Jim Christensen with JCBCM Consulting LTD, and Gary Reece, Chamber President, were also present.

Approve minutes of the June 23, 2009 and July 28, 2009 meetings

Ms. Feddersen moved to approve the minutes from the June 23, 2009 EDC meeting as presented. Mr. Affrunti seconded the motion. On voice vote, members Affrunti, Bawolek, Feddersen, Fowler, Riley, Viger, and Haleblian voted aye. Motion passed.

Ms. Feddersen moved to approve the minutes from the July 28, 2009 EDC meeting as presented. Mr. Affrunti seconded the motion. On roll vote, members Affrunti, Feddersen, Viger, and Riley voted aye. Members Bawolek, Fowler, and Haleblian abstained.

Public participation and comments

There was no one present who wished to speak.

Business continuity management presentation

Mr. Christensen said he is a certified business continuity consultant and his background. He said having a business continuity plan is important for a business to have. Every organization depends on many things. If any one major part is removed, it can be catastrophic to the business. There are natural disasters as well as human disasters organizations need to plan for. Mr. Christensen asked how many businesses could be shut down for 2 weeks and still be viable. He said that 6% of the rail traffic is hazardous material and that is something we have no control over.

Mr. Christensen said an organization needs to have a program to address outages ahead of time. The time to plan is before it is needed. The process to create the document/plan is just as important as the document/plan itself. He said there are three core elements to a plan: action list, crisis list, and predisposition of certain assets. After a plan is created, it needs to be reviewed and updated on an annual basis and possibly sections need to be reviewed more often.

Ms. Feddersen asked about the cost of such a plan. Mr. Christensen said he charges by the hour and it depends on the amount of time needed. He said most business in downtown Chicago have plans such as this but the further out into the suburbs you go, fewer businesses have them.

Mr. Affrunti asked where insurance fits in. Mr. Christensen said it is part of the plan and you need the right coverage.

Ms. Feddersen asked if a small business has one person who does everything, is there contingencies if there are health issues. Mr. Christensen said that is part of the plan. Mr. Affrunti feels that everyone in business should have a plan like this. Mr. Christensen said especially in this business environment. He said if computers are used in a business they should be backed up regularly but that information should be kept off site. It should also be checked to be sure the information that was to be saved is on there and not corrupted.

The members thanked Mr. Christensen for his presentation.

EDC Projects

I Shop Crystal Lake program

A. Review final version of the ishopcl.com website prior to launch

Mr. Richter said they are near the final version of the I Shop CL website. He showed the home page and said it was suggested that the photos be changed since they are mostly of the downtown area. They changed the "Business of the Week" to "Featured Business." They felt it was more appropriate. They will be able to select 5, 10 or all of the businesses for that area. Every time someone clicks on the site the business information will change. The members agreed with the name change.

Ms. Viger asked if someone would need to scroll down to see the entire page. Mr. Richter said he believes so, but it depends upon the browser that is being used. Ms. Viger suggested that the icons be made smaller.

Mr. Richter showed the business web page. This is a template and the business inputs their information. Staff will need to review and approve the information before it can be "live" on the website. If there is a problem, we will call the business to explain what and why it needs to be changed. Mr. Hopkins asked if there are any hyperlinks. Mr. Richter said only to the business' website at this time.

Mr. Affrunti said he can't believe there is no charge for this service. Mr. Richter said it is part of the I Shop CL program. Mr. Reece said there are many businesses who are still gun shy that this is a free service. Mr. Haleblian said it is too early to charge for this but if the site were to expand in the future, that may be a possibility.

Mr. Richter said there can be coupons set up by the businesses. They too are templates. When the expiration date is reached, the coupon automatically will be deleted. There won't be any additional staff time checking on the dates. There is also a map link for each business and they can also add information to the calendar.

Ms. Feddersen asked if we will be tracking the e-mail hits. Mr. Richter said it will be the IP address and not individual e-mail addresses.

Mr. Richter showed how businesses sign into the site. We will be receiving notification of a new business signing up so we can send them a thank you as well as a window cling. Ms. Feddersen asked about businesses that are not retail. Mr. Richter said they are also included. He added that he receives copies of all occupancy applications from the Building Division and they will be sent information inviting them to join the I Shop program. It will be sent to them separately so as not to be overlooked with all of the other paperwork they are given by the Building Division as part of the occupancy process.

Mr. Reece asked when the new website will be live. Mr. Richter said hopefully by Friday. We will be entering the business information for those who have already signed up for I Shop. We will notify them that they can go in to update their information – hours they are open, etc. – which we will review and approve. It was suggested that “Where do you shop?” be changed to “Benefits for Shopping Crystal Lake.”

Mr. Affrunti asked when the information for the Holiday certificate is going on the site. Mr. Richter said the site will show both the Holiday and car incentive programs if one of the video segments is removed.

Ms. Feddersen asked for a list of businesses that have not signed up for I Shop.

B. Advertising and Promotions program

Mr. Richter said they are making good progress on the craft wrap for the ads in the Sunday Northwest Herald. There are 6-8 spaces sold and the rate is cheaper than the regular rate. He said there hasn't been an overwhelming response to this yet. Mr. Fowler said most of the businesses are waiting to see what it is like before they sign up. Mr. Hopkins asked how the businesses are finding out about this. Mr. Richter said it was part of the RFP that Dobbe Marketing will be selling the spaces. Mr. Haleblian said he met with Ms. Dobbe and she indicated they are hard to fill. He believes as time goes on it will get more involvement.

Ms. Feddersen asked if two businesses could share one space. Mr. Richter said he believes so. Mr. Haleblian said the ad itself is rather small.

Ms. Viger suggested that instead of “Shop Smart” it should read “Shop Local.”

Mr. Richter said they are also moving on a video for car dealers that will be about 30 seconds. They are 3-4 dealerships that are interested. They can also show the video in their waiting rooms. Mr. Reece is concerned that other businesses will say why not do a video for their type of business. He doesn't want to be showing favorites. Mr. Richter said not all of the dealerships have signed on for this. Mr. Hopkins said it may be a corporate problem.

Mr. Richter said they will table this so he can check into what can be done.

Mr. Richter said Dobbe Marketing was to attend the Chamber Mixers to pitch I Shop but she felt that having a display may be a good idea. He has spoken with the Chamber about this. They have had other businesses request having a display and been turned down. Mr. Reece said as a compromise, the Chamber can provide information in the orientation packets for the new businesses. They can even have it available for their business breakfast programs.

Ms. Feddersen suggested that there be incentives for businesses to bring in other businesses to the I Shop program. Mr. Richter said that would be difficult since they don't have an endless budget. Mr. Reece said there are so many benefits to this program he doesn't understand why businesses are hesitating - especially since it doesn't cost them a dime. Mr. Richter said information is being put in the City newsletter and the Chamber has also been good enough to get the word out.

Mr. Richter said they are working on a post card that will have a perforated card that can be sent back to the City for the business to be added to the I Shop program. Ms. Feddersen felt that an e-mail blast would work better. Mr. Richter said the post card was part of the RFP.

Mr. Richter said the I Shop logo is being trademarked. He was amazed that it takes more than a year to go through the process. They are also working on banners for various parts of town such as Anderson BMW across from another car dealership across Route 31 that is not in the City limits regarding the car incentive program. There could also be banners put up in shopping centers with the owners' approval for the Holiday certificate program. Mr. Fowler feels the dealerships will prefer the banners to the video. Ms. Viger suggested that they be generic enough to use for many years. Mr. Affrunti said he has seen banners/signs recently that look like sails. Ms. Viger said they are very nice and catches the eye.

Mr. Richter said the I Shop roadway signs have been redesigned and are larger so the website can be seen. He said they need to get McHenry County Highway permits for their signs.

Mr. Richter said they have received about 1000 applications for the Back to School promotion and the first 300 gift certificates were sent out recently. Since the cut off is September 1 for the applications, he doesn't believe they will max out on the program. Mr. Haleblian feels the time frame was too short for making purchases. Ms. Viger suggested that we talk with retailers and get feedback about the time frame, etc.

Mr. Richter said there were 279 applications received for the car incentive so far. He said Brilliance Honda is doing very well. He is sure that this program will last through the end of the year as planned.

Business retention

A. Visitation plan scheduling

Mr. Richter said he gave the members a copy of an article from a planning publication regarding business survey. It suggests that a face to face discussion is better than a survey. Attached was also a possible schedule, list of businesses to talk with as well as the final short survey so the same information can be achieved out of the face to face discussions. Mr. Richter said Staff has visited a few businesses recently and they are proposing that members also attend meetings with the staff members. It would only be one day a month for about an hour. Staff will arrange the meeting times and then will contact the members for availability.

Mr. Haleblian said he heard that Alexander Lumber was moving to Ridgefield. Mr. Richter said they have been in contact with them.

Economic Development incentives update

A. Façade Improvement / Commercial Tenant Improvement program

Mr. Richter presented a list of applications that have been received for grant funding. The challenge we are having is regarding eligibility. Office users are applying for the program which was intended for retail businesses. After we began receiving applications, staff revisited the workshop discussions meeting minutes, agenda supplements, and all information indicates that the legislative intent of this project use to facilitate business occupancies in vacant sales tax revenue generating retail spaces.

Mr. Fowler said anything to help fill up vacancies would be a benefit. He said if the offices are filled, those employees will spend money in Crystal Lake such as going out to lunch, running errands, etc. Mr. Richter said

he has not called them to say they are not eligible. Mr. Reece said filling spaces will help retail. It's all hand in hand. Mr. Fowler said if the business creates or retains jobs it should qualify for the incentives. Mr. Richter said he is concerned that office uses may dominate the applications we receive. Mr. Bawolek said this will help with business retention. Mr. Reece said only about 10% of the total funding has been applied for. This is great for small businesses. Mr. Bawolek said this also shows business that Crystal Lake wants to cooperate with them. Mr. Affrunti said we don't want to dangle a carrot out in front of them and then tell them that they don't qualify.

Mr. Fowler moved that the Façade Improvement and Commercial Tenant Improvement Programs be revised to include business uses which creates jobs or retains jobs including commercial office uses and manufacturers. Mr. Affrunti seconded the motion. On voice vote all members voted aye. Motion passed.

Organization Reports:

Downtown Crystal Lake

Mr. Fowler said the National Night Out was held on Saturday. Mr. Reece said it was very family oriented and a great idea. He said it should have been promoted better. Mr. Fowler said the last lunch in the park will be held this Friday. They have been very successful.

Committee for Business Support

There are no meetings during the summer months.

McHenry County Economic Development Corporation (Brian Fowler)

Mr. Fowler said the MCEDC has a new director. Recently there was a grant given to a Crystal Lake business for software and employee training. Mr. Richter mentioned that he would be meeting with her later this week.

City of Crystal Lake

Mr. Richter said they are planning to hold an EDC forum regarding the City's Certificate of Occupancy requirements. The forum will review how the process works and it will be held in the next month. Mr. Affrunti suggested that Pepper Construction be invited. They will give very positive feedback on the process. Mr. Haleblian said Pepper Construction has a lot of credibility. Mr. Reece said he has met with people who said things were changing at the City. The original meeting was generally positive and people have changed their perception of the City. Mr. Richter said it was the follow up on the information obtained in the meetings. The consensus of the Committee was to hold the meeting at lunch time.

Comments from the Committee

Ms. Feddersen said she is concerned with the number of seniors who live in Summerset apartments and the association will not install ramps for those in wheelchairs. The seniors have asked many times for the ramps. Mr. Richter said the Fire Department does do life safety inspections. He will check it out.

Ms. Feddersen asked that Mr. Richter accompany her on a visit to a retailer who has concerns. Mr. Richter said he would be glad to attend.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:35 a.m.