

Meeting Minutes  
Economic Development Committee  
Tuesday – March 29, 2011 - 4:30 p.m. - City Council Chambers

Members present: Morack, O’Connell, Steinhorst, Schirpke, and Dyreson. Excused: Tate, and Romberg.

Also present: Henke, Hager, Missy Kempen and Ed Wendland.

1. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Morack at 4:30 p.m. Steinhorst/Schirpke to adopt the agenda. Carried 5-0.
  
2. Chairman Morack introduced Ed Wendland. Ed has at one time in his career owned seven shopping centers in Wisconsin. He is a private economic development consultant that has worked for the City on several projects from as far back as in the 1990’s. A few years ago, Ed was brought to the City to review the possibility of establishing the Main Street program in New London. Ed was one of the founders of the Main Street program at the state level. Main Street has a substantial focus on historic preservation and also calls for establishment of a budget of at least \$60,000 annually for three years. One of the requirements of the Main Street program is to hire a full-time manager. It was determined at the time that the Main Street program was not the way for the City to go, rather a different program was set up by Ed that was subsequently called the Home Town Program. Block managers were set up for downtown New London and a number of accomplishments were achieved including the Pearl Street mural, and establishment of the Wolf River Marketplace, among other achievements. The Forward New London group still continues their efforts to improve the downtown today. The Home Town Program was eventually expanded throughout all Waupaca County communities. Ed sincerely enjoyed working with the New London group and called them one of the best groups he has ever worked with. The group accomplished more than any Main Street community he knows of. The Economic Development Committee talked at length with Ed about his initial suggestion that the City needed to establish a theme. The theme that was implemented at the time a couple years ago was an “Irish” theme. According to Ed, the theme is what will bring people to the Community. The theme is easy to use to attract people to the City. For some reason, the Irish theme was never truly accepted by the New London participants.

When asked what the Economic Development Committee can do to bring business to the City, Ed said that you don’t bring business to a community, and you don’t recruit business, rather business recruits you. The City needs to show that our community is a place a new business wants to be. We need to be an attractive community for people who want to locate here. The economy has changed things. The Internet has changed things as well. There are too many other alternatives out there for people to choose from. Business now is like rolling a rock up a hill with your nose. You can’t fight the current trends. You have to evaluate where your greatest potential is. If you can, create a “nitch” that attracts people.

Ed was asked to share his opinion regarding the development of the City river front property downtown. Ed says that no one wants to develop property now. Everyone is afraid of the current economy. We all need to focus on surviving the next couple of years. At the same time Ed noted that there is always opportunity out there and we don't want to focus strictly on the negative. Think positive and think about a local "brand" such as the Irish theme. Ed noted that Kent worked well with him and was an asset to the efforts that Ed initiated. The Committee thanked Ed for his observations and wished him well with his retirement.

3. The Committee next discussed options to promote the City utilizing modern digital technology. Chairman Morack reviewed with the Committee several examples of community video segments he observed on YouTube. Rather than watching a plain vanilla compact disk that is filmed with standard community information, it was suggested that we consider creating a series of short video segments that will make an impact and draw people's attention and incorporate the videos into the City web site. A video of the demolition of the old Pearl Street Bridge was suggested as the type of action footage that we should aim for. We need to do something different to attract people here rather than the same old informational video. We could create a story board to start off. It was agreed to try an initial effort focused on the industrial park. We have enough staff talent to see if we can make our own promotional piece. We can go one step at a time and see what progress we can make. The Committee will consider this idea further at their next meeting.

Chairman Morack noted that in a 1987 planning document he recently reviewed regarding what New London could be in 2010, it suggested reaching out to more people by distributing promotional material to a mailing list, particularly to the larger regional manufacturers. It was also noted that it would be beneficial to contact the businesses that are just getting a start at the local business incubator in Appleton. Everyone agreed to give this idea some more thought. Having the City attend large trade shows and "business to business" events was also suggested. If we could have a booth in place at these types of events to distributed community information, we could get our name in front of a lot of people. It was noted that booth space can be expensive and that preparation of a quality display and manning that display can be very costly.

4. The Committee reviewed Kent's monthly economic development report for March. Kent noted the work of the Downtown Beautification Committee as they make plans to purchase and place improvement items such as benches and trash cans in various locations in the City. Kent also updated the Committee on recent inquiries he has received regarding interest in our Revolving Loan Fund program. Kent noted that he expects to receive an application from a local business who is making plans to expand.
5. Kent reviewed with the Committee the basics of the Department of Transportation regulations regarding signage visible along state highways. The regulations are very restrictive. That is obvious, otherwise you would see a lot more billboards and signs along state highways. There is an option to create another billboard out near the current City billboard along north Highway 45.

The New London School District is currently conducting a design competition to replace the old City billboard and they are planning on reporting back to the Committee at the May meeting. Kent suggested that the Committee may want to consider making a recommendation in the future to light the current City billboard. A budget to accomplish this is about \$8,700. The Committee agreed to wait until they receive the new design proposals before proceeding.

6. A motion was made to adjourn by O'Connell and seconded by Steinhorst. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:32 pm. The next regularly scheduled meeting will be April 26, 2011 at 4:30 pm.

Kent Hager  
City Administrator