

CLOQUET CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
Wednesday, March 2, 2016

Present: Bjerkness, Kolodge, Langley, Maki, Rock, Wilkinson, Mayor Hallback

Absent: None.

Staff: Fritsinger, Klassen, Butcher

Other: Jamie Lund, Pine Journal; Ross Peterson, Russ Smith, Mike Schultz

Joint Meeting with EDA

- Introductions were made by everyone in attendance. The Council meets with EDA annually to review the year's activities and discuss established future goals. Ross Peterson began by reviewing the 2016 work plan and priorities for 2016. Top priorities for 2016 include downtown redevelopment/revitalization; promotion of the development and maintenance of housing by implementing the 2014 Cloquet Housing Study; development of the Cloquet Business Park; and development of business and community marketing programs. Some items of priority on the EDA Work Plan include continuing Blandin Broadband Community Involvement with collaboration with Northeast Service Cooperative; continue to pursue grant opportunities; establish a metric to measure impact and value of redevelopment efforts; and Highway 45 commercial corridor redevelopment.
- Holly reviewed current EDA business loans and various EDA funds available for businesses and rehabilitation.
- Highlights of 2015 activities include \$885,500 SCDP funds for owner occupied, rental and commercial rehabilitation; assistance with the ISD #94 RFP for the old Middle School; initiation of downtown business district meetings with various businesses and property owners; Hwy 33/I-35 site marketing; and the County Blandin Broadband involvement.
- Mr. Bjerkness asked how long the information gathered in the housing study is valid. Ms. Butcher responded the information is good for five years.
- Business promotions in 2015 included Small Business Saturday, Manufacturing Month, promotions of new businesses, features and community issues on the EDA Facebook page.
- Council ED Goals include the development of a comprehensive business retention/expansion plan; development of strategy for the Hwy 33 corridor focusing on the north Hwy 33 Business Park and South Hwy 33; and outreach to downtown property owners.

Open Discussion

- Question on how the old middle School fits into the housing study. Mr. Peterson responded the RFP submitted would meet several of the housing needs in Cloquet, fitting 78% of our demographics. George Sherman, the developer who is interested in the project, spoke with EDA and shared in depth plans. He also met with the school board to discuss comparable projects this company has completed.
- Mr. Bjerkness questioned what role the City will play in zoning, plan approvals, etc. Ms. Butcher is anticipating that the City will be asked to take part in the public meeting for a panel discussion. If the school board approves the RFP and enters into a purchase agreement, the City may be asked to examine its development tools and assist with development process (EDA, Planning & Zoning, Building Code review and permitting).
- Mr. Kolodge inquired if there has been any expressed position of the City in this process so far? Ms. Butcher responded there has not. The bar for RFPs was set high to submit. Mr. Kolodge stated he feels the Council needs to discuss this at length. Ms. Butcher agreed that some discussion on understanding roles of the school district and the City needs to take place. For now, the City's role is to be supportive. Ms. Butcher stressed the importance that the future public

meeting by Sherman is attended by Council members. Mr. Fritsinger will post the meeting notice. Project time lines are critical because of the funds applied for historic and housing tax credits.

- Mr. Kolodge asked what the responsibility of the City is since the City does not own the property. Responsibility includes reviewing requests for development assistance, examining the site plan and zoning reviews and building code review. Economic Development is helping ISD #94 understand the process of development. Mr. Fritsinger commented that if the school district approves this proposal, the baton will be handed on to the City and Ms. Butcher will be work closely with the developer.
- Mr. Kolodge asked if there are any figures showing how many businesses were added in Cloquet? Mr. Fritsinger answered that no, there is not, but if the council sees a need for this, Holly will develop a plan to monitor. Ms. Butcher shared how retail has continued to change and that online sales are leading to the cool down of big box development. Many large businesses want to be near malls and there are few stand-alone draw sites as in the past. Outlet malls located 100 miles out of metro areas are also struggling. There has been little interest for the available Cloquet sites.
- The next step with the downtown business discussion is to get together again and break into groups to discuss the variety of issues they've categorized as prioritized. Priorities are varying between the downtown businesses and the west end businesses. West End's biggest concerns are the vacant store fronts and the lack of traffic due to lack district visibility.
- Mr. Kolodge asked what components make up EDAs priorities. Ms. Butcher responded that bringing awareness to how they can do things together is the key. One example of this is that many business/properties aren't aware there are funding sources available through the City.
- Mr. Bjerkness questioned if we need to redefine what downtown is? There are many housing opportunities available where businesses can benefit. The key is to be doing things to make them open and vibrant. Information from business owners is helpful with this issue. Discussion of the popularity of brew pubs and how City Code would need to be updated, but it is something that can be looked at.
- Discussion of the 2015 Clean Up Day, what worked and what didn't. Ms. Butcher feels that the first event in 2014 was so large, people had an unpleasant experience leading to the lack of participants in 2015. Also, the Carlton County transfer station has made changes since 2014 and people are more familiar with it and using it more. The consensus is a Clean Up Day in 2016 won't be worth it.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brian Fritsinger
City Administrator