

Village of Lemont
Planning and Zoning Commission
Regular Meeting of March 16, 2011

A meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission of the Village of Lemont was held at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 16, 2011, in the second floor small conference room of the Village Hall, 418 Main Street, Lemont, Illinois.

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Verify Quorum

Upon roll call the following were:

Present: Armijo, Maher, Spinelli, Schubert

Absent: Erber, O'Malley, Murphy

Village Planner Charity Jones and Planning and Economic Development Director Jim Brown were also present.

B. Approve Minutes

Commissioner Maher made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Armijo to approve the minutes of the February 16, 2011 meeting with no changes. A voice vote was taken:

Ayes: All

Nays: None

Motion passed

II. CHAIRMAN COMMENTS None

III. GENERAL DISCUSSION

A. What is Economic Development?

Mr. Brown stated that economic development was the effort to accommodate and stimulate economic activity. He said that the Comprehensive Plan's context can discuss such things as business retention, attracting new businesses, workforce development/education, business incentives, and tax policies. Mr. Brown stated that the current plan of 2002 is rather weak on economic development and he is hoping to improve this with the new Comprehensive Plan. He said that he and Mrs. Jones continue to field questions and misunderstandings as to what role the Village has in economic development. He stated that staff is welcome to expanding that role if the Board feels that it is necessary. Mr. Brown stated that years ago the Village did have a separate department for economic development; however that department no longer exists.

B. Past & Current Economic Development Efforts

Mr. Brown then showed a power point from Marquette that was from January 2005, during the planning of the Front Street lofts development. It showed where local spending was going, and what retail businesses the Village might try to attract. The focus was to develop the downtown as an area where people can live, shop and work.

Mr. Brown discussed the impact of sales tax revenue to the overall Village budget.

Commissioner Maher asked who owned the (former Tri-Central Marine) property on the other side of the railroad tracks downtown.

Mrs. Jones stated that MWRD. (Metropolitan Water Reclamation District) She said that property is mentioned in the 2002 Comprehensive Plan stating to support the clean up in the area, but did not specify a use.

Commissioner Maher asked how polluted was the land.

Mr. Brown stated that phase one was done and they were still waiting for phase two.

Commissioner Maher asked if the Village was interested or had looked at that property.

Mrs. Jones stated yes, and the Village is still pursuing clean-up of the site so it could possibly be developed.

Mr. Brown stated that the site has been discussed and that there are certain problems. He stated that there is no good road access. It would be hard to develop because there is barge traffic, trains and road traffic overhead.

Mr. Brown stated that he would like to get some kind of direction because some of the land use decisions should be based on the economic development goals.

Mrs. Jones then passed out a copy of a summary report that was created by a company called 4 Insights Inc. who was hired by Marquette during the 2005 planning process. They conducted a retail analysis of the downtown area. She explained that report states that retail depends on nearby residential, which would be within a three mile range. The potential consumer would be someone who leads a "suburban lifestyle". Mrs. Jones then read the elements listed in the report's proposed downtown retail strategy. The report is not a full strategy report because the consultant did not know the number of units that were available downtown; therefore they did not know what the consumer spending base would be. However, Mrs. Jones stated that many of the strategies are still viable for the Commission to consider in identifying economic development priorities, particularly for the downtown and retail.

Mrs. Jones said that in 2008 the Chamber of Commerce hosted a business forum. At that time there was a lot of misconceptions on economic development and what role

the Village plays. She stated that the Village responded by creating an Economic Development and Downtown Improvement Work Program that included short and long-term goals for the Planning & Economic Development Department. She said that a lot of the long-term recommendations that are in the work program are what staff is looking to incorporate into the Comprehensive Plan.

Mrs. Jones stated that on March 15, 2011 she and Mr. Brown met with three of the Board members from the Chamber of Commerce. She said they wanted to get their input as to what issues they see facing the Village with economic development and what the Chamber viewed as economic development priorities. Mrs. Jones stated that the Chamber Board members responded that there should be more general marketing of the Village to attract individual customers and business and the Village should be playing a role in that marketing. She stated that the Chamber Board members expressed a need for the Village to capture more of the available spending within the community, rather than having people spend their money outside of the community. Mrs. Jones said that one challenge the Chamber Board sees facing the community is a lack of co-operation or a lack of desire to work together among the business community. She said another thing mentioned was reducing the number of vacancies in the downtown and having a more aggressive business attraction strategy. She stated that one Board member suggested making Route 83 a gateway to draw people into Lemont.

Mr. Brown stated that the Village had won the billboard case. He stated that the vision that was outlined for the I & M canal corridor in the Comprehensive Plan played a large part in the judge's decision. He said that even though the Comprehensive Plan does not enforce ordinances or laws it does play a important role and is used in a lot of court decisions.

C. Discussion of Future Economic Development Priorities

For this discussion, Mr. Brown said they would start with what was said yesterday at the meeting with the Chamber of Commerce. He said the Chamber's Board felt that the Village as a whole should be doing more to attract people into the town. The Village should also make the community aware of what there is to offer. Mr. Brown stated that he felt the Village should play a role, but he is not sure what medium should be used. He did state that they would not advertise for specific businesses.

Mrs. Jones stated that there are two different routes the Village could take with marketing. There is the marketing of the community for potential new visitors, residents, and individuals. Second, there is marketing to new businesses as a business attraction strategy. She said that both involve two different skill sets and different mediums to communicate this message.

Mr. Brown suggested one cost effective marketing strategy would be a brochure that would highlight why Lemont is a good place to live or open a business. This could

then be passed out and put on the website. He then asked the Board what they thought as far as what role the Village should take.

Commissioner Maher asked if they have ever gone to a marketing company and what that cost would be.

Mr. Brown stated that they have looked into it and it would be at least \$15,000 or more.

Commissioner Maher asked if there was any grant money to do these things.

Mr. Brown stated that there is not a lot of money out there for that type of thing. He said the best way would be to tie it into the historic downtown or historic preservation efforts.

Commissioner Maher asked about the TIF districts and how much revenue did the Village get out of those districts.

Mrs. Jones said that she did not know, however one would be expiring in two years.

Commissioner Maher asked if there was any money in the TIF district to fund a study. He suggested that maybe the Village try using a company that recruits or looks for businesses to come to our town. Another suggestion was to look at trade shows. Commissioner Maher then told a story about a friend who was looking to open a business in Lemont. The person had a hard time finding out who he should talk to about incentives and possible locations or sites. Commissioner Maher suggested making sure the Village website was up-to-date and had a more prominent display for new business or events.

Chairman Schubert stated that adding more trains would be a major marketing factor for the downtown area. He said he was concerned that businesses were not working or talking together.

Mrs. Jones asked what role the Village take on this issue of business cooperation.

Chairman Schubert stated that Village needed to support the Chamber.

Commissioner Armijo said that the Chamber should be talking with the businesses to see what they expect from them, and to see what those businesses are willing to do to help themselves. He stated that the Chamber can only go so far.

Chairman Schubert stated that if there is a big event in town, the businesses should come together and help promote the event. One such example would be promoting the event on the LED signs that are in town.

Mr. Brown stated that there is a business forum that the Village will be starting and hopefully will continue with regular meetings.

Chairman Schubert asked Mr. Brown if he knew who owned the property up by Chipain's. He said that they are the people that you would want to build relationships with and have come to the forum. Instead of having the storefronts vacant maybe they can work with them to bring in new businesses.

Commissioner Maher stated that the Village should spend money on marketing because the Village has a vested interest in increasing sales tax revenue. He said the Village should be actively recruiting businesses or looking for companies that go out and look for businesses. He stated that the Village should support these landlords, but also talk with them to see what they are doing or what incentives they are offering to fill these empty buildings.

Chairman Schubert asked what other suggestions the Chamber Board came up with.

Mrs. Jones said marketing, lack of co-operation, and business recruitment which were all talked about. She asked how the rest of the Board members felt about business recruitment.

Discussion continued about trade shows for business recruitment.

Mrs. Jones stated that the Village should identify target industries, which could include heritage and eco-tourism, retail and employment generating industries. She said that in the past the focus has been on tourism and retail. She asked if these industries should still have priority, is there one that should have top priority, or should they just focus on retail.

Chairman Schubert stated that tourism should not be a top priority. He stated that kiosks should be placed around the Village where people shop and visit.

Mr. Brown stated that the grant that they just received is looking into ways to draw people into the quarry area.

Commissioner Armijo stated that they should promote that whole area by maybe have a fishing tournament.

Mrs. Jones stated that currently a consulting firm is looking at the different populations that would be interested in the quarries, then what improvements would the Village need to do to make it attractive to people. She stated that they need to improve the assets they have and then market those assets to attract visitors.

Commissioner Maher stated that when he rides his bike down there, he is not sure what paths he can or can not take. He stated that the quarries are the biggest asset to

the downtown, not the buildings. He said if there was some way to get the trails to connect to the Centennial trails it would be a great asset.

Mrs. Jones stated that they are looking for grant funding to help connect those two trails.

Mr. Brown stated that there was one item that was brought up by the Chamber that he would like to discuss. He said it was ideas on how to get people to shop in town. He stated that the Village had the shop local campaign, which at least raised awareness.

Mrs. Jones asked what role the Village should take on this subject.

Chairman Schubert stated that it was up to the business owners to market their businesses.

Commissioner Spinelli stated that the downtown businesses close too early.

Commissioner Maher stated that the Village should take a leadership role.

Mr. Brown reiterated to the Board some of the major comments/recommendations:

1. Pursue commuter rail service.
2. Look at the website and make sure it is updated and displaying information to businesses.
3. Look at maybe going to some regional trade shows.
4. The Village should be fostering communication between businesses.
5. The Village should be willing to spend money on marketing the Village.
6. The quarries should be exploited as an asset.
7. The development of tourism is not a benefit at this time.

Mr. Brown stated that they would want to start to create or think about a vision statement for economic development. He said he had a few suggestions and they can change or make suggestions:

- Lemont is a community with a range of commercial activity.
- Lemont is a community that has strong tax generating commercial activity.
- Lemont is a municipality that seeks to create jobs, so people can work, live, play and shop in town.
- Lemont is a community that is a destination for numerous people with a variety of interests.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Maher made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Spinelli to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken:

Ayes: All

Nays: None
Motion passed

Minutes prepared by Peggy Halper