

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
VILLAGE OF RIVER FOREST
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

November 6, 2024

A meeting of the Village of River Forest Economic Development Commission was held on Wednesday, November 6, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. in the 1st Floor Community Room of Village Hall, 400 Park Avenue, River Forest, Illinois.

1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. Meeting started by calling roll. Upon roll call, the following persons were:

Present: Chairman Cuyler Brown, Commissioners Carr Preston, Walter Wahlfeldt, Katie Lowes, and Tim Brangle

Commissioner Bob Graham attended via Zoom until 7:04pm

Absent: Commissioner Raj Chiplunkar

Also Present: Village Administrator Matt Walsh and Deputy Clerk Luke Masella

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – OCTOBER 2, 2024

A **MOTION** was made by Chairman Brown and seconded by Commissioner Brangle to approve the minutes of the October 2nd meeting.

MOTION PASSED by unanimous voice vote.

4. DISCUSSION REGARDING TIF SMALL BUSINESS INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Administration Walsh presented the comments that were prepared by Assistant Administrator Spencer from the October meeting and asked for feedback on the current draft. He laid out the next steps once this commission had a final draft. Commissioner Wahlfeldt asked about the expectation for budget for this program, Administrator Walsh answered that there are a few ways to determine how much of the TIF funds to use for this program, but further thought was needed. Discussion ensued regarding methodology, and commissioners settled upon having a \$50,000 annual budget, \$5,000 per project set at the beginning of the program with the intention to review the funding structure after 12 months. Another question was raised regarding how many grants can be applied

for by the same business/property owner. One suggestion was one application per business, per year, per property. This would allow for the property owner and the business (tenant) apply in the same year. The main point was that all approvals are subject to the availability of the budget.

Administrator Walsh explained how TIF funds come into the Village and how it is spent.

Chairman Brown asked how often applicants can apply for the grant – one a year? Once every three years? Discussion ensued regarding the merits of the application process; Commissioner Wahlfeldt suggested allowing the application process to sort out who is awarded.

Commissioner Lowes suggested striking “painting things that had not been painted previously”. Commissioner Brangle said that he felt the statement was subjective, but he understood why it might have been included. Commissioner Wahlfeldt suggested this might not be allowed so that the applicant would have to improve the façade in another way. The statement will be kept.

Commissioner Lowes also suggested “applications must include photographs of the existing façade and detailed renderings of the proposed improvements”. She felt that the last portion, after “and detailed renderings...” should be struck entirely because sometimes applicants will not have that available at the time of applications. Commissioner Brangle agreed suggested drawings instead so as not to have a financial burden on the applicant. He also promised to provide additional comments on the draft document later. He suggested having some definitions to help clarify the portions of the exterior to be included in the grant. Chairman Brown suggested streamlining the list of successful projects rather than provide too many options, the other commissioners agreed.

Commissioner Brangle suggested not including the “restoration of historic interior architectural features, including ceilings, light fixtures, floors, and architectural detailing” as that would be interior work, Commissioner Wahlfeldt agreed.

Commissioner Brangle raised the topic of reimbursement in the event of the business ceasing. Discussion ensued regarding the situation that would cause this penalty to be imposed.

Chairman Brown asked for the next steps on this draft. Administrator Walsh said that he will see that the draft is distributed to the Commission to review again. Chairman Brown is happy with the program and the work put in thus far.

5. CONTINUED DISCUSSION REGARDING BUSINESS COMMUNITY RETENTION/ SUPPORT STRATEGIES AND COMMUNICATION

Chairman Brown said that the Memorial Day Parade planning is coming along with the Chamber of Commerce, in addition to the Façade Improvement Program. He’s quite pleased with the progress on both programs from this Commission.

Chairman Brown mentioned the recent additions to the Town Center, including J. Crew Factory and CAVA. Commissioner Graham asked about the status of the Whole Foods construction permit, Administrator Walsh said that they are working under a demolition permit at this time, but no other plans have been submitted. Chairman Brown said that is great news, given how hard things have been for retail lately.

6. GENERAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

Administrator Walsh updated the Commission about Black Fodder, moving into 349 Ashland Ave. It's expected that they will open in the Spring.

Administrator Walsh stated that there was no substantive update on Lake and Lathrop at this time. He explained that the Village has taken some steps to motivate the parties to resolution, with more details to come. Commissioner Lowes pointed out some corrections to be made to the Lake and Lathrop webpage. Administrator Walsh reminded the commission that Lake Lathrop Partners had recently applied for a building permit, but the Village denied the permit based on the legal arguments over the site at this time. Lake Lathrop Partners filed suit against the Village, which the Village is handling.

Administrator Walsh reported that the Neighborhood Dialogues are going well and there has been good information gleaned from these conversations as they occur around the Village in residents' homes. Administrator Walsh said that a final report will be compiled after the final Dialogue is held later this month. There has been a lot of good discussions and feedback thus far, including how residents are hearing information from the Village and the public perception of communications regarding important topics. Chairman Brown pointed out that there are some people who have problems with this strategy, Administration Walsh confirmed that there are some people who have expressed an interest in hosting but haven't been scheduled yet.

Commissioner Preston asked about the format of the Dialogues. Administrator Walsh responded that they are meant to be informal and open-ended, with the tone set that the discussion is intended to learn about what residents want to see developed at the Madison Street site, even though other questions typically arise.

Chairman Brown asked if commissioners are welcome to attend these meetings. Administrator Walsh stated that yes, anyone is open to hosting if they are interested, even commissioners. Discussion ensued regarding the various topics that have risen from the Dialogues and comments from residents about several ideas for the Village. Administrator Walsh stated that some residents have asked about the plan for the Village, he responded that the Comprehensive Plan is still the guiding document.

Commissioner Wahlfeldt asked how many Dialogues were intended, Administrator Walsh said the goal was 8 to be completed before the holidays.

Commissioner Graham pointed out that its important to document how many meetings are held, not necessarily who attended them, in order to demonstrate that there has already been substantial conversation about economic development.

Commissioner Graham left the meeting at 7:04pm.

Chairman Brown expressed his confidence in the level of documentation of the Dialogues that was occurring during this process. He said that he's knows there are residents who have great suggestions for development, but it is important to bring to light the financial realities of development.

Commissioner Brangle reminded the group of the original recommendation regarding the commercial text amendment to the ZBA Commission several months ago and suggested having a joint meeting of the ZBA and the EDC Commissions later to discuss the implications from each commission's perspective. Administrator Walsh confirmed this was possible, with a little planning.

Commissioner Wahlfeldt cautioned that we learned from the previous zoning conversations, and when the topic is this sensitive, there needs to be additional steps to communicate with residents.

Chairman Brown pointed out that the commercial text amendment was focused on one particular property when that was not the intention.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Brown asked about the status of the process to hire a broker. Administrator Walsh said that this has been impacted by the Neighborhood Dialogues, as the information to move forward hasn't been determined yet. Chairman Brown urged staff to select a broker soon. Commissioner Brangle noted that there were still some negotiations to be completed due to the differences in the proposals.

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- a. Executive Session pursuant to 5 ILCS 120/2 (c)(6) to discuss: property for sale

A **MOTION** by Chairman Brown and seconded by Commissioner Brangle to enter Executive Session pursuant to 5 ILCS 2 (c)(6) to discuss property for sale and the Economic Development Commission will adjourn after Executive Session and will not return to open session.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A **MOTION** was made by Chairman Brown and seconded by Commissioner Preston to adjourn the meeting of the Economic Development Commission at 7:45 p.m.

MOTION PASSED by unanimous vote.

Respectfully Submitted:



Jessica Spencer, Assistant Village Administrator



Cuyler Brown, Chairman Economic Development Commission

Date: 12/4/24