



Economic Development Commission

**Wednesday, May 22, 2019
Council Chambers Room**

Commissioners Present

James Kucienski, Chairman
Rivak Albazi
James Berger
Myles Berman
Maureen Ehrenberg
Tim Garcia
Joe Spagnoli
Jennifer Spino
Leonard Weiss

Commissioners Absent

Staff Present

Anne Marie Gaura, Village Manager
Steve McNellis, Community Development Director
Douglas Hammel, Community Development Manager

1. Call to Order/ Quorum Declaration

Noting that a quorum of nine members was present in the room, the meeting was called to order by Chairman Kucienski at 8:02 AM.

2. Minutes Approval

Chairman Kucienski asked the Commission if any edits were to be made to the March 20, 2019 meeting minutes.

Hearing no corrections, Chairman Kucienski called for a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Albazi moved and Commissioner Ehrenberg seconded the motion. There was a consensus to approve the minutes.

3. Welcome to New EDC Commissioners

Director McNellis noted to the EDC that former Commissioners McCoy and Dyer had recently stepped-down from the Commission, leaving two openings, which have been

filled by new Commissioners Spino and Weiss. He welcomed the two new Commissioners, summarized their work experience and accomplishments, and thanked them for their time commitment and dedication to the Village. Chairman Kucienski also welcomed the new Commissioners and asked the current Commissioners to weigh-in on their personal background and experience, so as to familiarize the Commissioners with one another. Finally, Chairman Kucienski noted that this was a good time for the new Commissioners to join as the EDC is about to re-start a “brainstorming workshop” to look at the community and identify areas where economic development should be focused upon.

At this time, Director McNellis requested a change in the agenda, to move to Agenda Item #6, Other Business, as there is a minor item for which staff is seeking the EDC’s feedback prior to concentrating on this morning’s workshop. There was a consensus to move to Agenda Item #6.

6. Other Business

Director McNellis provided background on the previously-recommended PEP Grant at 7250 N. Cicero Avenue, which was approved by the Village Board this past April. Since that time, the Petitioner has gone back out to the property with their Landscape Architect, and is now asking for a couple of minor revisions to the plan that was part of their approved PEP Grant. These are revisions they feel will benefit their site by adding “winter interest.”

The two proposed revisions are: 1) Replace 20% of the proposed ornamental grasses at the building foundation with 10 new Dense Yews, and 2) Replace 17 Knockout Roses, in the walkway leading to the building, with an equal number of Boxwood. This is being requested in order to add more evergreens, not to reduce the cost of the project. In fact, the proposed plant material is more expensive than the original plan; however, the Petitioner is not requesting any additional funds in their PEP Grant.

Director McNellis noted this is a minor change that might typically be one that could be approved at the staff-level, however, because there was so much discussion by the EDC about replacing evergreens with grasses at the building foundation, staff felt it was important to get the EDC’s consideration and consensus for the revisions. He further noted that the Village Code recommends “winter interest” in landscape designs, so these revisions would make the plan more in compliance with Code requirements.

Commissioner Ehrenberg noted that the EDC had previously commented on their species choices, and asked them to revisit those choices and consider additional evergreens. She believed the proposed revisions were more in keeping with what the EDC wanted to see. Commissioner Berman inquired as to whether or not the proposed grant amount would change, to which Director McNellis responded that it would not. Director McNellis asked

if there was a consensus of the EDC that the revised Landscape Plan met the spirit of the previous plan, for which the PEP Grant was received, to which the EDC responded affirmatively.

4. Continued Workshop on Targeted Business Development & Marketing

Chairman Kucienski asked Director McNellis to provide the EDC background information on the topic and how the EDC arrived at today's discussion. Director McNellis directed attention to the agenda for today's discussion and noted that there was no expectation that the EDC would get through the entire process this morning. He noted that the workshop portion of the discussion would be handled by Development Manager Doug Hammel, who has experience facilitating such discussions based on his years of experience as a private Planning consultant.

Director McNellis began by recapping the overlay maps showing existing conditions in the Village, including traffic counts, transit lines and bike trails, commercial nodes, TIF Districts and traffic gateways. Commissioner Ehrenberg inquired as to the traffic counts anticipated on Touhy once the District 1860 project is completed. Director McNellis stated that he would obtain that information and provide to the EDC.

Chairman Kucienski noted that stores like Kohl's and Penney's are reporting nationally that their sales are down. He suggested that if, in the future, the Mall owners want to consider a TIF there to help redevelop, it may be advisable for the Village to consider it, to help the mall to survive. Director McNellis noted that the mall has at least considered, down the line, possibly incorporating multi-family housing to their development, in order to have a built-in population. Chairman Kucienski noted that Northbrook Court is now in a TIF District and will be adding multi-family residential where Macy's is located.

Director McNellis suggested that the EDC next discuss community assets and liabilities on a macro-level, considering the community as a whole, which will be the basis for moving into targeted areas. He turned the discussion over to Development Manager Hammel, who explained what staff was hoping to achieve in the workshop. He then stated that the discussion would start with the overall assets, which the Village can build upon, and liabilities that we have to overcome.

Commissioner Ehrenberg recommended that, per a good idea in a recent workshop she participated in, that instead of a discussion between assets and liabilities, there be a middle-ground, rather than categorizing thoughts as being in one polarized category or another. Development Manager Hammel agreed and set-about encouraging the EDC to develop a list of issues, not necessarily on one end of the scale or the other.

Commissioner Berman kicked-off the discussion stating there are challenges with the Village's historical zoning, small commercial lot sizes, pressure from development in other contiguous suburbs, and the dated aesthetic and small size of the Lincolnwood Town Center. Commissioner Weiss noted that the Town Center has a low vacancy rate and Kohl's at the mall is a high-performing store, so it is a regional draw and the Village does receive tax revenue from it. An additional positive is that the owners of the mall were aggressive in filling the Carson's space after that store closed. He noted that perhaps the mall should look at developing the open area behind their building, and consider developing uses that Skokie does not have, such as uses that attract Millennials, including entertainment uses. He further noted Pinstripes in Northbrook as a good example, and stated that these aren't uses that necessarily need frontage.

Commissioner Ehrenberg noted that a key to this workshop is about helping Lincolnwood become a place for Millennials and Gen. Z, so they have a place to come back to after they graduate from school. She stated that Lincolnwood's "brand" is not necessarily hip, but Downtown Skokie is developing that kind of vibe. The Village should look at developing a sustainability ethos, as we already have great parks and have possibilities with our environment. She believes the Village should have a strong commitment to diversity, inclusion and the environment, and that these are all part of sustainability. Commissioner Weiss felt that the District 1860 project will accomplish a lot of this by attracting people to move to Lincolnwood. The District 1860 site has good access and perhaps can add uses that are a regional draw that cannot be had elsewhere in the area.

Commissioner Berman continued on with challenges for Lincolnwood, including the fact there is no Downtown or central area. He noted that Lincoln Avenue could have served that purpose at one time but it does not now. He further noted Lincolnwood currently does not have an identifiable shopping street. Commissioner Ehrenberg stated that big companies don't necessarily gravitate to a Downtown area, but rather, they go to an area that can create a lot of foot traffic, has entertainment, has a place to work and live and has those intangibles people like, including outside activity, people out on bikes and with their dogs. She suggested that the Village should look at adaptive re-use, whether its adding residential into the Lincolnwood Business Center, or adding co-working, start-ups, coffee shops and bars.

Commissioner Garcia noted that Northbrook has created multiple Downtowns and different commercial areas. Commissioner Berman noted that Evanston has done a great job of becoming a destination. He further noted that Lincolnwood's greatest attribute is our location, as we are proximate to the city, O'Hare and the North. He also stated that Lincolnwood has good schools, which are central, well-maintained and diverse. Chairman Kucienski and Commissioner Spino also noted that the Village has good, well-used parks.

Commissioner Weiss returned to the subject of District 1860. He noted that the developer of this project may know other developers that are interested in redeveloping this area. Development Manager Hammel reminded the EDC that staff is currently working on a plan for this area known as the North Gateway Sub-Area Plan. This plan specifically targets the area surrounding District 1860. In addition, the Comprehensive Plan addresses redevelopment and transformation of the area to the west of the District 1860 project.

Returning to the discussion on the mall, Director McNellis noted that the mall ownership is looking at possible improvements. In anticipation of improvements, they have recently moved the mall up from a Tier II to Tier I mall in their portfolio, opening up further financial investment by the company in this property, in order to upgrade the facility. Commissioner Spagnoli stated that there is an opportunity for the mall to do something with the open parking lot to the south of their building.

Commissioner Berman compared the differences in a community like Rosemont to the environment in Lincolnwood. He noted that Rosemont has no population to speak of, and they have a lot of ability politically, whereas Lincolnwood has a larger, activist population, which makes it much more difficult to make change quickly. He noted the formerly proposed Hyatt on Cicero Avenue that he believed to be appropriate in that location, but which never materialized because the neighbors didn't want it.

Commissioner Ehrenberg noted that the Village does have areas that, while quirky, could be gems if the Village rethinks them, rather than looking at what they were and have been for 40 years. These are areas where people wouldn't be upset with change, because they've already accepted what is there now. Finally, she noted that roads and aesthetics are also an issue right now. She focused on garbage and minimum standards for lawn maintenance.

Director McNellis presented a recap of previous work by the EDC regarding the defined hot zones and opportunities within each, in order to show the EDC their thinking of a year ago and see if that is still the EDC's position. Three hot zones were presented and discussed: Northeast Gateway, South Gateway and North Gateway.

Chairman Kucienski stated that he felt perhaps the EDC should look at Lincoln Avenue and create additional parking opportunities along this roadway to make it more attractive for redevelopment. He suggested the Village could undertake this, similar to a previous initiative at the northeast corner of Touhy and Crawford, so that Lincoln Avenue could add more destination restaurants, like Lou Malnatis'.

Commissioner Berman asked if the EDC wanted to focus on hotspots where things are, but are oddly-resourced or under-developed, or focus more where things aren't, such as

vacant property? He wondered which is easier to develop. Director McNellis mentioned that it may be easier to look at commercial nodes, where infill occurs around it, rather than a long linear corridor like Lincoln Avenue, unless you were looking at specific nodes along it.

Commissioner Berman asked if the Skokie project, in and around Walmart on Touhy, happened because a developer had a vision and assembled properties or did Skokie encourage redevelopment based on their own vision. Commissioner Ehrenberg noted that Skokie does reach out to the brokerage community to help explain their vision and see if the brokers know of businesses that might be interested in those areas. Skokie wants to know what they should do to help redevelop those areas. They also want to know there is an environment for development and willingness to work with them on their vision. Director McNellis noted that on this subject, the developer of District 1860, Tucker Development, has mentioned in public that their development was approved in record time due to the assistance of the Village. This is the kind of message you want to get out there.

Director McNellis noted that the mall is another area the Village should put resources into assisting with redevelopment, on an accelerated schedule, if they have projects in mind. He further noted that the EDC has shown, with incentive requests like Loeber, Zeigler and District 1860, that we will move quickly to help meet developer schedules.

Chairman Kucienski stated that the Village buying specific properties can be beneficial, such as Commissioner Spagnoli previously noted. This could involve the area behind Town Center mall, where you could consider creating an entertainment center, similar to what we see in Rosemont. Commissioner Spagnoli noted that in any blighted area, when hospitality comes in, it brings residential. This happens everywhere across the country.

Commissioner Albazi noted that on Lincoln you could add more entertainment, in the area between the Malnati's restaurant and Touhy, as this is an area that's under-utilized. Commissioner Spino noted that in looking at "Hot Zones", Lincoln/Devon comes to mind. That corridor is a gateway to the Village, but there's no excitement there. There are a lot of hard surfaces in that area, and not enough greenery. Overall, the entry to the Village there is nothing special.

Commissioner Ehrenberg noted that the big thing in real estate right now is to bring opportunity that doesn't require a lot of investment, but does take creativity. Commissioner Weiss discussed the need to look at where you get your biggest bang for the buck. He suggested the Village talk to the District 1860 and mall owners, as they have the biggest financial investment in the Village and they have a financial incentive to develop the area around them to bring in traffic. He suggested there are two important

areas prospective developers consider: 1) traffic, and 2) Is there a cooperative community? He again suggested that the District 1860 and mall owners have a lot more connections in the development community and ideas about what can be developed in and around them. Commissioner Ehrenberg agreed, but stated that those owners don't need the Village to have those conversations. She stated that if they have a vision, they're already reaching out. It is important the Village help facilitate that vision. So, she suggested the EDC concentrate on areas where they really need the Village to do something because the property is sitting there with nothing happening.

Development Manager Hammel noted there is nothing wrong with a Village describing a vision to a developer. It's important for a developer to know what a community is willing to accept. He noted, as an example, that with District 1860 the Village defined a vision for that area, and what the developer ended up bringing to the table is very much compatible with what the Village identified. The challenge is to look at one specific area and address a vision for it. He suggested that an appropriate end point for this morning's discussion is to pick 1-2 or even 3 of these specific areas as a starting point for the next meeting.

Commissioner Albazi suggested staff reach out to the District 1860 and mall owners to see if they are thinking of some specific redevelopment ideas that the Village could help them with. Director McNellis noted that those discussions are currently ongoing with both parties. He noted he didn't believe either party saw the Village as an impediment to their vision. He further noted there is a lot of good positive word-of-mouth about how the Village, including the Village Board, Commissions and staff, are collaborating with developers.

Chairman Kucienski inquired of the EDC as to what areas the workshop should concentrate on. Commissioner Spagnoli stated his opinion that the focus should be on the mall area, as there is interest there already and it is the most viable. Chairman Kucienski noted that there is no residential opposition in that area and already lots of traffic. There was a consensus of the EDC to focus on the mall area. Commissioner Ehrenberg noted that many years ago the EDC approached the former mall owners to suggest they should utilize the open land along their street frontages for outlots to develop, which they ended up doing. She further requested that staff revisit the idea of transitioning uses around the mall, especially on Capitol Drive, to more commercial uses.

Chairman Kucienski inquired if there were any other comments from the EDC for staff on this topic. Hearing none, he noted this workshop would be continued to the next meeting.

5. Reports

No business was discussed.

7. Public Forum

There was no public comment.

8. Prospective Businesses Forum

No business was discussed.

9. Adjournment

Commissioner Spagnoli moved for adjournment and was seconded by Commissioner Albazi. By consensus, the meeting was adjourned at 9:37 am.

Respectfully submitted:

Steve McNellis
Director of Community Development