

## **Economic Development Committee**

**September 12, 2023**

**5:00pm - City Hall Council Chambers**

Chairman Ptak Called the Meeting to order at 5:00pm

### **ROLL CALL**

**Present:** Chairman Ptak, Aldermen Lavieri, Jeppson

**Excused Absence:** Aldermen Thompson, Crane

**Others Present:** Economic Development Director Curt Bedei

**A quorum was present.**

Economic Development Director Bedei said the items on the agenda are related to one another. Director Bedei said he's been with the City for over a year and has spent that time determining what his role is to better advance the community through his position. Bedei said the City needs to be able to market itself more and generate more exposure as well as to project what the City has available.

Bedei began by discussing a proposal from Retail Strategies and acknowledged the City did enter an agreement with them in the past and Chairman Ptak confirmed it was roughly 10 years ago. Bedei said knowing the previous arrangement did not result in developments, he did not believe the proposal would be accepted in its current form. Bedei expressed that to Retail Strategies, and they made a revised, three-year agreement offer. Bedei asked for example communities similar to La Salle for an idea of what could be accomplished with them. Some of the industries they mentioned as possible fits for La Salle were ones on Bedei's list as well that he believes would succeed in the area. Alderman Lavieri said he's not aware of any site visits from industries under the previous three-year agreement. He also mentioned industries can sometimes take a site visit to one community but also review other nearby communities and possible locate there instead. The aldermen discussed the current properties available for development. Chairman Ptak discussed how they updated the Council under the last agreement by stating when they mentioned La Salle in conversations. They were uninterested in getting paid based on the businesses they would bring in at that time, Ptak said. He said he was the only one who voted against it the first time but understood why Bedei was interested in them. Ptak said he struggles with the price for the City and limited parcels available for development, but he also doesn't want to hinder Bedei's work. He also wasn't impressed by the company under the previous agreement. The aldermen discussed how much money the City should invest into seeking properties and what properties are available. Alderman Lavieri noted it may be more beneficial for the County to hire them as they would assess a large region.

The next item under discussion was a proposal from Placer. Bedei said they are an analytics group that provide clients (municipalities or businesses) information for marketing, business attraction, and location visits. Bedei would have access to that data and utilize it to either attract or retain businesses. Bedei said retail recruitment, reports and data for travel and

tourism, local business support and sales tax estimation were elements of this proposal that was of interest to him. Bedei said it was \$12,000 for a year and said it may be something Retail Strategies would use itself. Bedei could use this tool but would not have the working relationship with the businesses that Retail Strategies would have. Chairman Ptak said when he thinks retail, he thinks downtown businesses and asked if national chains are interested in downtowns. Director Bedei said that it is possible to see a chain want to enter a flourishing downtown to reach a different clientele. Chairman Ptak asked if this would go hand-in-hand with Retail Strategies and Bedei said that could be the plan.

The Committee then reviewed proposals from Heritage Corridor Destinations. Bedei said there is a proposal for advertising opportunities and also a proposal for a partnership opportunity. Chairman Ptak believed the City was a partner in the past, but Bedei was uncertain. Bedei said tourism has a direct economic impact on a community, not necessarily in retail but in bringing outside dollars in to increase the community's sales tax. He said tourists generally spend \$180 in a day visiting a community. Bedei considers tourism to be the "front door to economic development" because one visitor could be looking for a new house to buy, make an investment, or expand a business from the suburbs. Alderman Lavieri said in the past one industry chose not to expand in La Salle due to the smaller population. Director Bedei said that's where Placer could assist him in making a more compelling argument. Aldermen returned to the Heritage Corridor proposals and the advertising they can provide. Alderman Jeppson said he liked this proposal a lot so far. The cost is \$9,000 for a year. Alderman Jeppson asked if other communities were involved. Director Bedei said Utica, Princeton, Streator, Ottawa, Lemont, Lockport, Morris, Pontiac were some communities also participating. He noted many of the communities along the Corridor are participating. Alderman Lavieri also showed interest in the proposal. Chairman Ptak asked what specifically would be advertised and how La Salle would be spotlighted. Bedei said he's previously included La Salle events on their website and can be linked back wherever they want to direct interested parties. Chairman Ptak said it's a lot of money for advertising on their website. Director Bedei detailed further how the City would be featured and how visitors would be able to see what the City has to offer and how the City could be mentioned in marketing in other communities.

Director Bedei said Flyerview is a dynamic map and document program. They take a GIS of the City's available properties and merge it with graphic design in the form of charts, graphs, etc. Those can then be turned into digital brochures and marketing of the area. The program has different packages available, the proposed one is \$7,490 for one year. The package would manage six parcels and Chairman Ptak asked how many the City has to market. Director Bedei said a minimum of 6 to 8 parcels come to mind. The Committee discussed what specifics the organization is able to provide and how it compares to the City's current tools or options. Bedei said it would assist in reducing the workload for the role in creating design materials and connecting them to the GIS software.

Chairman Ptak what had been budgeted for these proposals. Bedei said these were included as potential candidates and they are more or less budgeted for in different areas. Alderman Jeppson asked if the City had ever previously "super charged" economic development spending. Chairman Ptak said no but they had previously paid for the Retail Strategies

agreement. Bedei said many of these things play off each other but it is ultimately up to the Council to guide him. Chairman Ptak asked his interest in them individually with ranking them. Bedei said they all provide a useful and needed service. Bedei said Placer gives him a lot of tools, but he doesn't have the relationships as Retail Strategies. This would mean Bedei would then have to be the one potentially going to conferences and advocating for La Salle. He noted a high interest in Placer. Bedei said Retail Strategies has a high price tag but offers connections that are desirable. He noted, however, that it is not a guarantee of development. Alderman Lavieri said many of the Council and some of the staff still remember the prior agreement resulting in zero interest. Bedei said the Committee would see immediate results from Heritage Corridor due to the tourism interest in the area. Bedei has worked with them previously and knows what they're capable of doing for their communities. Alderman Jeppson calculated the cost of all of the resources together at roughly \$82,000 a year for three years. He said he likes the idea as there is money available for it. Jeppson acknowledged he was not on the Council under the prior Retail Strategies agreement. Chairman Ptak asked if any other communities are using Retail Strategies, Bedei was uncertain but knew some communities have used them previously.

Director Bedei updated the Committee on the Housing Grant project and the requirement of a commitment of funds. The Council can commit what it likes, but \$20,000 is the highest commitment and gives the most points toward housing redevelopments. The Committee was receptive to the program and that it is a good program for La Salle.

Chairman Ptak said the Committee will reconvene after hearing these proposals and return for final recommendations at a later date. Alderman Jeppson said he would like to see what happens in three years if the Committee fully invested into all of the potential tools. Jeppson said he understands there are limited parcels but wants to see what could happen with more investment from the City into the tools.

Chairman Ptak asked for an update on Thorntons in La Salle, and Director Bedei said he's aware there are in the middle of a merger.

**There were no more questions or comments from the public.**

Chairman Ptak adjourned the meeting at 7:25pm

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Quinn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Amy" on the top line and "Quinn" on the bottom line, slightly overlapping.

Amy Quinn, City Clerk