

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**OF WEDNESDAY, JULY 22, 2009**  
**LIGHTHOUSE LOFTS-7:30 P.M.**  
**1607 SIMPSON STREET**  
**EVANSTON, IL 60201**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ald. Rainey, Ald. Burrus, Ald. Fiske, Ald. Grover,  
Ald. Tendam, Ald. Wynne, Raymond Zenkich

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Ald. Jean-Baptiste, Robert Creamer, Seth Freeman,  
Dan Mennemeyer

**PRESIDING OFFICIAL:** Ald. Rainey, Chair

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Ald. Holmes

**STAFF PRESENT:** Morris Robinson-*Economic Development Planner*, Susan  
Guderley-*Interim Asst. Director of Planning*, Craig  
Sklenar-*General Planner*

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Jon Leineweber & Muffy McCauley- *Developers and  
Hosts*, Carolyn Dellutri-*Executive Director, EVMARK*  
Jeff Coney-*Director, Economic Development,*  
*Northwestern University*, the Press and Interested Citizens

**SUMMARY OF THE MEETING:**

**I.** Chair Rainey called the EDC Meeting to order at approximately 7:50 P.M. and thanked the hosts, Jon Leineweber and Muffy McCauley (husband and wife) for their generosity in providing the Light Lofts venue for the meeting and for the delicious refreshments.

Staff member Morris Robinson asked to be recognized to share information provided by Committee member Mennemeyer who was unable to attend the meeting. "The Fountain Square Art Festival was considered a success. A total of \$27,000 in sales was achieved compared to \$18,000 last year. The art that sold was primarily in the \$100 range. The more expensive items, \$500 and above hardly moved at all. Member Mennemeyer and Jonathan Perman polled several of the artists selling the more expensive items and learned that they are considering whether or not to return next year".

Also, Ms. Ann Diener asked staff member Robinson to share a Wall Street Journal Article by Joseph Epstein, a downtown Evanston resident, disparaging Evanston retail shops in the downtown area. After briefly mentioning the article, Staff member Robinson pledged to email the committee members the article and a well reasoned rebuttal to the Journal submitted by Jonathon Perman.

**II. TOUR OF THE LIGHTHOUSE LOFTS**

Although a tour of the Lighthouse Lofts was scheduled as the next agenda item, Chair Rainey suggested that the Committee consider the business items on the agenda first and save the tour for last. The EDC concurred.

**III. APPROVAL OF THE EDC MEETING MINUTES OF JUNE 24, 2009**

Chair Rainey asked for a motion to approve the June 24, 2009 EDC and the committee members voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

**IV. EPA CLIMATE SHOWCASE COMMUNITIES RFA & DRAFT GRANT REQUEST**

Chair Rainey announced that the next business agenda item concerned an Environmental Protection Agency grant application prepared by staff member Carolyn Collopy, the Sustainable Programs Coordinator with assistance provided by Community Development Department Interim Director and staff. Chair Rainey informed the EDC that the application documents had actually been approved and submitted prior to the EDC Meeting in order to make the deadline and asked staff to comment. Staff member Robinson explained to the EDC that the grant proposal for approximately \$500,000 with a city "in kind 50 % matching amount" is for a two year energy audit and revolving interest free loan program that will implement sustainable opportunities to increase energy efficiencies in commercial buildings for small business owners. If the grant is approved it will be administered in conjunction with the ComEd "The Smart Ideas program and the micro loans provided, ranging from \$10,000 or less, will be repaid via the recipients water utility bill.

Also, if the grant is approved, the program will provide an additional tool for City Planners to use for assisting the small merchant community. Together with the city's Neighborhood Business District Improvement Program and the Storefront Improvement Program, staff will enhance its small business assistance outreach in a significant way. Staff member Susan Guderley noted that the program will be administered by Community Development Department staff. The EDC members expressed their support for the grant application and the program concept.

**V. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WEB SITE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS UPDATE**

Chair Rainey next asked staff member Craig Sklenar to introduce himself to the EDC and provide an update on the Economic Development Planning web page improvement efforts.

Staff member Sklenar informed the EDC that the process to improve the Economic Development web page began with immediate triage remedies. The out dated photo of the pre-construction Sherman Plaza was replaced with a currant aerial view of the city and updated information including the latest vacant properties list and TIF District maps which were also posted. Ald. Burrus asked to speak and stated that she had visited the web site for the municipalities of Des Plaines, Morton Grove and Bartlet and by comparison found Evanston's web site lacking in several ways. Ald. Burrus was persistent in her desire to see a vastly improved web site.

Staff member Sklenar advised the EDC that the efforts made to date to improve the economic development web page is just the beginning of the ongoing improvement process and that suggestions from the EDC will be incorporated over the next few months. Many ideas that had been discussed by planning personnel such as links to Evmark, the Chamber of Commerce and other internal departments were explained to the EDC for their initial reaction or clarification. Staff member Robinson added that the new and improved web page(s) will also have a data collection for inquiries from various departments in the city. Staff member Sklenar suggested that one way to accomplish the capturing of data was to have a sign in section on the page for more detailed information.

In general, the EDC members were enthusiastic about the prospect of an improved economic development web page(s) and offered constructive comments. As for general improvements for the city's web site, staff will confer with BPAT personnel and inform them of the EDC's concerns. The critical needs for the improvements were such that Chair Rainey stated that it should be the lead update agenda item for the next EDC Meeting. In the interim, some committee members offered to contact staff member Sklenar and offer suggestions and advice for consideration in the improvement effort.

**ACTION TAKEN: No action by vote was required.**

**VI. TAX INCREMENT FINANCING DISTRICTS**

Chair Rainey announced the next agenda item concerned the six Tax Increment Financing Districts in the City and decided to hold that agenda item for last.

**VII. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNER UPDATE**

Included in the Economic Development Committee packets were a number of documents pertaining to economic development activities. These documents consisted of: the Business Visitation & Retention operating procedure; Business Retention and Attraction Visits report; Neighborhood Business district Improvement Program procedure; Neighborhood Storefront Improvement Program procedure; Space Availability inquiry report and Recent New Business Status Reports.

Chair Rainey asked staff member Robinson to proceed with the update. Staff member Robinson informed the EDC that he developed the business visitation/retention procedure two years ago to have a working document for all potential city departments that may be impacted by the visitations. Although the document was presented to the former City Manager, Interim City Managers and department heads, it was never officially approved. During the past two years, staff member Robinson has visited most if not all of the major manufacturers and scores of small entrepreneurs, often resolving vexing issues where possible. However, the most important issues the merchants face concern the need for more parking and the relatively high real estate taxes levied in Evanston. In some instances, staff member Robinson was successful in helping with increased parking opportunities but there is little in the way of alleviating high tax issues.

When staff member Robinson advised the EDC that “write-ups” of the visits were made and are on file, Chair Rainey said she was unaware of their existence and asked why the EDC never saw the reports. Staff member Robinson replied that since the procedure was not officially approved he limited distribution to the City Manager and senior staff. When asked if the EDC would like to see some of the reports, chair Rainey replied absolutely and as such they will be included in the next EDC meeting packet.

Ald. Burrus stated that she was aware that when making the calls Staff member Robinson provided the business officials with a packet of useful information and city staff contact lists, but wanted to know what kind of assistance tools or programs staff member Robinson gave the business officials at the initial visits. Staff member Robinson said that he didn’t understand the question and stated that the initial visits to the businesses were primarily for the purpose of listening and to understand what their concerns, if any, were; not to provide a laundry list of possible assistance programs from the city which may or may not be germane to the situation. After listening to the business officials and if it is determined that there were concerns that the city could address, immediate action is then taken utilizing the appropriate process or program.

Staff member Robinson continued, stating that with the current economic downturn, the timing is perfect for re-focusing attention to the many small businesses and retailers in the city and explained the Neighborhood Business District Improvement Program and the Neighborhood Storefront Improvement program and how they benefited the neighborhood business district associations and individual merchants. If the EPA grant is approved, it will provide another tool that can be bundled with those programs.

Ald. Grover noted the Mr. Kevin O’Connor was in the audience and commented that when he ran for aldermanic office he visited every store on Central Street and she was confident if staff member Robinson contacted Mr. O’Connor he would offer his expertise. Staff member Robinson reminded the EDC that in the recent past a comprehensive master plan was created for Central Street.

Input for the master plan was received from the entire residential and commercial community. Additionally, staff member Robinson has been working with the Central Street Merchants Association for several years. Mr. O'Connor also stated that his visits were brief while yet time consuming and perhaps viewed differently by the merchants since he was not a city official. Mr. O'Connor stated that what ever information he had he would be happy to share and asked for and received a business card from staff member Robinson. Chair Rainey mentioned how the business attraction visit she made with staff member Robinson to an independent grocer took the entire day.

Ald. Burrus stated that she thought the EDC asked for the Economic Development Planner to provide a report listing incoming telephone inquiries regarding available space or establishing a business or in the nature of doing business in the city. After locating her report which contained five such inquiries the impression by Ald. Burrus was that the number was insufficient. Ald. Holmes and other audience members commented that staff member Robinson handled other inquiries, one of which required several follow-ups that they were aware of during the past month. Staff member Robinson concluded the comments by stating the difficulty in clerically tracking all incoming calls when taken in the context of the press of day to day business activities. Ald. Burrus also wanted to know if staff will canvass the city for vacant spaces in addition to the listing report provided by ComEd so that the web page will reflect a report with the City's name on it. Staff concurred to the extent that it is possible.

With regards to the new business license application reports for restaurants and retail, the EDC members offered suggestions on how the departments issuing the reports can improve the documents. One of the suggestions was to add an applicant contact column with name and phone number on the report. Another suggestion was to define the term "license pending." Staff member Robinson stated that the suggestions would be passed on to the report issuers. The aldermen on the EDC were most concerned about not being able to know before hand if a new business establishment has applied for a business license to operate a business in their respective wards. Staff commented that they are exploring ways to incorporate all of the entry points for business inquiries, such as the City Managers Office; Zoning Division; the Collectors Office; the Health Department; the Planning Division and any other areas within the Civic Center.

Chair Rainey reintroduced the TIF Increment Financing Districts agenda item and asked staff member Robinson for comments. Staff member Robinson explained that the reason the Annual Joint Review Board Meeting Minutes from December 2008 and maps of the city's six TIF Districts were included in the EDC packet was to give the new EDC members an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the districts and their general performance history.

The EDC was advised that the Downtown II Research Park TIF District will terminate as of December 31, 2009. Chair Rainey asked if the actual TIF District annual report documents were posted on the city web site.

Staff member Robinson stated that he didn't believe so but would check with the Finance Department. There were no other inquiries from the EDC members with regard to the TIF Districts documents.

**VIII. COMMUNICATIONS**

The communication documents contained in the packet were acknowledged without further comment.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT:**

**ACTION TAKEN:**

Chair Rainey asked for a motion to cancel the August 26, 2009 EDC Meeting. Ald. Wynne moved to cancel the meeting and the measure received a second and was unanimously approved the motion.

There being no further business, Chair Rainey adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:45 P.M. at which time the property owner hosts provided the EDC and audience with a tour of the Lighthouse Lofts redevelopment project. The EDC was impressed with the quality and value of the project.

**The Economic Development Committee Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, August 26, 2009 at 7:30 P.M. at the Civic Center in Room 2404 has been canceled. The next meeting will be in September 2009, date and location to be announced.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Morris E. Robinson  
Economic Development Planner

