

Director Passmore and Council Liaison Ribich introduced the agenda item to the Commission. An e-mail from City Council Member Duane Liddle dated January 26, 2009, was read. In the e-mail, Council Member Liddle requested that a City Council review of the effectiveness of the Economic Development Department be placed on the agenda for the February 2, 2009 City Council Meeting. The City Council removed the item from their agenda at that meeting, and requested a review from the Economic Development Commission.

Director Passmore gave a status report on various department efforts and activities. He gave an update on the development of the Economic Development web site. The first phase includes linking the former WADG site to the City web site, editing that content, adding 4 new pages, and changing the hard-coded contact information on the site. The content of the former WADG pages is in the process of being rewritten, and once that is completed phase one will be complete. The Commission was encouraged to provide feedback and suggestions on site content. Phase two would be a future project entailing a larger update of the entire City web site, including upgraded functionality and a fresh new look.

Director Passmore also gave a status report on the marketing of the City-owned NABL building which will be vacated July 1, 2009. A Location One Information System (LOIS) site has been created and is linked to the City's Economic Development web site. A one-page summary sheet regarding the property was distributed. Dates were also set for the Economic Development Strategic Planning sessions which will be facilitated by UNI's Institute for Decision Making (IDM) (see agenda item below).

The Commission discussed Council Member Liddle's e-mail and the Council's request for a department review. Commissioner Schneider stated that the Commission and department have been laying groundwork and are just getting on their feet in terms of developing a strategy and expressed concern that to put off economic development efforts for a year or two while the economy is struggling, as the e-mail suggested, would result in losing the benefits of the work done to date. Commissioner Willis expanded on the topic and stated that it is a very basic business concept that when economic times are difficult, organizations should focus on and do even more marketing, not cut back or eliminate marketing efforts. Commissioner Bogenreif expressed a need to manage expectations, and suggested clarifying the City Council's expectations compared to the expectations the Commission has identified. He further stated that the focus of Economic Development during times of economic downturn may shift from bringing in new businesses to retention of existing businesses and helping to manage employee displacement if and when that occurs. Vice-Chairperson Reed stated that the role of the Commission is to develop a strategy, not to micromanage the Economic Development Department. It was suggested that a monthly activity report might be helpful in creating awareness of the department's economic development efforts.

Further discussion took place regarding upcoming strategic planning sessions and that City Council members would be invited to attend. The Commission agreed that a joint meeting with City Council to review the completed plan would be appropriate, and that the Council's Strategic Planning Session in July would be a logical opportunity for a review of the Economic Development Department. Council Liaison Ribich indicated that the Council would like the Commission to also review the current economic development incentive strategy and report on that at the time of the review in July as well.

J.D. Francis, a community member in attendance, echoed the support and statements expressed by the Commission. He urged the Commission to send a strong message to the community and the City Council that economic development efforts by the City should continue, in good economic times as well as bad, and that the review in July is not to be considered the end of Economic Development efforts, but rather the beginning.

Motion By: Willis

Seconded By: Stevenson

The Commission affirms the timeline for reviewing the effectiveness of the Economic Development Department in July 2009, given that the Commission has scheduled IDM-facilitated sessions for March 25 and April 15 to develop the Economic Development Strategic Plan. City Council members are invited to participate in these strategic planning sessions; upon completion the Strategic Plan will be reviewed with City Council in a joint meeting. It is the strong belief of this Commission that in times of economic downturn it is imperative for the City to continue to invest in marketing efforts, and that the Economic Development Department should continue to function as currently structured.

Yes: 6

No: 0

Absent: 3

(Commissioner Schneider left at 7:45 a.m. and was not present for the vote.)

2. Discuss and Review Economic Development Plan and Strategy

- Discuss possible dates for Strategic Planning Sessions led by UNI's Institute for Decision Making (IDM)

Director Passmore has contracted with IDM to facilitate the development of an Economic Development Strategic Plan. The Commission decided on March 25th and April 15th from 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. for strategic planning sessions with IDM. City Council members will be invited to attend and the sessions will be open to the public.

- Continue discussion and development of outline for Strategic Plan
An updated outline was distributed. Commission members were asked to review and provide feedback by the end of the week. The outline will then be given to IDM for use in strategic planning.

3. Update on Current Status of Economic Development Projects

- Director Passmore reported that some of the larger economic development projects have been put on hold due to economic conditions.

4. Regional Economic Development Information

- Director Passmore reported on the Trade Adjustment Assistance Grant Program administered through the U.S. Department of Commerce. This program offers a dollar for dollar match for marketing efforts by companies that have been adversely affected by foreign trade. It was suggested that information about programs such as these be e-mailed to major employers in the area as a method of disseminating the information.

C. Old Business:

- None

D. New Business:

- None

E. Next Meeting Date:

The next meeting is scheduled for March 10, 2009, at 7:00 a.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers.

F. Adjournment:

Motion By: Willis

Seconded By: Stevenson

That the Economic Development Commission meeting be adjourned.

Yes: 6

No: 0

Absent: 3